

# MID-EAST e-NEWS

An electronic journal of the Middle East, for those who want to be informed.

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## Welcome

March must have been eventful, as the number of countries in the calendar has grown this month. Events outside of the Middle East are not listed in the calendar, but still have major repercussions in the region, in particular the bombing in Madrid (March 11th), which will affect European attitudes to Al Qaeda.

The Madrid bombing came on 3/11, exactly 2½ years, or 911 days after 9/11

A project in preparation is a survey of the boundaries of the Muslim region, the 'Islamic Interface' I call it, which would bring Nigeria into our purview. The Christian president oversees a nation divided by ethnicity and religion, and where recent efforts to eradicate polio have been rebuffed by those who claim a Western plot against them.

Also, Sudan is worth watching, where the government uses 'Jinjawid' militias to operate against ethnic (but often still Muslim) Africans, massacring many and creating as many as a million refugees internally, and over the border in Chad. This at the same time as a final peace treaty is about to be put in place in the south. Libya's progress toward reconciliation with the west has broken into the news recently, but has been the result of diplomatic pressure over more than a year. The Cyprus issue (see p4) may or may not be resolved by May 1<sup>st</sup> (the date when the republic becomes part of the EU) but Greece and Turkey seem more intent that it should than the Cypriots at the current point.

Libya	Weapons stockpiles declared to UN														Blair/Qaddafi meet												
<b>Opens to inspectors, shws cooperation</b>	Sends nuclear material to US														UN verifies weapon declaration												
Sudan	Refugees attacked as they flee into Chad														US reports atrocities in Darfur												
<b>South calm, but rebellion in Darfur</b>	Sudan blocking UN aid to African refugees														'Ethnic cleansing' in Darfur												
Cyprus	Denktash critical of progress														Greek Cypriots dislike plan												
<b>Reunification hopes before EU entry May 1</b>	Turkey offers land to Greeks														Denktash refuses to attend next round of talks												
Iran	IAEA slams nuclear research														Mar.27 inspection canceled/allowed by Iran												
<b>Nuclear processing concerns; Continued unrest over election results in deaths</b>	3 days of unrest in north over rigged election														IAEA inspects facilities												
Pakistan	Bombs aimed at Shias kill 50 in Quetta														Long-range missile test												
<b>Alignment with the US is resented by populace</b>	Indian cricket tour opens														US consulate bomb defused												
Afghan.	Ashura parade clashes with army recruits -1 dead														Operation begins against Al Qaeda												
<b>Taliban resist US forces Warlords surrender militia/weapons</b>	Min. aviation killed, Herat warlord fights govt. forces														Rockets hit Peshawar												
Arabia	Yemen arrests 2 Al-Qaeda														Saudi Human Rights panel formed												
<b>Saudi gov't acts against al Qaeda militants; Qatar &amp; Russia dispute over assassination</b>	Mine clearance on Syria border														Masonic meeting bombed												
Turkey	Intermediary for Syria, Israel plans to sell water to Israel; in line to join EU														18 militants arrested												
Iraq	Constitution approved														Signing delay												
<b>Economy improves; aid workers being targeted; evidence of police involvement in killings</b>	Constitution signed														4 US missionaries killed in Mosul												
Syria	Attacks on Karbala/Baghdad kill 197 Shiites														2 CPA killed by fake police												
<b>Assad seeks to improve US relations</b>	Rockets kill 3														11 mortars aimed at green zone												
Jordan	Wm. Burns warns of US sanctions														Kurdish unrest spreads												
<b>Central location for Iraq relief, NGOs, etc.</b>	Joint Jordan/Israel educational Science Center opens in Wadi Arabah														World Bank trains Iraqi civil servants												
Israel	Supreme court orders 1-week halt to barrier														Egypt to patrol Gaza border after pullout												
<b>Road Map lapses; Gaza pullout discussed; Fence/wall Settlements</b>	Sharon prisoner swap criticized														Knesset approves Gaza pullout												
Palestine	Arafat aide killed														6 die in failed attack												
<b>Society moves towards anarchy; militias dominate life, recruit suicide bombers; conflict between Arafat and Dahlan supporters</b>	Fateh plans reforms														Gaza strip raid - hundreds resist, 14 die												
	Jenin raided														Rape trial demo over lack of a conviction												
	Helicopters kill 2 in home														Local Hamas leader dies in raid												
	Qurei: leave Gaza, but no more destruction														Sheikh Yassin assassinated												
	Rantissi, new Hamas leader														14yr old bomber held												
<b>Mar.</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S

## Government and Islam

*As a religion, Islam makes no distinction between...*

This is a misleading way to begin an article on the attitude of Islam towards government. Islam is not just a religion. The distinction between religion and government is not made, it is expected that one should be the expression of the other – true Islam results in government by Islam.

Two issues are at work here: *jihad* (struggle) and *shari'ah*.

The Koran is not organized chronologically, but with each *Sura* ("chapter") in order by size – largest first – except for the first. The longest *sura*, therefore, is the second, and it includes a number of verses related to government.

(2:190) *"Fight [struggle] for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love the aggressors. Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed.... Fight against them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme."*

The lack of chronology in the sequence of chapters makes analysis and commentary difficult. The Koran is also open to multiple interpretations on significant doctrines, since numerous examples exist of contradictory statements.

(2:256) *"Let there be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error."*

The following verse reminds us of how those who refused to accept the new religion were actually treated:

(9:29) *"Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given ... and do not embrace the true Faith, until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued."*

And another is even stronger:

(9:5) *"Slay the idolaters wherever you find them. ... lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way ..."*

Today there is a wide gulf between moderate Muslims, and the radicals who enthusiastically kill even their own people for not being devout enough. In Algeria, for example, the decade-long conflict has seen more than 100,000 Muslims killed by militants who seek to impose their own interpretation of the religion, and are willing to kill for it.

This militaristic approach to spreading the religion is evident from the earliest days. In response to a question about the use of the sword, an Islamic web site responds: *"Islam was spread by proof and evidence, in the case of those who listened to the message and responded to it. And it was spread by strength and the sword in the case of those who stubbornly resisted, until they had no choice and had to submit to the new reality."*

Much of what we see today, in the rise of terrorism, is a conflict that is present within Islam itself. There is a struggle between those who prefer *proof and evidence*, and those who use *strength and the sword*.

The struggle over the strictness of the interpretation of Shari'ah Law goes on in fundamentalist countries (Sunni/Wahhabist Saudi Arabia & Shi'ite Iran) and ostensibly secular countries (Turkey, Syria, Egypt), in peripheral countries (Senegal, Nigeria and Indonesia) and in those where Islam is central (Pakistan, Yemen). It also hits the news in emerging countries, such as Iraq.

But the struggle also goes on in the courts, constituencies and constitutions of Western nations who have become moribund in their faith, failing to recognize that they may be voting to lose their freedom to express it. As they grow in numbers, Muslim communities in any country find it difficult to accept the rule of a government other than that of Islam. *Proof and evidence* may have their way at times, but lack of success may breed a new generation that prefers strength and the sword.

## Photo Album

A selection of photographs from Jordan and the region.



Jordan's national flower, the black iris.



The Palace of Iraq Al Amir, near Amman. Built by one of the Hasmonaeen family, It is referred to by Josephus, and dates from about 150 BC.



In the Baptism site complex is also found 'Elijah's Hill', named for Elijah's being caught up to heaven near this location. Known locally as Tel Mar Elias, there are various chapels, caves and cisterns being restored.



## Arabs in the Bible (4)

On the day of Pentecost, we are told in Acts 2, a wide variety of people groups were represented in Jerusalem, “*God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.*” In his account of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Luke lists many of them, and includes – last of all, in verse 11 – Arabs. These have all gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, and it is evidence of the wide variety of cultures that Jews came from in those days, even as today.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul is giving an account of his movements after being converted. He was in Damascus at the time, but “*went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.*” How deep into Arabia he traveled we cannot be sure, but it would probably mean traveling south-east as far as what is now Jordan and possibly even beyond, into the Sirhan. It was only after he returned to Damascus that he traveled to Jerusalem to be introduced to the twelve.



A Roman arch on Straight Street in Damascus, the street where Paul regained his sight.

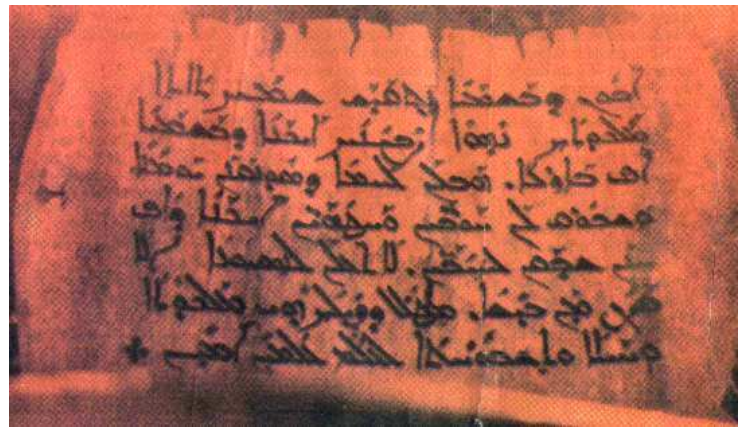
At one point Paul had to escape from Damascus in a basket let down from a window in the wall (2 Cor.11:32-33). This was because the governor (ethnarch) of Damascus “under King Aretas” had the city guarded in order to arrest Paul. We are not given the name of the governor, but Aretas was the last of four kings by that name. Aretas IV was a Nabataean king, ruling the kingdom famous for the rock-carved tombs of Petra. The Nabataeans controlled a swathe of territory stretching from southern Jordan through the eastern desert to Damascus. They grew rich by controlling the trade routes between Syria and the Red Sea, and were finally conquered by the Romans in 106AD.

Aretas IV ruled from 9 BC to 40 AD, which allows us to date Paul’s adventure there to no later than that date.

In Galatians 4:25 we are given an interesting, and maybe puzzling reference to “*Mount Sinai in Arabia*”. Locating this mountain, where Moses received the Ten Commandments, in Arabia seems contradictory. The Sinai Peninsula is not in Arabia, but is geographically and historically linked with Egypt.

Paul’s reference is not the only place that the question arises as to the location of Sinai, or Horeb, as it is also known. The ‘received opinion’ is that St Catherine’s monastery in the southern Sinai commemorates the actual location of the holy mountain. This location was actually selected during the fourth century, when Constantine’s mother, Queen Helena, was traveling the Holy Land looking for the sites at which the Biblical events happened. Many current sites, east and west of the Jordan River, were pinpointed by her aides during this time, and commemorated by churches of varying sizes, many of which grew into active monasteries. In the Old Testament, when we first read of Moses’ at Mount Horeb it is in the context of the burning bush. He had fled from Pharaoh, and gone to live in Midian, where he met his wife, Zipporah. His father-in-law, Jethro (also called Reuel in Ex.2:18), was a “priest of Midian” (Ex.3:1), and may well have been descended directly from Abram, through Keturah (see e-NEWS 11). As regards Mount Horeb/Sinai, Midian is located to the east of the Red Sea, in what is now Saudi Arabia, in the region the Arabs know as the Hejaz.

The modern Arabic and Hebrew scripts descended from the stylized Nabataean writing, whose predecessor was Aramaic. The text below is the Lord’s Prayer in Aramaic, and was photographed in the Syrian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem.



The Bible does not ignore Arabs, but as we have seen, they have been significant in the historical narrative. Our final reference does not make the record complete (as the incidental reference to Jethro suggests, more Arabs can be found in the Bible than we covered in previous issues). In his prophecies of the last days, Isaiah reminds us (60:6) that Arabs will be among those who congregate in the Holy Land to praise God: camels from *Midian* and *Ephah*, gold and incense from *Sheba*, flocks from *Kedar* and rams from *Nebaioth* remind us of the traditional occupations and products of those regions.

## Cyprus

In 1974, in response to a coup attempt in Cyprus, Turkey invaded and took control of the northern region.

Since then the island has been divided between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Negotiations over reunification began on Feb 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004, at an unused airport in the UN buffer zone. The same 'Annan Plan' was rejected by Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot leader, in March 2003. He continues to resist compromise on the issues detailed in the plan, though external pressure, by Turkey and by the UN, has pushed him back to the table. His latest calls are for Cyprus' EU membership to be renegotiated, and EU members to go through the island's ratification process again.

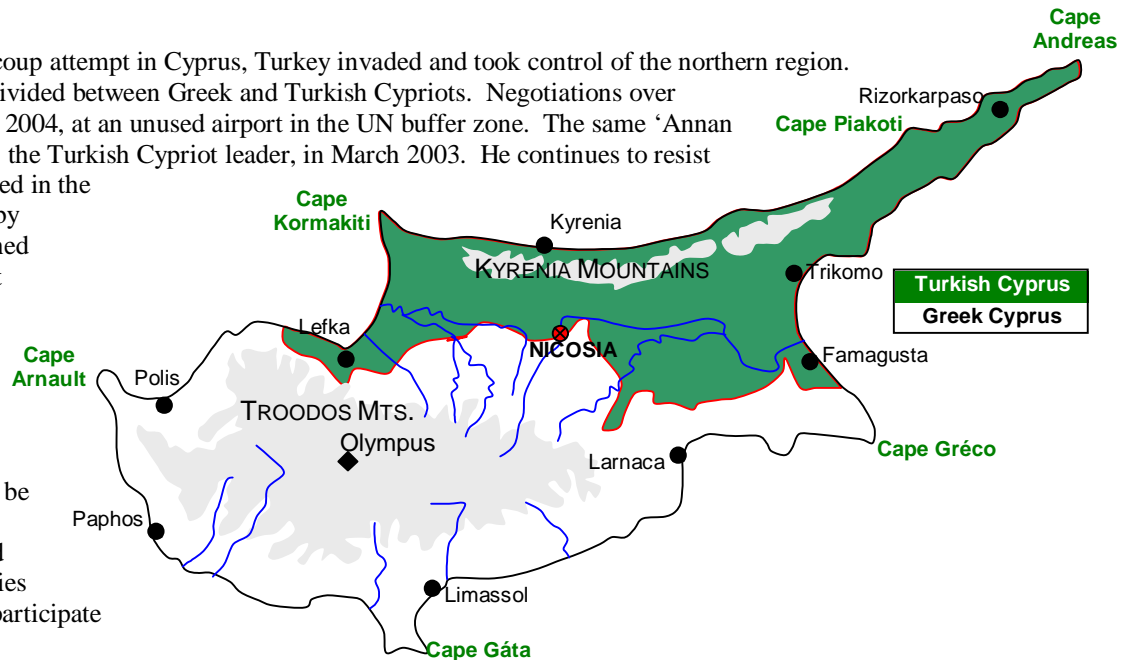
The schedule had already called for Greece and Turkey to be brought to the table to assist if negotiations were not concluded by March 22, but deep animosities initially made them hesitant to participate in direct negotiations.

Polls taken during March have consistently shown that neither Greek- nor Turkish-Cypriots are happy with the middle-of-the-road plan, and each group wants to move the dotted line in their favor.

Turkey itself is in favor of reunification. Its incentive is that Cyprus will become part of the EU on May 1<sup>st</sup>. If the island is not unified by this date, then the increased prosperity that Cyprus would experience would be lost to the Turkish Cypriots, whose standard of living is already significantly below that of the southern region.

Twin referendums are planned on April 21, and the plan allows Kofi Annan to impose his decision, where any omissions exist in the agreement, and then submit this to the referendum.

Turkey wishes to keep at least some troops on the island, after unification, and is resisting the *right of return* of those Greeks who were displaced in 1974. As if to compensate for this, the Turks have offered to cede a portion of Turkish-controlled Cyprus to the Greek Cypriots. Greece has promoted reunification, strongly urging the Cypriots to accept the UN plan.



## Conflict Resolution (The molasses cookies approach)

This week I finally plucked up courage to talk to my landlord about the black hose that appeared in the boiler room about a month ago, connecting his hot water tank to ours. We had been having other problems with the boiler, and when I finally found a repairman who would do a good job he pointed out that our hot water was being used upstairs too. I studied the complex mess of pipes for some days, and even re-opened the tap to his tank, as a partial solution. Finally I realized that if the tap to his water tank was closed (listen carefully now...) he would be drawing our hot water, but when it was open our hot water was being diluted with his unheated water. (See, it wasn't too complicated after all).

My wife had made some of the molasses cookies that our boys find irresistible, so I took a plate of them upstairs and sat and visited with my landlord and his family. His son had a problem installing a copy of an expensive computer game, so I promised to go back this evening and help him figure out why it is not working.

I was offered Easter pastries (baked cookies with dates) and we sat and talked about the assassination of Sheikh Yassin (my spell checker wants to remove the 'h' from that word), problems with his car, and our plans for the end of the year.

Finally, since I had a choir practice to be getting to, I excused myself and headed for the door, not having broached the subject I actually came for. As I was leaving he asked me how we were doing downstairs (I would have had to ask him something similar within a meter or two if he hadn't!). I was then able to mention that we had a problem getting hot water.

Anyway, having broached the subject, we quite quickly got round to the point that, even though he was worried about his tank leaking, it would be better for all if the hose was disconnected.

The Middle East is very focused on relationships, and avoiding direct embarrassment in situations such as this. (I would have accepted that the hose put itself there, if that had ensured that it would be removed). A hint is often enough to make a point, whereas forcing someone to assume the blame can mean that denial sets in, the problem is not solved, and future dealings are more difficult.

And yes, I was late to choir!