

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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

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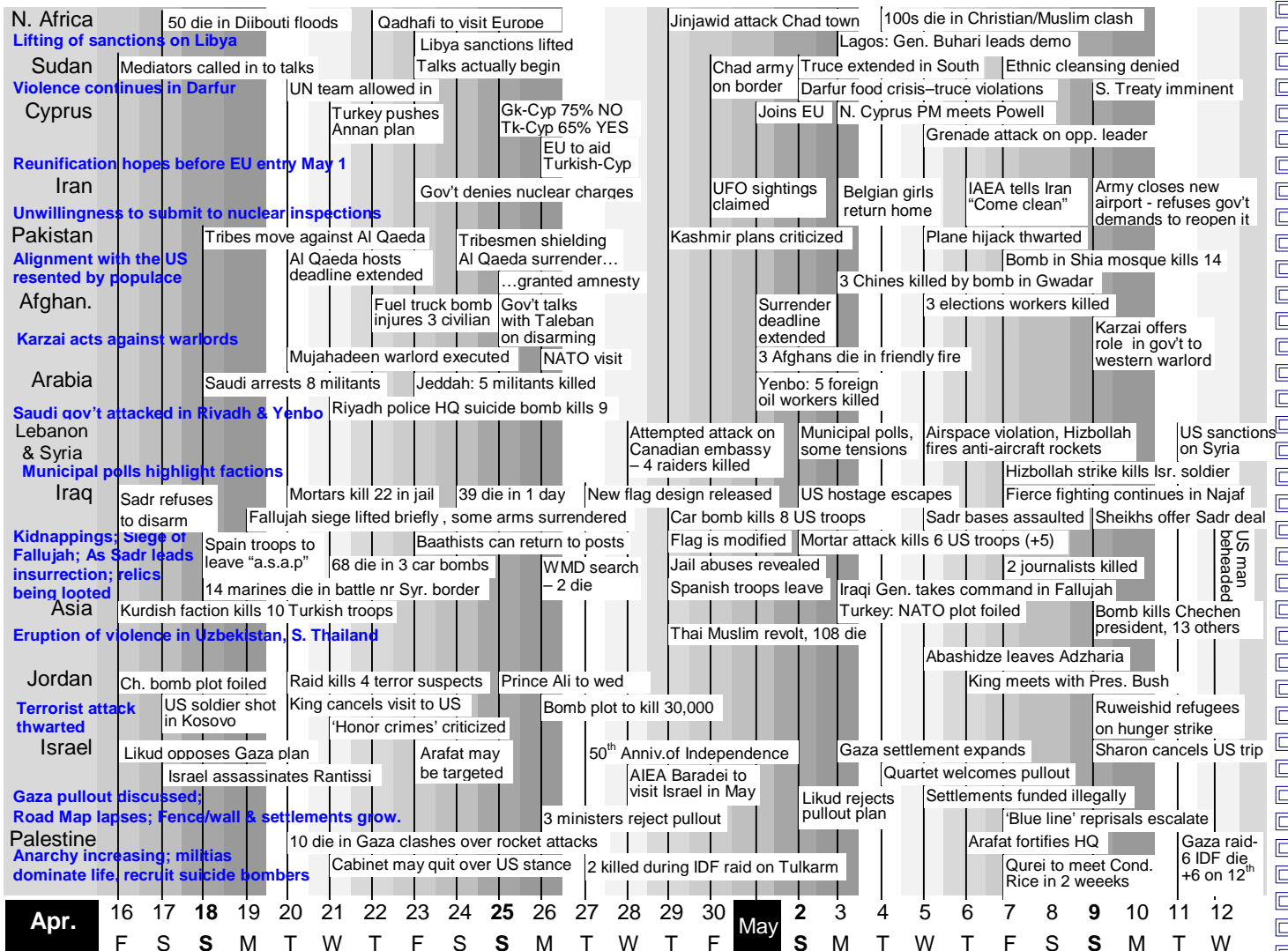
Welcome

In a month where inter-ethnic fighting continues in Sudan, and erupts in Thailand and Nigeria, we look at the Islamic Interface. What is happening in those regions on the periphery of the Islamic bloc? What problems arise in countries with an increasing population of Muslims? How similar are the problems faced in traditionally Hindu, Buddhist or Christian countries, and how different are the responses?

Also, a sad update on an Iraqi baby in a Jerusalem hospital, but how much love the parents received from those who care – an entirely different *Islamic Interface* !

A thought:

Two evils have been in the news recently in Iraq. Condemnation rings out, and rightly so, about the prisoner abuses, especially from those who are against the coalition's presence, but also from the coalition itself. But how strong is the Iraqi condemnation of the mutilations and assassinations are demeaning the value of life there?



The Israel/Palestine Conflict (Events since 1967)

Continuing the review we began in e-NEWS 16, of events in Israel/Palestine since 1967. We paused at the conclusion of the 4th Arab-Israeli War, the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In this issue we begin in 1974.

1974

At the 1974 Arab Summit in Rabat the PLO was recognized as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian cause. This deliberately excluded Jordan, which had an outstanding claim since the 1967 loss of the territory.

1975-79

**Egyptian
Peace
Process**

After the death of Nasser in 1970 a new approach was seen from the Egyptian government, though not reciprocated by the people. The defeat of 1973 was no longer seen as a valorous struggle, and the continued occupation of Sinai was a continual humiliation for the nation. Having Sinai returned to Egyptian control would restore their dignity. For the government, the peace process was inevitable.

1975

Sinai disengagement agreement, negotiated by Henry Kissinger

1977

President Sadat addressed the *Knesset*, to pursue a peace agreement with Israel

1978

Talks led by US President Carter at Camp David

1979

Treaty of Washington, peace between Egypt and Israel (March).

1981

Sadat is assassinated by members of the military, having drawn their ire for his peace efforts.

1982-85

Lebanon

Lebanon has had a troubled history, its clan militias being private armies ready to assert their rights against the variety of other minority groups. The arrival of the PLO as refugees from Jordan further exacerbated the instability, with civil war breaking out in April 1975. Syria eventually intervened against the Palestinians, on the side of the Christian militias. Since setting up bases there in 1981, the PLO had been able to operate across the Lebanese border, directly into Israel, threatening security there. Finally, after the attempted assassination of their Ambassador in London, Israel acted.

June

Israel invades Lebanon, led by Gen. Ariel Sharon, taking control of Beirut.

August

PLO removes its troops from Lebanon, establishing a HQ in Tunisia.

September

Local militias are used to maintain order, especially in & around Palestinian refugee camps.

14

President Bashir Gemayel (who was supported by Israel) is assassinated.

16

Lebanese militias massacre Palestinian refugees in the Sabra & Shatila refugee camps

June, 1985

Israel withdraws its troops from all but southern Lebanon

1985

October 7

The Palestinian Liberation Front, a PLO-linked group commandeers the cruise ship, the Achille Lauro, gaining notoriety by killing the wheelchair-bound American, Leon Klinghoffer.

1987

Intifada

An accident involving an Israeli military vehicle led to a number of fatalities. Rumors were spread that these were deliberate killings, and an angry Palestinian populace began a series of demonstrations, tire-burnings and strikes. It was partly as a result of this intifada ("uprising") that western nations began to seriously consider establishing a Palestinian state.

Babylon The Great

A short photo-album of pictures from Babylon, taken by a friend during a visit in April, 2003.



1. Said to be the largest free-standing arch in the world. 2. Even as ruined as they are, the meters-thick walls are awe-inspiring. 3. The Ishtar Gate, to be seen to be believed.

Pride

There is personal pride and there is national pride. It is personal pride that makes it difficult for us to admit doing wrong, making mistakes, or being fooled. It is national pride that makes it difficult for us to admit doing wrong, making mistakes, or being fooled.

Yes, when it comes down to it, pride is as pride does.

A friend put in into a nutshell recently when he wrote that *“Our culture, however flawed, has been seasoned toward truth-telling by centuries of the church’s experience of confession and forgiveness.”*

Perhaps in the west we are more subtle about hiding our pride, or more devious about avoiding embarrassment, but in the Middle East this is another challenge that we confront almost daily.

It is well known, and related to new visitors frequently, that if one asks for directions (admit it, men, we do occasionally lower our pride and... , now where was I?). When being given directions one has to consider the possibility that the guide actually doesn’t know the answer, but is giving you directions anyway. This may be either because a) he is unwilling to admit that he doesn’t know, or b) (as the story is usually related) because he doesn’t want to disappoint you, who so trustingly have come to him for assistance.

The issue is not seen so much as one of pride, but of avoiding humiliation. This is frequently seen in the news, and a couple of items have caught my eye this week.

By May 10th, time seemed to be running out for Muqtada As Sadr, who was being pressed militarily by US troops in Najaf. He does not have a wide following amongst Iraqis, but (*national pride, support the underdog*) when standing up to US military might, many Iraqis made noises about supporting him. Many Shiites also are frustrated with his approach, particularly with his not being a senior cleric. On May 10th an approach was made to him by those who would be his elders in a more traditional setting, offering him a way out to solve the stand-off, *“and to solve it in a way that doesn’t humiliate Moqtada, that doesn’t humiliate the Iraqi people, and that doesn’t humiliate the Americans.”* Even though their resolution would still see him stand trial for the murder of Ayatollah Bakir Al-Hakim, and his *Mehdi Army* disbanded, their approach has a good chance of succeeding, given their status, the large population they represent, and their opposition to his actions.

The point is, even though Muqtada is condemned by these tribal leaders, protecting him from humiliation is still a consideration for them. This contrasts with the Western approach to conflict, where humiliation of the conquered seems to be at least part of the goal.

When one considers the reports of abuse of prisoners in Iraqi jails in the light of this native fear of humiliation, the disclosures seem even more reprehensible, and a strong reaction from relatives and friends to be expected.

Baby Thafir

In the last issue we gave an update on Thafir, who had been progressing slowly since surgery. Well, about a week later I received an email, of which this is a portion:

It was a three month fight. The Israeli team of surgeons, cardiologists and ICU personnel fought hard day and night for Thafir’s life. Your prayers have surrounded this little life all these weeks. In the end Thafir’s heart failed.

At the request of Hashim and Anwar, baby Thafir would be buried in Jerusalem. I did not know what to expect when I met the parents for the first time since Thafir’s death. Would they be in a dazed silence, still in shock? What should or could I say to them? It is a gift that at times like these words are not necessary. Really all you need is someone to hold onto. When I met Hashim he put his arms around me and held on. He didn’t just hold on, he held on for life and strength. I felt as though he was trying to squeeze as much strength from my body as he could. We stayed in this embrace for a full five minutes, quietly weeping. A few times I began to release from him but he would grab on tighter.

A few hours later we found ourselves at the foot of the Golden Gate in Jerusalem, located outside the eastern wall of the Old City.

In the Muslim tradition, everyone from the richest to the poorest is buried in the same way. The body is wrapped in a simple white cloth and laid in the earth without a coffin.



The Muslim clerics who were officiating went about the preparation for burial. On my way to the cemetery I was wondering how I would react being part of my first Muslim funeral. Would it feel empty. Would it feel like the spirit of Jesus was far away. Somehow there is something about burying a little child that transcends everything else. My fears were unfounded because Jesus was there in a powerful way. A German woman, a believer in Jesus held Anwar. Myself and two other Arab believers held Hashim. We were all facing the Mt. of Olives with the Golden Gate to our back. This gate is also known as the Mercy Gate. Some believe that Jesus is going to enter this gate when he returns to Jerusalem. The whole scene was pregnant with history and prophecy.

As I watched Hashim crush some dirt clods and tenderly smooth some dirt over the grave site my last thought was that I would like to return here on a regular basis and place flowers and spend some time thanking the Lord for allowing me to be a part of such a beautiful family during their time of testing. We trust that the Lord’s spirit will surround Hashim and Anwar as they return to Baghdad today [May 5th].

(From a happier time, the sealed gate known as the Golden Gate can also be seen over Hashim’s left shoulder in the picture in e-NEWS 3. Download it from the Web Page.)

The Islamic Interface

In *e-NEWS* 14 we considered the relationship of *Islam and Government*, noting that the stated ideal is of government by religion. Religion then becomes more than just a guide for the legislation and administration of law, but the source of law and the recourse for adjudication.

North of the *world desert*, which stretches from Mauritania to China, a swathe of countries can be seen to have primarily Muslim populations. Many of these have also adopted their interpretation of Islamic, *Sharia* law as their foundation. The application of this varies, however, as can be seen in the difference between the **Republic** of Iran and the **Kingdom** of Saudi Arabia.

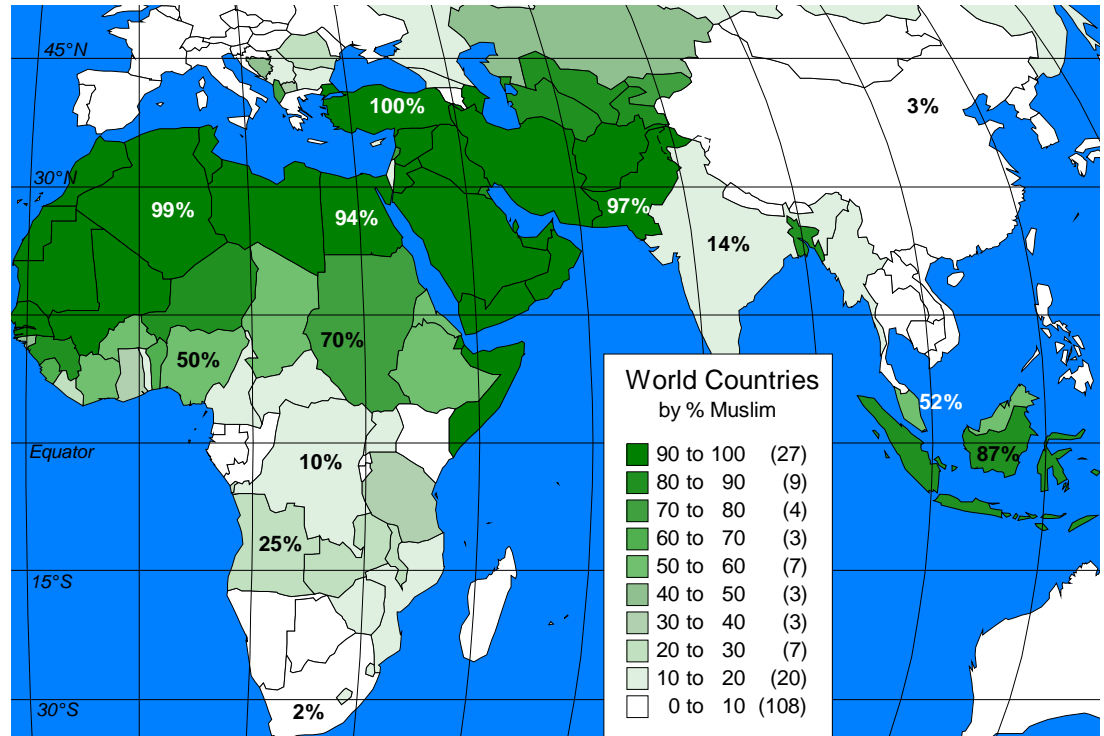
Over the next weeks we shall look at the countries on the periphery of the Islamic world. Countries such as Nigeria and Malaysia, distant but similar in their religious make-up. We will consider Africa, where the interface cuts the continent East-West somewhere north of the equator, and Asia, where history has isolated Bangladesh and Malaysia from the Islamic bloc.

It is important for us to remember that very frequently the tensions that arise are not inter- but intra-national. Sudan and Nigeria are examples of countries where the south is predominantly Christian, and the north is Muslim. In these countries, as we have seen even this week, inter-ethnic conflict seems to be based on religious belief. We shall consider whether this is the case, or

whether the issue is primarily tribal (with families or clans vying for land, and their religious ties being incidental), racial, or political.

The Islamic interface confronts Hinduism in India, Buddhism in East Asia, as well as Christianity around the world, and we will remember to consider these regions in our tour.

Readers might want to refer to *e-NEWS* 1, where we pointed out that 'Christian' has a variety of meanings, depending on context. In Cyprus, Greek-Cypriots would declare themselves Christian, to a man, even though they might never attend church or adhere to any of the Orthodox Church's teachings. In Jordan, a Muslim country with a more liberal attitude than some, those born in Christian families have this identified on their birth certificates and passports, just as do the Muslims. (It is this, and the prohibition of alcohol in the Koran, that results in liquor-stores being owned by Christian families.)



Islamic Interface – in the news this week...

May 4th, Abuja, Nigeria – Christian militias kill hundreds of Muslims in Yelwa, central Nigeria.

May 11th, Christians & Muslims fight in Kano, N. Nigeria. A reaction to last week's killings.

May 4th, Pattan, Thailand – Government forces kill 108 Muslim militants in the historic Krue Se mosque. The government fears that it may be the renewal of old attempts to establish a Muslim state in the narrow peninsula alongside Malaysia.

Southern Sudan – Talks are continuing (in Kenya) to determine a peace treaty that will exempt the southern region from Islamic Law, and after six years give them the right to vote on secession. (Ethnic cleansing of Muslim African tribes in Darfur, by the Arab government in Khartoum, is a reminder that religious differences are not necessarily the prime cause of conflict.)

Hamtramck, Michigan – Residents of this small town vote on an objection to a local mosque amplifying its call to prayer over loudspeakers.