

# Conflicts Forum

## NOTES & COMMENT

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### THE AXIS OF NOT QUITE AS EVIL

BY MARK PERRY

We might now take George Bush at his word: in the wake of the September 11 attacks, he named three nations as the "axis of evil": North Korea, Iran and Iraq. The statement had a solid tripartite ring to it, conjuring images of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan. The implication was chilling: that Axis, we might remember, damn near overran the world.

"North Korea," Bush then said, "is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens." Iran, he explained, "aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom." When it came to Iraq, Bush was oddly careful, saying it "had plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade." Had plotted.

We are now, some five years later, left with the realization that thinking about acquiring weapons of mass destruction will get you attacked (if you're Iraq), while actually having them will lead to negotiations--as is the case with North Korea. In truth, this is not an incoherent theory of deterrence: the Soviet Union had some 20,000 nuclear warheads aimed at us during the cold war and we spent our time fighting them in Nicaragua, Chile, the Congo, Vietnam--in other words, in places where our vital interests were not threatened in the slightest. In fact, we fought them on every continent in the world, except Europe, where our vital interests actually were threatened.

But we should not think Bush's words are a kind of historical conceit; we fought the Axis by first knocking off its lightweight contender, Italy. So too, we thought, we would do with Iraq. It was the "axis of evil's" Italy. More simply, as one of my colleagues has described it, the Bush administration went after Iraq because they thought it would be a pushover, "a Grenada with goats". (*contd on pages 2 & 3*)

### THE POLITICS OF POWER: IF ONLY TONY BLAIR COULD ACT LIKE ISMAIL HANIYAH ~ BY ISMAIL PATEL

"Power," as Henry Kissinger once said, is the "great aphrodisiac." Leaders worldwide (elected, unelected, self-appointed) have demonstrated the apparent truth of this statement, with British politicians at the forefront of such proofs. After nearly ten years of Tony Blair's premiership, we are witnessing the long, drawn-out exit precipitated by his announcement of his retirement and exacerbated by his reluctance to put words into practice and actually move aside. Even Blair's closest political colleagues have been unable to cajole, nudge or push him out of Number 10; power's qualities, it seems, are more alluring than acting for the good of the nation.

In our brand of democracy winning is above policies, politics and personalities and there are few politicians in recent history who have given up their mandate for the sake of the people. Whereas in past generations, politicians who erred could usually be relied upon to "do the right thing" and fall on their political sword. But today's democrats have skins thicker than a rhinoceros hide and have to be forced out by media pressure. If they can ride the storm, they will, clinging to the vestiges of power at all costs, despite the fact that the lofty principles of democracy mean that it is there to serve the people. Put simply, it has become the vehicle for power-mad politicians to gain control. As Orwell's O'Brien said, in 1984: "We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power."

Thus it is that when an alternative democratic vision appears, we not only fail to recognise it, but work quickly to destroy it. The current government of Palestine is a case in point. In February of this past year a people under military occupation and subjugation carried out one of the most transparent and fair elections ever witnessed in any part of the world and one unrecognisable to the voters of Birmingham or Florida, where electoral shenanigans – if not outright fraud – were witnessed.

The Palestinians were rewarded with economic sanctions and the US and its erstwhile European allies then gave more aid to the occupiers. Their purpose was and has been to destroy the nascent democracy's already severely damaged social and physical infrastructure. Blair and his cohorts have allowed Israel to arrest dozens of democratically elected representatives of the Palestinians, thereby further undermining this nascent democracy. (*contd on pg 2*)


**THE POLITICS OF POWER** (continued from page 1)

The blockade has had serious effects which are – according to the Western script – supposed to be consigned to history by the democratic process: malnutrition among Palestinian children, hospitals unable to treat those patients who can get past Israeli checkpoints, teachers without resources, and the building of a wall to keep out those hardy souls who might protest such treatment.

As the world powers see fit to remain deaf to the cries of the victims of this aggression, one man has spoken out in such a way that is unrecognisable to our leaders whose humanity is corrupted by power. Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah, the man elected in those scrupulously free and fair elections, has stood proud and dignified. Alone after Friday prayers one day in November, he said what no democratic leader of recent times has said: "If the choice is either lifting the siege or Haniyah, I choose the lifting of the siege."



Ismail Haniyah

And thus, in one simple sentence, Ismail Haniyah handed back the aphrodisiac which Blair has been clinging on to against his own party's wishes for over two years. No wonder the Western-backed "peace process" has struggled to bring its version of democracy to Palestine; Western leaders can neither match nor relate to Haniyah's stature as a politician and a human being. Tony Blair should take a lesson from democracy Palestinian style and do us all a favour. If the choice is between Blair and democracy then it is time for Tony Blair to make the choice that he alone would reject. *Ismail Patel is a member of Conflicts Forum Advisory Board* 

**THE AXIS OF NOT QUITE AS EVIL** (continued from page 1)

Such glibness is well-placed, for it shows that among the gibberish being uttered by Bush's most important policymakers, there is a sense that perhaps America is not the all-powerful hegemon its class of neo-conservatives would have us believe. At the beginning of the movie "Patton"--a classic, played nearly every night on some television somewhere in America--the great and strutting General faces his troops.

"Men," he says, "this stuff we hear about America wanting to stay out of the war--not wanting to fight--is a lot of bullshit. Americans love to fight--traditionally. All real Americans love the sting and clash of battle."

No we don't. At the height of World War II, when we and our allies were bumping up against the German army, the American army had the highest desertion rate of any fighting force in the European theater. Dwight Eisenhower was enraged; there were tens of thousands of men wandering around behind the lines, "separated from their units". (British commanders, by the way, often referred to the Americans as ... "our Italians".)

That is to say: we didn't invade Iraq because we thought they had weapons of mass destruction. We invaded Iraq because we knew they didn't. By this through-the-looking-glass logic, the only nations and movements worth attacking are those that are the least capable of hitting back. That sounds glib, but it is supported by the facts. During his recent address before the United Nations Security Council, Bush laid out a new axis of evil-- Hamas and Hezbollah (this is, it seems, the "axis of not quite as evil, but still evil"). Hamas and Hezbollah were each mentioned three times. Al-Qaeda, the movement that attacked the World Trade Center and killed thousands of Americans was mentioned once. Once. North Korea was never mentioned.

America has a great military man, but his name is not George Patton. His name is Fox Conner. He was a Brigadier General and war theorist earlier in the last century, and was responsible for tutoring some of our greatest military leaders--like George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower. His view was that dictators would always fight better, because they ruled by fear. Democracies do not have that, ah, luxury. So, he said, democracies must follow three rules when it comes to fighting a war: never fight unless attacked, never fight alone, and never fight for long.

The Bush Administration has got it exactly backwards--we attacked a country that didn't attack us, we did it virtually by ourselves, and we have now fought longer in Iraq than we did against Germany and Japan. So too, we have abrogated the most fundamental principles of diplomacy. We insist on negotiating with others (when both Iran and North Korea want bilateral talks), we insist on making demands we cannot hope to enforce, and we believe that the negotiations should be short, when everyone knows that constant negotiations mean constant peace. (continued on page 3)

### THE WHITE MAN'S CLUB ~ BY ALASTAIR CROOKE

He stepped in from the harsh sunlight of Egypt. He had just crossed the Sinai with two Arab friends, one of whom had died during the journey. The news that he and his friend brought was of huge import. This slight figure, still dusty and grimed from travel by camel, stepped from the Cairo hubbub into the cool starched interior with his companion and strode across to the bar for water. The interior with its comfortable leather chairs, white linen and discreet servants breathed the comfort and certainty of upper class England. The barman gave a disdainful glance at the pair: "What is he doing in here?" he demanded to know, glaring at the Arab.

Lawrence had come to the officers' mess at the British military headquarters in Cairo to tell General Allenby that the Arab army had done what no one believed was possible--the army had crossed the Nefu desert to take the Turkish army by surprise--Turkish guns faced only outward toward the sea. He had taken Aqaba! This mattered little however in the Officers' mess in Cairo: Lawrence had actually brought his Arab companion to the bar to demand water! Another club, the International Quartet, reacted with similar disdain and indignation to the news that--against an entrenched power structure--an unexpected figure had walked in on their officers' mess: Hamas had won the Palestinian elections that the Quartet had prescribed as part of its roadmap. An Islamist movement was seeking western recognition of their popular mandate! Like most clubs, the Quartet sets its rules--post hoc if necessary--to keep out those who do not quite "fit in" to its ethos. Hamas would need to comply with three hurriedly agreed-upon conditions if any club member were to speak to the new candidate.

At its meeting in New York in September of this year, however, it became clear that even if the new candidate did comply with the three new club rules and abandon its mandate to more "respectable" albeit unelected persons to govern in its place, this still would not allow the new sanitized government to "step in". An EU member who participated at the Quartet said that if a sanitized arrangement were to be formed under the guise of national unity, and club rules were appropriately "reflected" by the incoming government, "stepping in" was still not assured: the club membership committee (aka the Quartet) would first need to scrutinize the suitability of each member of the government--to ensure, presumably, that each new minister fitted with the club ethos.

Additionally, the club wanted assurances that the new government knows how to behave: Ministers are not required to wear ties, but their policy guidelines would be vetted. Only if these additional scrutinies were positive would the Quartet consider whether to talk to the new candidate. The Quartet saw the language drafted in New York this September as a big step forward: In their view it was intended to be both helpful and positive. Club candidates who wish to be addressed by members need now only "reflect" the three new rules. But the reality is that whereas there were three rules, now there are five. In addition to recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and required re-commitment to all past agreements (whether or not they represent flawed and failed instruments), candidates also needed the extra two conditions of being validated for allocation of portfolio and policy guidelines.

The metaphor of an officers' club may seem a harsh parallel to draw in respect to the Quartet for some, but it reflects two aspects of the Quartet's current posture that are important to draw out. The first--and this has been a persistent trait--has been its disconnect from reality with its smug officers' mess ethos; and the second has been its failure to do politics or as Senator George Mitchell used to say, to do the "choreography": That is, it is easy to post new rules and make declarations, it is much harder to do the hard shuttle diplomatic work of patching together the moves and accompanying statements which is how political progress in reality is achieved.

Doing this work does of course require talking. And of course Quartet members have determined they cannot talk to those with whom it is necessary to resolve the present impasse. On the basis of the Quartet's reluctance either to do choreography or to reflect reality, it is likely that candidate Hamas will not be addressed in discussion by members. Like Lawrence's Arab companion, Hamas is unlikely to be welcomed. *(continued on page 4)*

### THE AXIS OF NOT QUITE AS EVIL *(continued from page 2)*

Don't think that any of this has been lost on either the North Koreans or Iran. The North Korean leadership knows we're not going to hit them--why, Americans might actually die by the tens of thousands. It's much easier for us to hit Hamas, to ship weapons into the West Bank and Gaza in the hopes of fomenting a civil war. That suits us. So the North Koreans are safe. And the Iranians are moving as fast as they can to make sure they will be too.

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**THE WHITE MAN'S CLUB** *(continued from page 3)*

Quartet members, however, might care to reflect on the future. That earlier officers' club, which was also so remote in its cool white linen Britishness and that also did not think Muslims should play a part in deliberations about the future of Muslim societies, was swept aside by the flow of events: The bar at which Lawrence's Arab companion was refused water after his journey from Aqaba in 1916 gave place to a swank hotel. That hotel, which became a refuge for European elites visiting the city, has now also been swept away. If the Quartet persists in its present vein it should not be surprised if before long voices are heard asking why Muslims are not a part of this "white man's club" that decides on the legitimacy of election outcomes and the future of their society. And the answer to the question, "what is he doing here," will be obvious: they happen to live here.


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**CONFLICTS FORUM UPDATE:**

**WE WELCOME TWO NEW MEMBERS TO OUR ADVISORY BOARD, AISLING BYRNE AND PAUL WOODWARD.**

**CF NOW HAS A NEW WEBSITE ADDRESS –**

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### CONFLICTS FORUM BOARD OF ADVISORS

**LORD ALDERDICE** Key negotiator of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement; Lord Alderdice was appointed as one of the four International Monitors to the Good Friday Agreement by the British Government in 2004.

**GEOFFREY ARONSON** Executive Director of the Washington, D.C.-based Foundation for Middle East Peace; He is a widely published authority on the region and is the foremost authority on the settlements issue in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**MILT BEARDEN** Former CIA Chief in Pakistan and Former Chief of the CIA's Soviet/East European Division; Recipient of the Donovan Award and the Distinguished Intelligence Medal.

**AISLING BYRNE** Worked in community development with refugee communities, and more recently as a social and organisational development consultant. Ms. Byrne has also been involved as an activist and campaigner on the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and on legal campaigns for Palestinian political prisoners.

**RUPERT CHETWYND** Senior Advisor to CF; Author and activist, has worked to build humanitarian programmes in the region after a career as a businessman.

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**DR. AZZAM TAMIMI** Director of the Institute of Islamic Political Thought (IIPT), London; Former Director of the Islamic Movement Parliamentary Office, Amman, Jordan.

**PAUL WOODWARD** Creator and editor of the web site, [The War in Context](http://TheWarinContext.com); formerly a software knowledge architect, web editor, designer and Buddhist monk: currently Managing Editor for Conflicts Forum. 