

Graffiti for intellectuals



Simon Says



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By Si Frumkin

HISTORICAL MYSTERIES

There is much that is amazing about science. Scientists can take a mummified body of an Egyptian king who died 3000 years ago and determine that death was caused by a fall from a horse during a hunt and that the deceased had bad toothaches from an abscessed molar at the age of 12.

In a more recent case scientists have uncovered a mass grave dating back to the Mayan kingdom in Guatemala 1200 years ago and were able to determine from the de-



Arafat smiling on the way to hospital and a mysterious but permanent death

cayed bones that one of the bodies was that of a king - his name was listed - who was murdered by a blow from a blunt instrument in a massacre that followed an uprising. The website about this excavation adds that a detailed chronological list of 152 more Mayan kings, and their lives and deaths, is available from Amazon.

All this is remarkable but I wouldn't call it amazing - I have come to expect this and more from science. No, what is truly amazing is that a year has gone by since the death of the mass murderer and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Yasser Arafat, and we still don't know what he died of!

It took almost ten months for the French hospital to release a report that was headlined by the Associated Press release as "Cause of Arafat's death inconclusive". The medical report lists a number of causes it considers to be highly unlikely, including poison or AIDS, but goes on to say that his blood was not tested for the HIV virus and gives no reason for this omission. It is definite about one incontrovertible point only: Arafat died of a stroke and is to be considered to be officially dead for the foreseeable future.

As far as what led to the stroke, well, "a

discussion among a large number of medical experts...shows that it is impossible to pinpoint a cause that will explain the combination of symptoms that led to the death of the patient." Huh? Like I said, it's amazing!

So now we have rumors based on rumors. The most persistent rumor among more or less sane people is that Arafat died of AIDS. There is quite a bit to substantiate it - a report from a former Rumanian intelligence officer who hosted Arafat in Bucharest and taped his sexual encounters with several male lovers, his alleged liaisons with children and a statement by Arafat's personal physician saying that he knows that French doctors found the AIDS virus in Arafat's blood.

The physician, Ashraf al-Kurdi, then ex-



Tutankhamen—A tooth ache?

plains that the virus was given to Arafat by Israelis who used it to disguise poisoning. The doctor is far from alone - an overwhelming 73% of Palestinians believe that Arafat was poisoned by Israel just as the overwhelming majority of Arabs - and 43% of Frenchmen - believe that 9/11 was an Israeli/U.S. plot, that Jews didn't come to work at the Twin Towers on 9/11, that the crash of an Egyptian airliner several years ago was not caused by a suicidal pilot but by Israeli intelligence and that the Indonesian tsunami was caused by CIA's undersea explosions. (It is this that prompted me to differentiate between the "more or less sane" and the rest).

There are many rumors. Gautier's dis-

ease is a genetic affliction that affects Eastern European - Ashkenazi - Jews and their descendants, and a few small isolated communities in Northern Europe. At a recent meeting on Gautier's a speaker told of Gautier's also found within isolated Sephardic Jewish communities, one of them being Jews from Hebron! Could it be that the post-mortem diagnosed Gautier's and the diagnosis was hushed up because is a Jewish disease and, therefore, Arafat would be posthumously exposed as a Jew?

And so, we don't know why a man died in a Paris hospital on November 11, 2004. I am sure that when and if his body is recovered and investigated by future scientists a few centuries from now we will know more, just as we know about the pharaohs and the Mayan kings. But by then, who will really care?

And, by the way, here is another amazing mystery. The estimates of Arafat's fortune that he either did or did not leave with his wife Suha and which was or was not recovered by his cronies/ friends/enemies/rivals are anywhere between 2 and 8 billion U.S. dollars. Not exactly something that is found



**Hillary Clinton and Suha Arafat
\$6-7 billion?**

by looking under the mattress of Suha's bed. So where is it? And why doesn't anyone ask?

Amazing!

WORLD WAR IV—Looking back at the conflict with Teheran

By Niall Ferguson, professor of History at Harvard, Senior Research Fellow at Oxford and Stanford's Hoover Institution

ARE WE living through the origins of the next world war? Certainly, it is easy to imagine how a future historian might deal with the next phase of events in the Middle East:

WITH every passing year after the turn of the century, the instability of the Gulf region grew. By the beginning of 2006, nearly all the combustible ingredients for a conflict - far bigger in its scale and scope than the wars of 1991 or 2003 - were in place.

The first underlying cause of the war was the increase in the region's relative importance as a source of petroleum. On the one hand, the rest of the world's oil reserves were being rapidly exhausted. On the other, the breakneck growth of the Asian economies had caused a huge surge in global demand for energy. It is hard to believe today, but for most of the 1990s the price of oil had averaged less than \$20 a barrel. A second precondition of war was demographic. While European fertility had fallen below the natural replacement rate in the '70s, the decline in the Islamic world had been much slower. By the late '90s the fertility rate in the eight Muslim countries to the south and east of the European Union was 2.5 times higher than the European figure.

This tendency was especially pronounced in Iran, where the social conservatism of the 1979 revolution combined with the high mortality of the Iran-Iraq war and the subsequent baby boom to produce, by the first decade of the new century, a quite extraordinary surplus of young men. More than two-fifths of the population of Iran in 1995 had been aged 14 or younger. This was the generation that was ready to fight in 2007.

This not only gave Islamic societies a youthful energy that contrasted markedly with the slothful senescence of Europe. It also signified a profound shift in the balance of world population. In 1950, there were three times as many people in Britain as in Iran. By 1995, the population of Iran had overtaken that of Britain and was forecast to be 50 per cent higher by 2050. Yet people in the West struggled to grasp the implications of this shift. Subliminally, they still thought of the Middle East as a region they could lord it over, as they had in the mid-20th century.

The third and perhaps most important precondition for war was cultural. Since 1979, not just Iran but the greater part of the Muslim world had been swept by a wave of religious fervor, the very opposite of the process of secularization that was emptying Europe's churches.

Although few countries followed Iran down the road to full-blown theocracy, there was a transformation in politics everywhere. From Morocco to Pakistan, the feudal dynasties or military strongmen who had dominated Islamic politics since the '50s came under intense pressure from religious radicals.

The ideological cocktail that produced Islamism was as potent as either of the extreme ideologies the West had produced in the previous century, communism and fascism. Islamism was anti-Western, anti-capitalist and anti-Semitic. A seminal moment was the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's intemperate attack on Israel in December 2005, when he called the Holocaust a myth. The state of Israel was a "disgraceful blot", he had previously declared, to be "wiped off the map".

Before 2007, the Islamists had seen no alternative but to wage war against their enemies by means of terrorism. From Gaza to Manhattan, the hero of 2001 was the suicide bomber. Yet Ahmadinejad, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, craved a more serious weapon than strapped-on explosives. His decision to accelerate Iran's nuclear weapons program was intended to give Iran the kind of power North Korea already wielded in East Asia: the power to defy the US; the power to obliterate America's closest regional ally.

Under different circumstances, it would not have been difficult to thwart Ahmadinejad's ambitions. The Israelis had shown themselves capable of pre-emptive air strikes against Iraq's nuclear facilities in 1981. Similar strikes against Iran's were urged on President George W. Bush by neo-conservative commentators throughout 2006. The US, they argued, was perfectly placed to carry out such strikes. It had the bases in neighbouring Iraq and Afghanistan. It had the intelligence proving Iran's contravention of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But the President was advised by his Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, to opt instead for diplomacy. Not just European opinion but American opinion was strongly opposed to an attack on Iran. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 had been discredited by the failure to find the weapons of mass destruction Saddam Hussein had supposedly possessed and by the failure of the US-led coalition to quell a bloody insur-

gency. Americans did not want to increase their military commitments overseas; they wanted to reduce them. Europeans did not want to hear that Iran was about to build its own WMD. Even if Ahmadinejad had broadcast a nuclear test live on CNN, liberals would have said it was a CIA con-trick.

So history repeated itself. As in the 1930s, an anti-Semitic demagogue broke his country's treaty obligations and armed for war. Having first tried appeasement, offering the Iranians economic incentives to desist, the West appealed to international agencies: the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN's Security Council. Thanks to China's veto, however, the UN produced virtually nothing.

Only one man might have stiffened Bush's resolve in the crisis: not British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had wrecked his domestic credibility over Iraq and was in any case on the point of retirement, but Israel's Ariel Sharon. Yet he had been struck down by a stroke as the Iranian crisis came to a head. With Israel leaderless, Ahmadinejad had a free hand.

As in the '30s, too, the West fell back on wishful thinking. Perhaps, some said, Ahmadinejad was only sabre-rattling because his domestic position was so weak. Perhaps his political rivals in the Iranian clergy were on the point of getting rid of him. In that case, the last thing the West should do was to take a tough line; that would only bolster Ahmadinejad by inflaming Iranian popular feeling. So in Washington and in London people crossed their fingers, hoping for the *deus ex machina* of a home-grown regime change in Tehran.

This gave the Iranians all the time they needed to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium at Natanz. The dream of nuclear non-proliferation, already interrupted by Israel, Pakistan and India, was definitively shattered. Now Tehran had a nuclear missile pointed at Tel Aviv. And the new Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu had a missile pointed right back at Tehran.

The optimists argued that the Cuban Missile Crisis would replay itself in the Middle East. Both sides would threaten war, and then both sides would blink. That was Rice's hope - indeed, her prayer - as she shuttled between the capitals. But it was not to be.

Please see "WAR" Page 3

MIAs—missing political will

David I. Forman, *J'lem Post*, Dec. 16—22, 2005

ZACHARY BAUMEL, ZVI FELDMAN AND YEHUDA KATZ ARE STILL MISSING; AND NO ONE SEEMS TO GIVE A DAMN.

Oh yes, their families, friends and the International Coalition for Israeli Missing Soldiers care deeply. But, those who should also care our government officials - seem to have removed the case of our MIAs from their radar screen. For them, it is as if they never existed.

Ron Arad's name does crop up now and then, but quickly fades from sight. As for Guy Hever - Guy who? As of this writing, Baumel, Feldman and Katz have been missing for 8,580 days, Ron Arad for 6,992 days, and Guy Hever for 3,034 days.

But, who's counting? How is it that Defense

Minister Shaul Mofaz, IDF chief of Gen-

eral Staff Dan Halutz and Ariel Sharon, all military leaders, have somehow not embraced the IDF's code of ethical arms: "Do not abandon a comrade on the battlefield"?

While no one in Israel mourns the loss of Vasser Arafat, he may, ironically, have held the key regarding the fate of Zachary Baumel.

Arafat found Zachary's army dog tag when he searched the remains of Ahmed Jibril's belongings after he was assassinated. He promised Yitzhak Rabin he would verify what happened to Baumel through his operatives in Syria. He never did. It seems as if the present government has just assumed that the matter of the MIAs was buried with Arafat.

THERE IS something that does not register with me. Israel's intelligence services are considered the best in the world. Their foreign counterparts stand in awe of Israel's capability to not only identify potential terrorists, but to often target them with pinpoint accuracy.

In 1981, Israel located Iraq's nuclear reactor and obliterated it. After the Munich

massacre, in the 1970s, Israel sent undercover agents to Europe who, one by one, killed the Arab terrorists involved. Israel flew thousands of miles to Entebbe, Uganda, to rescue 200 Israelis who were facing certain death at the hands of terrorists. Adolf Eichman was captured in Argentina, nuclear spy Mordechai Vanunu in Italy.

To successfully execute such daring feats requires an extremely sophisticated intelligence operation. So why do we know nothing of the whereabouts of the MIAs? If it is not a failure of intelligence capability, then it must be a failure of political will.

The last serious talk about the MIAs was a little less than two years ago when the prisoner exchange took place with Hizbullah. In return for 400 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners, including Hizbullah leaders Abdel Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani, Israel received the bodies of Benny Avraham, Adi Avitan and Omar Suwayed, all kidnapped and murdered by Hizbullah and Elhanan Tanenbaum, a reserve officer in the artillery corps, who was involved in some sort of shady business dealings.

At a national ceremony for Avraham, Avitan and Suwayed, our prime minister, Ariel Sharon, said: "The decision to bring the boys home for burial was a Jewish decision." He added his personal commitment to bring home all other Israelis missing in action.

Since his boast, Sharon has been missing in his actions to fulfill this promise; otherwise,

how does one explain returning the recently held bodies of Hizbullah fighters instead of using them as bargaining chips to gain some information about the MIAs?

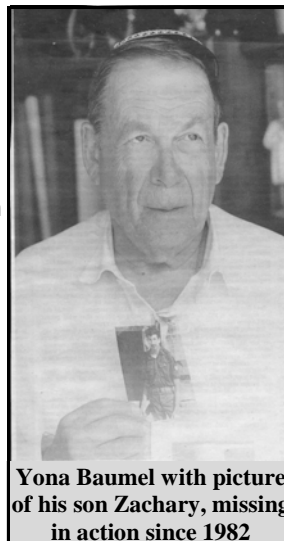
A failure of political will to deal with such a crucial issue as the MIAs is a manifestation of one's moral commitment. Every political decision has its moral equivalent. Therefore, the government's lack of political will to pursue the matter of our MIAs is a reflection of moral laxity.

Going into battle for one's country is the ultimate expression of one's dedication to his people and nation. A soldier should, at the least, expect his government to stand by him and his family. If this is not the case, citizens may not so readily be willing to endanger their lives for the state in the future, knowing that they may be left on the field of battle to fend for themselves.

And yet, it is too easy to hold our government exclusively responsible for this moral lapse. After all, our political leaders express the will of the people. Therefore, it is not only a matter of moral integrity, but of moral responsibility to pressure our elected representatives to pursue the matter of the MIAs with intensity and steadfastness.

There can be nothing more painful than the loss of a child. But, even in the death of a child, there is some comfort in mourning that loss - a sense of closure. Not being able to mourn one's child because he is missing in action wreaks the most devastating emotional turmoil imaginable.

Our tradition acknowledges this painful



Yona Baumel with picture of his son Zachary, missing in action since 1982

"WAR" from page 2

The devastating nuclear exchange of August 2007 represented not only the failure of diplomacy, it marked the end of the oil age. Some even said it marked the twilight of the West. Certainly, that was one way of interpreting the subsequent spread of the conflict as Iraq's Shia population overran the remaining US bases in their country and the Chinese threatened to intervene on the side of Iran.

Yet the historian is bound to ask whether or not the true significance of the 2007-11 war was to vindicate the Bush administration's original principle of pre-emption. For, if that had been adhered to in 2006, Iran's nuclear bid might have been thwarted at minimal cost. And the Great Gulf War might never have happened. ☐

Political decisions have moral equivalents. The government's lack of political will to pursue the matter of our MIAs is a reflection of moral laxity.

reality. "The sword is worse than death, famine is worse than the sword, but captivity is the worst of all," says the Talmud. If, in our prime minister's words, bringing back the MIAs is a "Jewish decision," then putting the MIAs back on the national agenda is a Jewish moral imperative. ✧

The writer is the author of Jewish Schizophrenia in the Land of Israel.



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They're Rounding the First Turn! And the Favorite Is . . .

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF, New York Times, 1/16/2006

The great race of the 21st century is under way between China and India to see which will be the leading power in the world in the year 2100.

President Bush's trip to India next month is important, for we in America must brace ourselves to see not only China looming in our rear-view mirror, but eventually India as well. India was the world's great disappointment of the 20th century, but now it's moving jerkily forward with economic reforms, reminding me of China around 1990.

One of India's (and China's) greatest strengths is its hunger for education. Most American newspapers lure readers with comics, and some British tabloids with photos of topless women, but a Calcutta daily newspaper is so shameless that it publishes a column on math equations. Imagine titillating readers with trigonometry!

I visited the ramshackle Hasi Khusi Kindergarten and Primary School in a poor area of Calcutta, where most of the pupils' parents are illiterate street vendors, rickshaw drivers or laborers. Out of an average family income of \$23 a month, the parents pay a one-time fee of \$13 for registration and then \$2.30 a month.

"What they didn't get, their children must get," explained the principal, Sampa Sarkar. Even kindergartners study English, Bengali, math, art and music - and do 30 minutes of homework. Private schools like this one are booming all across the country.

With India's ever-deepening pool of English speakers, its outsourcing boom will continue. Your next employment contract may be prepared by an Indian law firm, your mutual fund advised by Indian analysts - and if you need elective surgery, you may get it at a luxurious Indian hospital that will let foreigners combine their medical care with a recuperative vacation in Agra or Goa.

India has a solid financial system, while

China's banking system is a catastrophe. And India is in better shape demographically for long-term growth: China has already reaped most of the economic benefits of population control and is now rapidly aging, but India's population will be disproportionately working-age for many decades to come (a factor that strongly correlates with economic growth).

India's democracy, free press and civil society also provide a measure of political stability. Sure, India can erupt, as it did with the slaughter of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. But the risks of social and political explosions in India are declining, while in China they may be rising.



China will probably manage its eventual transition to democracy with bearable turbulence, as Taiwan and South Korea did, but with China anything is conceivable, including a coup d'état, mass unrest or even civil war.

Yet if democracy is one of India's strengths, it's also a weakness. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh knows exactly what to do, and I've rarely met a leader more competent (or less charismatic). But his reforms are stalled or slowed in the Indian political labyrinth. India's basic problem is that its economic policy-making isn't nearly as shrewd, pro-growth or farsighted as China's.

That's a tragedy: we should all want In-

dia to demonstrate that democracy is an advantage. But Indian lawmakers aren't helping.

Foreigners are still blocked from directly investing in some sectors in India, like retailing. Privatization is lethargic. Food subsidies are soaring and are so inefficient that it costs 6.6 rupees to transfer 1 rupee's worth of food to the poor. Restrictive labor laws mean that companies hesitate to hire, and regulations tend to suffocate entrepreneurship.

The upshot is that India has enjoyed a boom that has added few jobs. Only about one million people work in technology, and manufacturing, which could absorb tens of millions of poor rural laborers, trails even Bangladesh. The losers are India's poor.

And while China has been exceptionally shrewd in upgrading its infrastructure, India has been pathetic. India's economic future is marred by its third-rate roads and ports.

India is also horrendously mismanaging its AIDS crisis; it may already have more H.I.V. cases than any country in the world. AIDS casts a cloud over this nation's entire future.

The bottom line is that the once-great nation of India is reawakening from several centuries of torpor, and facing less risk of a political cataclysm than China. India is poised to again be a great world power.

But over all, my bet is that China will still grow faster and win the race of the century. I'm going to tell my kids to keep studying Chinese, rather than switch to Hindi. Ø