

# MID-EAST e-NEWS

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

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## Welcome

The diagram on this page is the beginning of a *decision tree*, with just enough background information to get you started. There is no room for the side issues that complicate matters (random acts of violence that thrive in times of tension, but which hopefully will have no environment to support them as the weeks progress.) If you think it is incomplete, please pass on your suggestions.

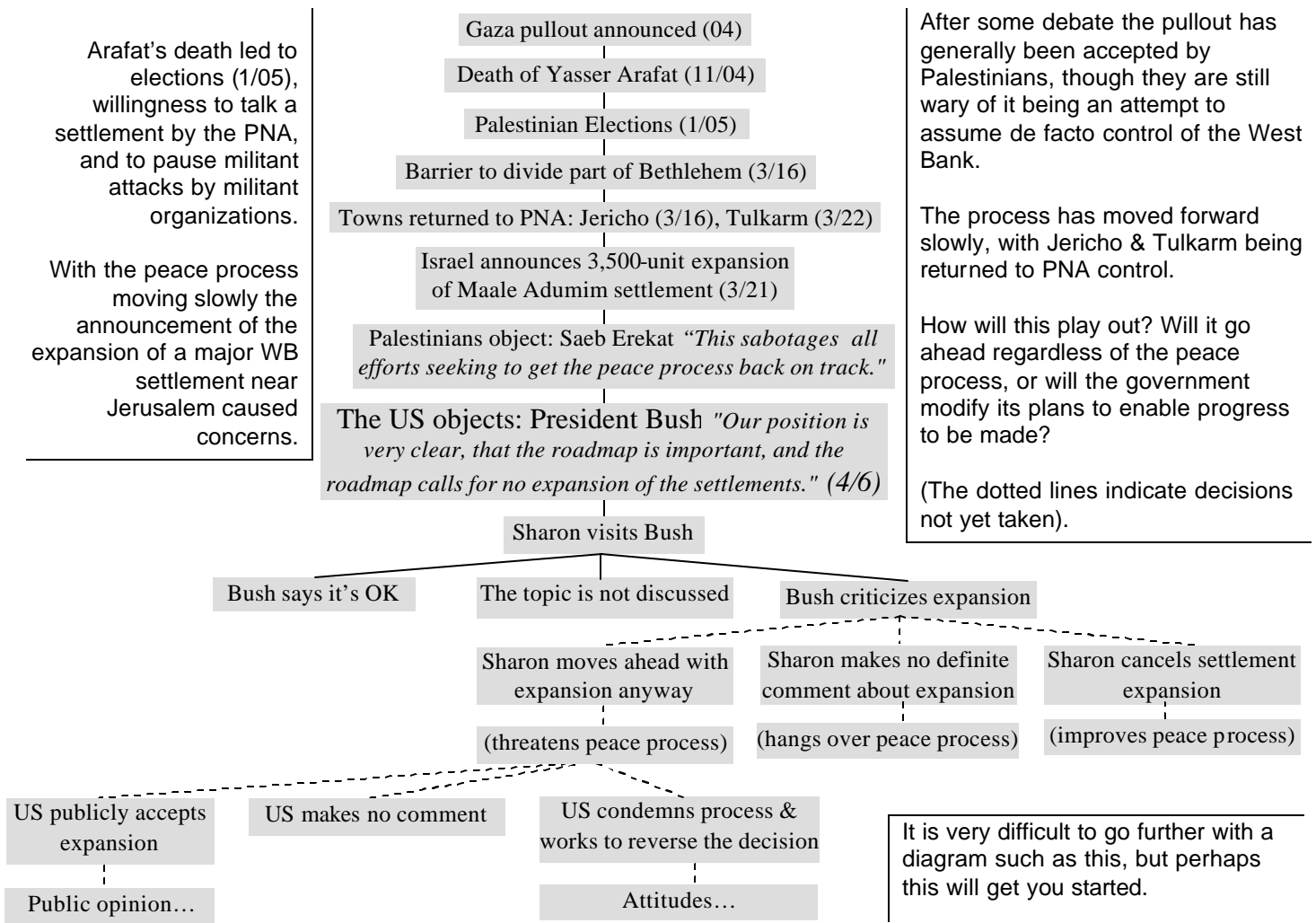
Perhaps there will be room for an update article on Lebanon next issue, though I have others in the pipeline, including one on the different ethnic/religious groupings in Nigeria.

Email your responses to [pkclark@pmbx.net](mailto:pkclark@pmbx.net) & check the web for back issues.

## Shepherd's Delight or Sailor's Warning?

Just as a red sky has different interpretations, so we can look at current events and interpret them differently. I have heard it said (who was it?) that *History doesn't repeat itself, it just rhymes*. How can we learn from this? In this diagram I illustrate how a decision tree can help in understanding the consequences of political decisions upon events. Follow the notes in the sidebars.

After serious events the reaction of both parties influences future events. In this chart I want to consider the alternative paths when such events happen.



## Islam's Sects

At times we are given the impression that Islam is a united faith, with few divisions. This is not the case, and, without going into detail at this point, the following chart can serve to illustrate the fragmentation of Islam.

### Islam (622 AD)

— **Sunni** (followers of the '*Sunna*', traditions of Islam)

— **Wahhabi** (~1745) (after Muhammad Ibn Wahhab)

— **Shi'ite** (680) ('*Partisans*' since they followed Ali)

Their belief that God is essentially good (i.e. he *cannot* do evil) distinguishes them from Sunni Muslims. They also believe that Imams, since Ali, are divinely appointed.

The twelfth Imam did not die but will return as the Mahdi. Orthodox Shia are therefore known as *Twelvers*.

— **Kharijites** (658-700)

Supporters of Ali who rebelled during the conflict with Mu'awiya in 658. They still exists as the Ibadi sect in Oman, and also in small numbers in North Africa. Their rejection of Ali's compromise in 658 remains their defining feature. It was a Khariji who murdered Ali in 661.

— **Isma'ili** (765)

The Quran has dual meanings, literal (for the masses) and esoteric (for the *chosen few*). Begun in India, it spread amongst the poor there, Yemen and North Africa. The Tunisian Fatimids who founded the Egyptian Islamic empire were Isma'ilis. Belief in living Imams is general through the Isma'ili sects.

— **Druze** (1018)

Formed out the the Egyptian Isma'ili movement, the Druze claimed that an Egyptian (Fatimid) Caliph was God, and – after he died - that he would return one day. They are a very secret faith, but accept many of the Prophets taught by Islam. Caliph Hakim was the 16<sup>th</sup> Imam of the Isma'ili.

— **Nizari Isma'ilis** (~1140)

This group supported Nizar, an alternative candidate to succeed the 18<sup>th</sup> Imam. Today, the (49<sup>th</sup>) Imam of this group is the Aga Khan.

— **Mustaali Isma'ili** (~1160)

This Bombay group separated over the Imamate succession. One sect, the *assassins* of Crusader period, are known as the *Khoja* today.

— **Zaidi** (*Fifthers*) (~800)

Followers of the successors of the fifth Imam, they are the dominant group in Yemen. A Pakistani sect (*Ithna Ashiri*) accept the Twelve Imams.

— **Saabiyyin** (*Sevensers*) (~840)

They consider the 7<sup>th</sup> Imam the final one.

— **Alawi** (~870)

Arose from a dispute over the 11<sup>th</sup> Imam. Pres. Assad of Syria is an Alawi. The Turkish province of Sanjak (handed over to Turkey by France in 1939) is largely Alawi. They are *Twelvers* but are labeled heretics for deifying Ali.

— **Ahmadiya** (1889)

Founded in Pakistan, based on the claims of the founder to be the Messiah and the Mahdi. Considered heretics by mainstream Islam.

### Sufi

Mystical branch of Islam, from early asceticism.

Contemplation, the values of the heart, and the love of God are its focus.

— **Sikhism** (founder born 1469):

Based on a syncretism of Hindu and Sufi Islam, the word Sikh means *disciple*. They follow the teachings of 10 gurus, (teachers). Punjab is primarily Sikh.

— **Baha'i** (1852):

Syncretic, recognizing the earlier faiths as predecessors, incorporating some of their prophets. From Iran's Babis movement, based on a Mahdi claimant of the late 1800s.

— **Zikri** (1500s):

From Baluchistan, they follow practices based the teachings of a 15<sup>th</sup> Century Mahdi.

— **Yezidi**: A religion based on a pre-Islamic cult, Mithraism, and the worship of a peacock-god, malak ta'us. Most Yezidis are ethnic Kurds.

## History of Islam

### The Writings

The Qur'an is the Muslim equivalent to the Bible, but it does not quite have the same role in Islam that we might expect. The Qur'an is formed from the revelations given to Muhammad, recalled by his followers after his death, and compiled by Zaid Ibn Thabit beginning in AD 633.

Besides the Qur'an, which records the *revelations* of Muhammad, Islam reveres the records of other debates and conversations in which he expressed his beliefs. These are known as the *hadith* (sayings) and are, along with the *sunnah* (actions) of Muhammad "viewed as an uninspired record of inspired words and actions." (Geisler & Saleeb, 2002, p83)

These sayings and actions are taken very literally as examples of conduct by Muslims, to the extent that "you have to sit when putting on trousers, and to stand when winding a turban, and to begin with the right foot when putting on shoes."

This imitation has contributed to ensuring that Muslim practices and traditions are consistent around the world, and that Islamic culture is remarkably, if still not entirely, homogenous.

Other sources of Islamic beliefs are found in *ijma'*, historic communal consensus over practical issues, and in *qiyas*. These last are the result of reasoning by analogy on the part of Muslim teachers and preachers, and are still a potential source of contemporary rulings. It would be presumptive to say that these 'analogies' depend upon the whims of the proponents, but nevertheless they are more subjective than the standards of logic that would often be applied in the West.

(Much of this information was obtained from: [Answering Islam](#), Geisler & Saleeb, 2002)

### Jerusalem that Jesus knew



The "Garden Tomb"

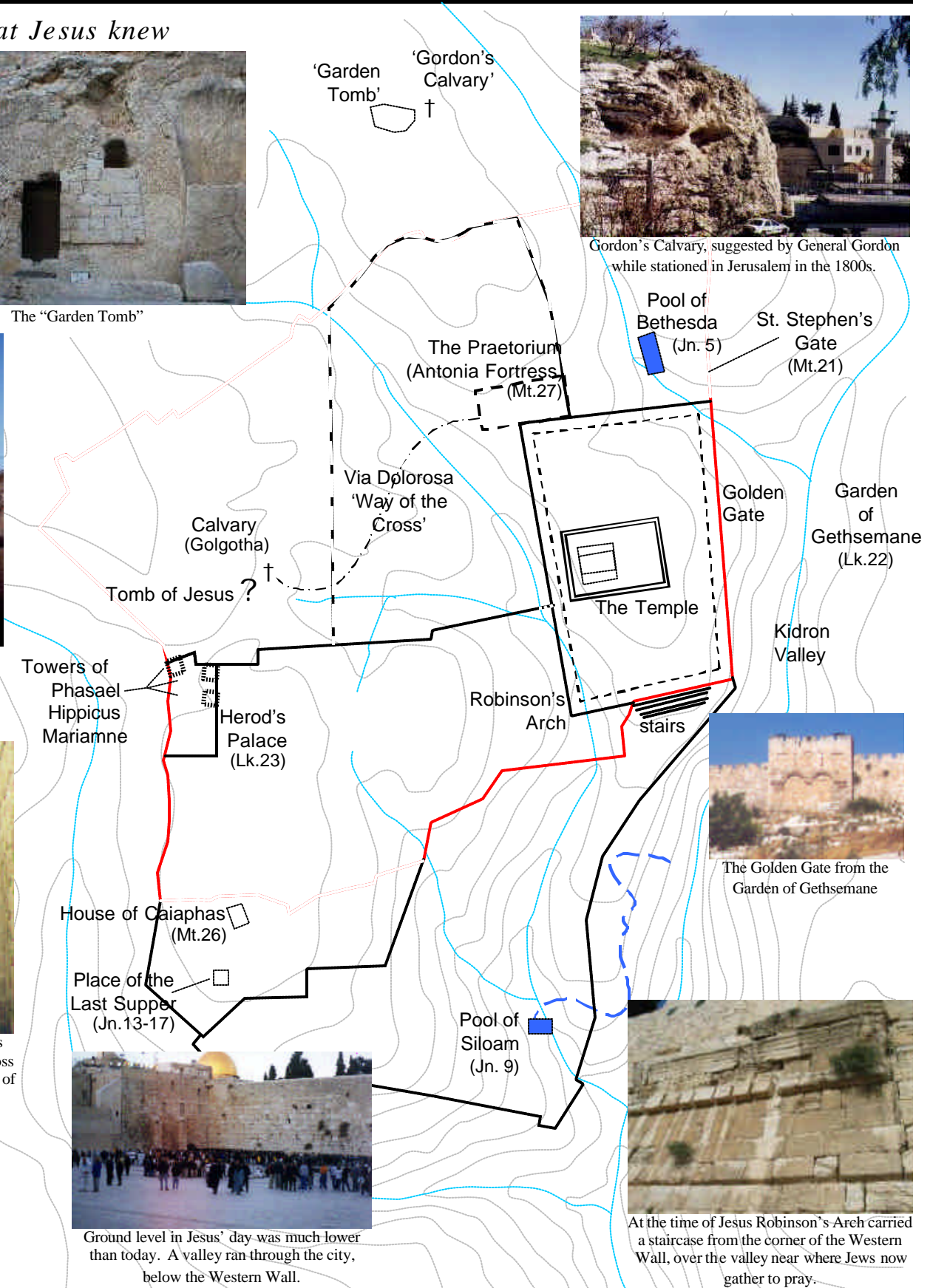
'Garden Tomb' †  
'Gordon's Calvary' †



Gordon's Calvary, suggested by General Gordon while stationed in Jerusalem in the 1800s.



The Holy Sepulchre is located over the traditional site of the crucifixion and the tomb.



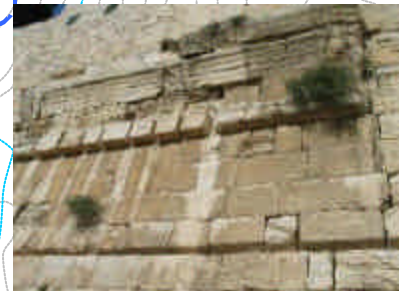
The 'Via Dolorosa' begins where Jesus' walk to the cross began, though little remains of the Praetorium..



Ground level in Jesus' day was much lower than today. A valley ran through the city, below the Western Wall.



The Golden Gate from the Garden of Gethsemane



At the time of Jesus Robinson's Arch carried a staircase from the corner of the Western Wall, over the valley near where Jews now gather to pray.

