

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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

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Welcome

This issue of **e-NEWS** has been delayed by circumstances for which we are entirely responsible – we are moving. For about a year (*Yanni, Inshallah, etc.*) we will be in the US, studying (and working to pay for the studies!) before returning to continue our work in education. We are closing up the house and working on shipping items that we can't do without (a list of items whose length is inversely related to the cost of shipping!). We are also documenting our every move at school, to hopefully ensure that there are fewer hiccoughs (doesn't *anyone* use that spelling any more?) in the transition.

As usual when **e-NEWS** is delayed, the calendar is not up to date, but will be corrected in the next issue. We are waiting for the promised, but much delayed, signing of the peace treaty for the south of Sudan. Also, the events leading up to the handover of political power to the Iraqis come thick and fast, and will be more fully documented in the next issue (June 13th, approximately).

N. Africa	Nigeria: 100s die in Christian/Muslim clash	Nigeria: 30 die, church, mosque burned	5 die in Muslim reprisal	
Nigerian violence	Lagos: Gen. Buhari leads demo		Arab Summit in Tunisia	
Sudan	Truce extended in South	Ethnic cleansing denied	Rpt: Govt. led Darfur burning	Famine expected in Darfur
Gov't delays aid	Darfur food crisis—truce violations	S. Treaty imminent		Peace treaty in S. delayed
Cyprus & Turkey	Joins EU	N. Cyprus PM meets Powell		Blair to visit Erdogan
EU & N. Cyprus plan improved relations		Grenade attack on opp. leader		Election likely north Cyprus
Iran	Belgian girls return home	IAEA tells Iran "Come clean"	Army closes new airport - refuses gov't demands to reopen it	IAEA suspects nuclear breaches
Resists IAEA checks				Demonstrations outside British embassy
Pakistan		Plane hijack thwarted		Shiite family killed, "Shiites are infidels" sprayed on wall
Alignment with the US resented by populace		Bomb in Shia mosque kills 14		
Afghan.	Surrender deadline extended	3 election workers killed	Karzai offers role in gov't to western warlord	5 Taleban killed as raids continue in S.
Karzai acts against warlords	3 Afghans die in friendly fire			Bomb defused in Helmand, 2 US troops die in raid
Syria			US sanctions on Syria	EU plans trade pact w/ Syria
Lebanon	Leb. Municipal polls, tensions	Airspace violation, Hizbollah fires anti-aircraft rockets		Vandalism by Hariri opponents
Municipal polls highlight factional issues		Leb. Hizbollah strike kills Isr. soldier		Leb: Election in south
Iraq	US hostage escapes	Fierce fighting continues in Najaf	Najaf: 2 fighters die	Abuse trial-jail for soldier
As Sadr leads insurrection; Siege of Fallujah; relics being looted;	Sadr bases assaulted	Sheikhs offer Sadr deal	US man beheaded	Italian soldier dies in Nasariya
	Mortar attack kills 6 US troops (+5)		Karbala: 20 Sadr forces killed in battle	IGC head killed
	Iraqi Gen. takes command in Fallujah	2 journalists killed		Sistani calls militias to leave holy cities
Asia	Turkey: NATO plot foiled	Bomb kills Chechen president, 13 others	Thai Buddhist temples bombed	Kufa attacked, 32 militia killed, mosque raided
Eruption of violence in Uzbekistan, S. Thailand	Abashidze leaves Adzharia			33 Indian soldiers die in Kashmir bus bomb
Jordan	King meets with Pres. Bush	Ruweishid refugees on hunger strike	WEF opens-Powell attends	
Terrorist attack thwarted				Pr. Hamza weds
Israel	Gaza settlement expands	Sharon cancels US trip		Powell criticizes home demolition
Gaza pullout discussed; Road Map lapses; Fence/wall grows.	Quartet welcomes pullout			Barghouti convicted
	Likud rejects pullout plan	Settlements funded illegally	100,000 Israelis demo for Gaza pullout	UN resolution condemns Rafah raid – US abstains
Palestine		Arafat fortifies HQ	Gaza raid: 6 IDF die, +6 on 12 th	20 Rafah homes demolished
Anarchy increasing; militias dominate life, recruit suicide bombers; Intensive Rafah raid & home demolition	Qurei to meet Cond. Rice in 2 weeks			20 die in Op. Rainbow: Rafah raid, helicopters, tanks, 'dozers
				9 killed in protest march
				8 more die in Rafah

May.

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The Israel/Palestine Conflict (Events since 1967)

In e-NEWS 17 we left off at the Intifada, in this review of events in Israel/Palestine since 1967. The Intifada marked a turning point in Western attitudes to the Palestinian issue, perhaps realizing for the first time that the Palestinian condition was indeed serious, and that Israel might well be best served by having a partner in peace instead of in conflict.

Towards Statehood

To clear the ground for Palestinian statehood, in 1988 King Hussein renounced Jordan's claim, standing since 1967, to Palestinian territory.

1991

Madrid: Secret multilateral talks between the Palestinians and Israel, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. They discussed the possible future relationship of a Palestinian state with Israel.

1993

Oslo: Declaration of Principles

1994

Palestinian National Authority established. Initially it was given authority only over civic institutions (education, health, tourism, etc.) but in certain areas (designated A, B and C) it would progressively take over the policing duties.

(October)

Jordan/Israel Peace Treaty, signed by King Hussein and Israeli P.M. Yitzhak Rabin.

1997

About 80% of Hebron (Arabic, *Al Khalil*) was handed over to the PNA. The presence of a few hundred Jews in the old town always remained a flashpoint, and Israel maintained a military presence there, for their protection.

The intentions of Oslo had been good, but the implementation of them occurred more slowly, and was always less than the Palestinian population had been led to expect. Individual incidents of violence led to collective punishment of the Palestinian people, cancellation of hand-over agreements, and renunciation of previous pledges. This, along with the continuing growth of settlements, led to an increasing sense of hopelessness among the population. At the same time their leaders were known to be corrupt, and misuse of the funds provided by western agencies meant that the people were not benefiting from the goodwill resulting from Oslo. It was in this context that President Clinton sought to revitalize the process.



The ailing King Hussein gave his support to the Wye talks

1998

Wye Plantation, discussions involving Netanyahu, Arafat and Madeleine Albright
The Wye Accord included provisions designed to reassure each party of the other's willingness to cooperate towards peace. In actuality many failed to be implemented due (a) to the collapse of Netanyahu's government, (a planned 13% Israeli troop withdrawal never occurred, and actually became a troop increase under Sharon), and (b) to the onset of the 2000 Intifada, which further limited the PNA's ability to control Hamas.

1999

King Hussein dies (February). King Abdullah II succeeds him.

2000

President Clinton attempts to re-invigorate the peace process, this time with Barak as P.M.
During the talks they discussed territory that Israel might be prepared to give up, and claims that the Palestinians might be prepared to put aside, in pursuit of peace. Both men went further in their offers than their populations would support, particularly since the 'Al Aqsa' Intifada had broken out in September.



Senator George Mitchell addressing a news conference in 2001

2001

Mitchell Report issued (April). The report criticizes both parties for the failure of the peace process, and recommends steps to be taken to resolve it.

2003

Middle East Road Map published (April).
The Road Map was prepared by the 'Quartet' of the UN, EU, Russia and the USA. It was completed in late 2002, but the US insisted upon delaying its publication until the Palestinian Authority had a Prime Minister and cabinet in place. This was accomplished on April 13th of 2003 when the Palestinian Legislative Council accepted the cabinet list that Mahmoud Abbas ('Abu Mazen') had presented. Abbas was continually frustrated in his attempts to bring the PA security services under his control, and resigned, to be succeeded by Qurei, in September of 2003.

The Islamic Interface – Thailand

The Indochinese peninsula extends down from south-east Asia, and includes the countries of Myanmar (still known in the US as Burma), Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. Extending from this peninsula, linked by a long isthmus, is the Malay Peninsula, where we find Singapore at the tip of 'mainland' Malaysia.

North of Malaysia the countries are primarily Buddhist, though Malaysia itself has a Muslim population of rather more than 50%. South of Malaysia is Indonesia. With a population of around 120 million, and 87% of them Muslim, it is the country with the largest Islamic population. Malaysia's government is Islamic, but it is officially tolerant of all faiths. We shall look at Malaysia and Indonesia in future issues.



The Thai border has extended down the Malay peninsula since 1902, when the Muslim kingdom of Pattani was annexed and incorporated into Thailand. Consequently, the isthmus adjacent to the border with Malaysia is where almost all Thailand's Muslim population lives. It was here in April that Thailand was shocked by an Islamist insurgency that seemed to many to have sprung out of thin air. There were precedents, however, including raids in January and March of this year. The January raid was on an army camp near the border, and it seems the goal was the theft of weapons, rifles in particular. In March a raid on a quarry netted dynamite, detonators and a nitrate fertilizer used to make bombs. Prior to these events, in June of 2003 the Thai authorities had uncovered a plot to attack western embassies. This alerted them to the presence of radical groups in the south, some apparently linked with Al Qaeda and other Indonesian and Philippine separatist groups. (We will look at events in Aceh very soon in e-NEWS.)

Muslims in Thailand have been frustrated by the lack of progress of a 5-Year Plan for the southern region, which would have given Islam a greater role in the southern infrastructure. Additional stimuli have been international: the invasion of Iraq, the suffering of Palestinians, and tighter US visa regulations. (This latter point is not insignificant, as even here, in Jordan, it is very difficult for anyone - academics, students, refugees - to even apply for a visa. The cost of application is prohibitive, and only those from rich families are able to afford to pay for what may be a rejected application.) Other issues have been domestic: discrimination in jobs, injustice in the legal system, the murder of a Muslim lawyer.

The developing conflict hit the news on April 28th when troops killed over 100 militants as they prepared to attack Thai military posts. Some of the insurgents had taken refuge in an historic mosque in Hat Yai, where they were wiped out by Thai troops. Since then, security services have been targeted almost daily. On Saturday a note was found next to the decapitated body of a Thai rubber tapper, a Buddhist.

What concerns Thai officials is that a number of the militants were not Thai nationals, and had crossed the border illegally. Outside forces may be contributing to the internal unrest. The presence of an Islamic college that preaches radical Wahhabi doctrine also concerns authorities. The college has many of its followers in key positions throughout the south. As in many other countries, the college is funded by Saudi money.

(For much of this information I am indebted to an article by John R. Bradley in the Lebanon Daily Star)

The Mesha Stele

In 1868 archaeological excavations uncovered a stone recording conquests of a Moabite king, named Mesha. The stone, also known as the Moabite Stone, recorded his conquest over Omri, king over Israel. The plan was to purchase the stone from the Arab families of Dibon, south of Madaba, where the stone was discovered. There was some competition between the British and French archaeologists for the stone, and in the intervening period the owners took drastic action. Heating the stone in an open fire, they cast water on it to break it into smaller fragments. These were then distributed among the people.

When the archaeologists returned they found that they had to purchase the fragments, piece by piece, from those who now possessed portions of the stone. Fortunately for those who were involved in reconstruction of it, a paper cast had been made of the stele, and this served as a model. The basalt stele is about 3' 10" high and is now on display in the Louvre.

The text of the stone is as follows:

I am Mesha, son of Chemosh, King of Moab; the Dibonite. My father reigned over Moab for thirty years, and I reigned after my father. And I made the high place for Chemosh in Qerkhah, a high place of salvation because he had saved me from all my foes and let me see my pleasure on all of them that hated me. Omri king of Israel afflicted Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land; and his son succeeded him and he also said "I will afflict Moab". In my days said he this, but I saw my pleasure on him and on his house, and Israel perished with an everlasting destruction. Omri took possession of the land of Madaba and dwelt therein his days and half his son's days, forty years; but Chemosh restored it in my days. And I built Meon and made the reservoir in it, and I built Keryathen. Now the men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Ataroth of old; and the King of Israel built for himself Ataroth. And I fought against the city and took it, and I slew all the people of the city and made it a grazing stock to Chemosh and to Moab. And I captured thence the shrine of Dudah and dragged it before Chemosh in Keriyoth, and I settled there the men of Sharem and of Mekhrath. And Chemosh said to me "Go, take Nebo against Israel", And I went by might and fought against it from dawn till noon, and I took it and slew the whole of it, 7,000 men and women, for I had devoted it to Ashtor Chemosh. And I took the vessels of Jehovah and dragged them before Chemosh. Now the king of Israel had built Yahas and lived in it while he fought against me but Chemosh drove him out before me. I took 200 men of Moab and all its chiefs, and brought them up against Yahas and took it to all it unto Dibon. And I built Qerkhah, the 4 wall of the forest and the wall of the mound, and its gates and its towers and king's palace, and I made two reservoirs in the midst of the city. Now there was no cistern in the city, so I said to all the people, "Make you every man a cistern in his house. And I cut the aqueduct for Qerkhah with the help of the prisoners of Israel; I rebuilt Aroer and made the highway through the Arnon, and I rebuilt Beth Ramoth for it was overthrown, and Betsor... for all Dibon was subject. And I reigned... 100 cities which I had added to the land. And I rebuilt Madaba and Beth Deblatein and the temple of Baal Meon, and took there the sheep-master... the flocks of the land. Now Khernan the son of Dedan dwelt in it, and Dedan said... Chemosh said unto me "Go down against Khernan". So I went down and warred... and Chemosh dwelt in it all my days.



1 Kings 16:21-28

Then the people of Israel were split into two factions; half supported Tibni son of Ginath for king, and the other half supported Omri. But Omri's followers proved stronger than those of Tibni son of Ginath. So Tibni died and Omri became king.

In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver and built a city on it, calling it Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill.

But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him. He walked in the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit, so that they provoked the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger by their worthless idols.

As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did and the things he achieved, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel? Omri rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. And Ahab his son succeeded him as king.

2 Kings 3:4-6, 24-27

Now Mesha king of Moab raised sheep, and he had to supply the king of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and with the wool of a hundred thousand rams. But after Ahab died the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. So at that time King Joram set out from Samaria and mobilized all Israel. He also sent this message to Jehosaphat king of Judah: "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?"

"I will go with you," he replied.

...

But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered the Moabites. They destroyed the towns, and each man threw a stone on every good field until it was covered. They stopped up all the springs and cut down every good tree. Only Kir Haraseth was left with its stones in place, but men armed with slings surrounded it and attacked it as well.

When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed. Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land.