

# MID-EAST e-NEWS

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

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## Contexts

### Topical

*This Month* 1  
*Truth & Consequences* 3

### Cultural

*Negotiations* 2

### Geographical

*Kurdistan* 4

## Welcome

The West is not just rich in resources, items on the supermarket shelves, or multiple outlets for discount clothes, autoparts or computers. It is also rich in ideas and opportunities. The Middle East, as it gains the former (see the markets in Iraq!) continues to have a deficit in the latter. Just as economic barriers and taxation can stifle trade, so can ideology and culture hinder the supply of new initiatives, restrict the demand for them, and hamper the ideas market. On page

2 we look at the importance of the bargaining process, in purchasing or in politics.

We just completed at week's tour of Jordan, showing a first-time visitor (my Dad!) the country. It was exciting to see how many tourists there are these days – 'since Christmas', the hotel managers, shopkeepers, and restaurant waiters say. Now we must get back to normal: teaching, grading, testing, teaching some more...

e-NEWS has been delayed by a couple of days by our being on the road, and the calendar is not as up-to-date as I would like, but that will be corrected at the end of the month.

N. Africa	UN verifies Libya weapon declaration	Moroccans suspected of Madrid bombing																									
<b>Opens to inspectors, shows cooperation</b>	Blair/Qaddafi meet	Algerian Berbers riot; Pres. accused of rigging election																									
Sudan	'Ethnic cleansing' in Darfur	Senior military arrested for 'plotting coup'																									
<b>South calm, but rebellion in Darfur</b>	Talks extended by 10 days	Hassan Turabi detained																									
Cyprus	Denktash to boycott talks	Greece/Turkey join talks																									
<b>Reunification hopes before EU entry May 1</b>		Annan presents modified plan																									
Iran		Greeks concerned about concessions																									
<b>Unwillingness to submit to nuclear inspections</b>		Powell pushes for agreement																									
Pakistan	Militants trapped in S. Waziristan	IAEA inspects facilities																									
<b>Alignment with the US resented by populace</b>	Rockets hit Peshawar	Iran reported hiding nuclear work																									
Afghan.	Min. aviation killed, Herat warlord fights govt. forces	Al Qaeda call for Musharraf assassination																									
<b>Taliban resist US forces Warlords surrender militia/weapons</b>		Al Qaeda allies release hostages																									
Arabia	12 reformists arrested	Qatar expels Russian diplomat																									
<b>Saudi gov't acts against al Qaeda militants; Arab summit cancelled abruptly</b>		10 of 12 reformists freed																									
Turkey	Kurdish youths clash w/ police	Earthquake in E. 2 <sup>nd</sup> earthquake = 5.3																									
<b>Intermediary for Syria &amp; Israel: wants role in united Cyprus</b>		Proposes Beirut peace plan																									
Iraq	Baghdad hotel bomb-7 die	Basra jobs riot injures 13 troops																									
<b>Economy improves; aid workers being targeted; As Sadr leads insurrection against occupation</b>	Powell visits Baghdad	Passports now req'd for pilgrims																									
Asia		Inflation drops from 50% to 28% in 3 months																									
<b>Eruption of violence in Uzbekistan</b>		4 US citizens killed, mutilated																									
Jordan	Academy graduates 584 Iraqi officers	Saleh visits Sudanese president																									
<b>Central location for Iraq relief, NGOs, etc.</b>	King Abdullah visits Sharon in Israel	60 held in riots over Yassin																									
Israel	Ban extended on barrier nr Jerusalem	US vetoes UN on Yassin																									
<b>Road Map lapses; Gaza pullout discussed; Fence/wall Settlements</b>	Hizbollah shells north	2 die in failed beach raid																									
Palestine	Qurei: leave Gaza, but no more destruction	Sheikh Yassin assassinated																									
<b>Society moves towards anarchy; militias dominate life, recruit suicide bombers</b>		Rantissi criticizes Bush																									
Mar.	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	Ap	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	Ap	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M

## *Negotiations (the Flea market approach)*

When did you last visit a flea market?

Remember? You arrived excited, early because you had heard from a friend of some real bargains and you wanted to make sure of a parking space, before the best items had been sold.

There were a few other people in the aisles, browsing, but not looking like they were much interested in buying. You, and your spouse (or son, perhaps?) headed straight for the stall that you had been told about, halfway down the long aisle, on the right.

*"Are you sure we're in the right place, honey?"* Perhaps honey should be capitalized, but...

*"I'm sure, they said it was in this building, and to turn right at the little café, so..."*

*"Here, this is it, ..., well, I think so. Why don't you ask this man?"*

*"Howdy y'all! Looking for something in particular? We got whatever you want, here, an' the prices are good. Just ask if there's anything you can't see, and we'll surely have it somewhere!"*

*"Well, I was talking with some friends about \_\_\_\_\_ and they said that you were sure to have one or two that would be worth looking at."*



Coffee vendor in Umm Qays, the Biblical Gadara.

Is that something like how it went?

In America, only in flea markets (and the like) can you experience the value of bargaining, and the tactics of ensuring good bargaining position. Did you come away satisfied from that proxy visit, or were you, like me, frustrated at being unable to obtain what you wanted at a price that you hoped for? Perhaps you got what you wanted, but after getting it home you found that it didn't work as well as you were led to believe. Or, perhaps, in the desire to please your spouse/son, you are now regretting having paid more than you intended, and are unsure how you are going to boast of it to your friends.

In the Middle East, this is not an occasional experience. This is life. We do not practice the flea market approach only when we go downtown to buy a necklace, the Friday market for cheap clothes, or the car rental company for a cheap rental. When I visit my landlord to discuss the pipe that takes our hot water to his tank it is important for me to establish a position for myself in the conversation, from which I can achieve my goal.

On our visit to the flea market, my son and I should have established our ground rules first: 1. Don't go early, he has many more customers coming later who could buy the item; 2. Don't look like he is the only person from whom you could buy it, you are strengthening his hand. Browse, arrive at his stall casually,

and come across the item by chance; 3. Don't look like this is *exactly what you have been looking for*, because the negotiating price doubles for items like that. 4. Be prepared to leave without it, and look around for a better source, with better quality or better price.

When we look at political dealings in the Middle East, as we are all doing these days, we are amazed at the positions that the spokesmen take on the variety of issues. Whether it is Sistani's representatives insisting that the new Transitional Administrative Law be rejected (the one that their representatives on the IGC signed into existence), Denktash refusing to attend the next round of talks on Cyprus unification, they are establishing a position from which to bargain.

When Sudan suddenly ceases to cooperate in the negotiations on Southern autonomy, and loses the Jinjawid on the non-Arab peoples of Darfur, it is clear that they feel they have the stronger position. The most difficult bargaining negotiations at the flea market occur when the seller does not need the money, when he has other customers, and when your need is so important that you have no alternative but to acquiesce to his bottom price.

I am in a gift shop in Jerusalem, just around the corner from the Holy Sepulchre. I speak some Arabic – establish my position as a 'local' and not a tourist. I look at various items, guide books (I see the one I want, by the door), postcards, and the like. As I am leaving I pick up the book I am interested in, glance at it, and ask how much. 100 NIS is too much for a book like that, so I put it down and leave.

He calls me back. (Ergo, I win. It's just a matter of time...)

After some frustrating negotiations: "How much do you want to pay?"-"I thought it would be about 10 shekels."-"That's too cheap. I'll sell you it for 80 shekels because I like you."-"I can only pay 20 shekels" (since I have only just arrived, and have not yet been to the cash machine). "You can have it for 60 shekels. Take it now and bring the rest tomorrow."-"No, I'll just come back tomorrow and buy it then."-"40 shekels, 20 now and 20 tomorrow"-"No, I'll just come back tomorrow" (He thrusts it into my hand). "Take it, you can have it."-"For 20 shekels? I will not pay more."-"Just take it. It's yours."

When you read that a negotiator has walked out of the talks, be sure that somewhere, they will continue. And if not, then it may well be a good thing, since being forced to remain in the talks may cause the whole treaty to be abrogated later.

At first I avoided that shop, approaching the church from a different direction, but later I was trying to find my way (using the guide book!) to the Ethiopian monastery. He saw me, asked where I was going, and took it upon himself to guide me to the correct doorway for the monastery (on the roof of the Holy Sepulchre, built to look like ethnic mud huts).

The pipe? Well, my landlord never got round to fixing it, or calling a plumber to come and cap the connections, as he had suggested.

So, a week later I did it myself.

## Truth and Consequences

Most of you remember the Iraqi baby, Bayan, whose life doctors in Israel attempted to save as she was born with vital arteries to her heart reversed. Since that time another baby, Thafir, was accepted by the same hospital. After initial concerns that similar unrecognized infections would take his life also, Thafir has done well, and is progressing satisfactorily.



Left, Thafir, on 7<sup>th</sup> March. Right, his parents.

In the pre-dawn hours of Easter Sunday I paced back and forth along the roadway in Amman, Jordan, near the GMC Suburbans which carry passengers into Iraq. Their drivers, normally desperate for

business, had drawn back when asked if they could take me, an American citizen, into Iraq on this day. "Turn around," one said. Finally another offered that he could take me as far as the outskirts of Fallujah, at double the normal price.

One of the families we'd helped with heart surgery was in Fallujah, and I longed to somehow mediate as events in their city threatened to destroy the relationship between Iraqis and the outsiders who'd come to help them. So many hopes for God's grace to touch the Iraqi people seemed to be in the balance.

A ministry meeting a great need in this region works to provide Arab infants that have heart defects with quality hospital surgery. A friend involved in this ministry writes the following:

How did it come to this in Iraq? That same morning a Washington Post reporter would witness a telling encounter in Baghdad between American officer Peter Mansoor and tribal leaders.

*"I remind you that the coalition did not start this round of violence."*

An Iraqi man rose to differ. *"The Iraqis started the violence?"* he said.

*"This is not the truth. The demonstrations were peaceful."*

Demonstrations? Mansoor was not talking about demonstrations.

*"I know exactly where it happened in Sadr City,"* Mansoor said. *"On the northern end. I can show you on a map. By the way,"* he said. *"We lost six soldiers that day."*

The Iraqi shook his head. *"That was the third or fourth day."*

Mansoor shook his. *"The very first day,"* he insisted.

The failure to communicate was grounded in the difference between reports filed up a brigade's chain of command and news circulated by word of mouth around an anxious city. Mansoor's questioner was referring to a protest several days earlier at Firdaus. Called to protest the shuttering of a newspaper controlled by Sadr, the demonstration had come off without incident.

*"We never fired a shot,"* Mansoor said. *"At least none was reported to me."*

But for days afterward, Iraqis spoke of shots fired toward the crowd from the nearby Baghdad Hotel. After tanks moved near the crowd, there was talk of innocents crushed under their treads. Hearing this in the hallway afterward, the colonel made a face. *"We didn't roll over anyone,"* he said.

This calls to mind the origin of the Palestinian intifada in 1987. A traffic accident near the entrance to the Gaza Strip had killed Palestinian workers returning from Israel. Journalist Amira Hess later interviewed the activists who cheerfully admitted creating the lie, that the killings were deliberate. In the resulting cycle of violence the truth soon didn't matter.

This phenomenon is familiar, I believe, to any Christian working in the Middle East. If truth claims are pressed in conversation one soon finds that the truth is irrelevant, and no amount of argumentation can change the other's view. One of the grossest manifestations of this is the claim, expressed again this week in the Al-Ahram weekly by an Egyptian professor at the American University in Cairo, that there is no proof of Arab or Muslim involvement in the September 11 terror attacks.

The easy explanation is that "Arab culture condones lying." This is fair only insofar as Arabs are a subset of humanity, and all humans, unless being transformed by God's grace, are liars. The same willingness to evade the truth exists in our own Western culture, as dialogue about abortion or evolution easily demonstrates. Still there is clearly a cultural disjunction evident in the meeting between the American officer and the Iraqi tribal leaders. Our culture, however flawed, has been seasoned toward truth-telling by centuries of the church's experience of confession and forgiveness. Our neighbors in the Arab world have spent those same centuries in a grace-less culture where there is no remedy for shame other than to hide or deny it.

*Just as in each of our lives, this will only be overcome by the personal experience of God's grace. Neither argumentation nor even force of arms can establish the truth in our hearts. As I stood by the roadway in Amman I realized it was the American occupation I wanted to save. However good and well-intentioned that intervention is, it is still not identical with my calling to share the love of God in Christ. I crossed to the other side of the roadway and took a taxi back to my apartment, as the Easter sunrise began to lighten the sky.*

The parents of Bayan continue to testify to the loving concern of believers - and the dedication of doctors - and in their enthusiasm attract and give confidence to other parents whose children need similar treatment. So also our testimony to truth can attract others to the Source of truth, in a world that seeks to deny it.

## Kurdistan

In the northeast of Iraq the 'plain of Shinar' gives way to the foothills of a mountain range whose summits are in Iran. The hills are more than a change of scenery, from the monotony of the arid plains; they also mark the region known as Kurdistan. The line through the towns of Zakhu, Dahuk, Erbil, Kirkuk and Suleymaniya approximately indicates the edge of the Kurdish region. Erbil itself is predominantly Kurdish, but has a large Arab population, as can be guessed from its location on the edge of the hills. The ratio in Kirkuk is reversed, with the northern quarter (north of the Mosul-Suleymaniya roads) being Kurdish, but the bulk of the city Arab.

We can use the plains and the hills as a metaphor for life in the region over the last decade. The ups-and-downs of Arab Iraq contrast with the stability of Kurdistan, where the decade of encouragement they have received from the west has fostered an appreciation for Americans, and a welcome for visitors from the US. A recent visitor told me that "a Kurd would throw himself in front of a car to save an American." Of the few Americans who have been killed in Kurdistan, it is not unknown for the locals to erect a monument in their memory. The same cannot be said for the rest of Iraq.

The two languages of the Kurds, Sourani and Badeni, are geographically distinct. Sourani is spoken in the south and west, from Erbil to Suleymaniya. Though Sourani is written in the Arabic script, and there are some words in common, it is distinct from Arabic. (Remember, Kurds are overwhelmingly Muslim, and Arabic is their religious language.) Badeni is the language of the north, around Dahuk and into Turkey, and is written in the Latin script.

While the two Kurdish groups were opposing each other over territory and politics (an issue which is not totally forgotten, incidentally) the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) represented the political and military forces of the two language groups. The leaders of these two groups, Jalal Talabani (PUK) and Massoud Barzani (KDP) now have seats on the Iraqi Governing Council. Their armed wing, the *Peshmerga* cooperated effectively with US troops before and during the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Kurds have not always experienced the unity that is growing among them these days. For many years their hopes of international recognition and support have foundered on the splintered nature of their society, in which Kurd-on-Kurd differences were frequent and caused the West to be hesitant in its support. The events of recent months, with the deep splits evident elsewhere in Iraqi society, have caused the Kurds to recognize that success in building an autonomous republic, even their survival, depends upon them working together. Kurds have good reason to be wary of power being handed over to the Arab majority, being concerned with the threat of another Arab ruler who might attempt to wipe them out. The Shiites have reciprocal concerns with the language of the T.A.L. over the possibility of a Kurdish veto over any future constitution. Discussions are already under way over this issue. (An illustration of the negotiation strategies of the region: Kurdish leaders have shown willingness to accept a joint administration over the city of Kirkuk. However, they are hesitant to advertise this fact, in case it weakens their position before future negotiations over the status of the border city.)

