

Israel's possible participation in the Abu Ghraib prison fiasco is, not surprisingly, being ignored by Congress and the press.

Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba's report on prison abuses mentions the presence of a number of "third country nationals" operating freely within the prison. The nationals in question are believed to be Israelis, who were "assisting" in the interrogations. Abu Ghraib aside, a number of observers have noted the similarity between the well-established Israeli policies of control on the West Bank and evolving American pacification policies in Iraq. House demolitions, isolation of neighborhoods and villages, mass arrests, and interrogation employing torture have become hallmarks of both occupations. Israeli experts have also advised Special Operations troops at Ft. Bragg on the best way to carry out urban warfare against an irregular opponent, to include the establishment of assassination squads. It is believed that some of the assassination teams have been operating inside the Syrian border in an attempt to interdict small groups of terrorists moving into Iraq. Israeli advisers have also appeared at Coalition Headquarters in Baghdad, and Israeli companies have obtained contracts relating to the security aspects of Iraqi reconstruction. CACI International Inc., which has been implicated in the Abu Ghraib prison malfeasance, has close ties to the Israeli security industry. Its president, Jack London, was in Israel in January and received an award for CACI's achievements in "national security." There is speculation that one of CACI's employees, John Israel, described as a translator, might in fact be an Israeli citizen working under a highly improbable alias.



For centuries after his death, the name of Hannibal was used as the bogeyman to encourage Roman toddlers to sleep. In a similar fashion, Americans are being urged to vote Republican to ward off the terrorist bogeyman, with Osama bin Laden as a latter-day Hannibal. But despite publicly expressed reports of "credible threats" against the United States, there is no reliable intelligence that suggests any al-Qaeda plan to conduct terrorist operations over the next several months. Internet chatter reveals that al-Qaeda wants to carry out some violent actions in the U.S., particularly during the Democratic and Republican conventions in Boston and New York this summer, but the resources to do so may be lacking. The alerts disseminated by the FBI to field offices and local law enforcement have been based on speculative information, including one notice that suggested an impending truck-bomb attack and another warning about suicide bombers on trains. An FBI source commented that a low threshold for threat information means that questionable material is now being routinely disseminated. One source speculates that the terrorist threat is likely being hyped to help the president's electoral prospects in the wake of sinking opinion polls. Europe may well be the terrorist target of choice for this summer, with the Athens Olympics, while several "Coalition of the Willing" members waver in their support of the Iraqi occupation. Al-Qaeda has more options in Europe, including the employment of increasing numbers of volunteers drawn from the large unassimilated and increasingly radicalized Muslim populations in France, Britain, Germany, Italy, and Spain. ■

nuclear triad and also the ability to strike many land targets around the globe, including much of Iran, from stations in the Arabian Sea or Gulf of Oman.

Israel's new Ofeq-3 military recon satellites allow it to look down on the central Mideast and parts of west Asia, spot hostile missile launches, and target air and missile strikes. These capabilities, and Israel's unique access to real-time U.S. satellite data, give it an enormous advantage in the confrontation with Iran which, lacking any strategic reconnaissance capability, is blind beyond its borders.

Given all these ominous portents, chances are growing that either Israel, the United States, or the two in concert, may attack Iran's nuclear facilities unless Iran can convince skeptical American (not UN) inspectors that it has truly eschewed weapons production. And Israel is putting maximum pressure on the Bush administration to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Iranians are clever people and will probably do everything possible to appear to come clean while secretly continuing their weapons program. They understand that if Iraq had had a few nuclear weapons, it would probably not have been invaded. North Korea's small nuclear arsenal has allowed Pyongyang to stare down the Bush administration.

Who came down from Mt. Sinai and said that Israel, India, and Pakistan may possess nuclear weapons but not Iran? After losing 500,000 men in a war with Iraq that was backed by the U.S. and Britain, Iran feels it has every right to the ultimate self-defense. So the race is on, a deadly game of nuclear hide-and-seek that could easily blow up into a nasty crisis for all concerned. ■

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[new world order]

The Perils of Hegemony

Washington learns that democracy is not made for export.

By Owen Harries

A DISTINGUISHED ANALYST of international politics, Martin Wight, once laid it down as a fundamental truth of international politics that “Great Power status is lost, as it is won, by violence. A Great Power does not die in its bed.” But 12 years ago, the Soviet Union, a state not exactly averse to violence, confounded all expectations by doing just that. It sickened and quietly expired, without war or bloodshed.

When the communist superpower ceased to exist, it did more than bring the Cold War to an end. It also altered fundamentally the structure of the international political system. For the first time in its history, that system became unipolar. The United States became a global hegemon. While there have often been local or regional hegemonies—the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe, for example, or the United States in the Caribbean, and later in the Atlantic Alliance—there has never before been one that dominated the whole system.

How fundamental a change this is indicated by the fact that one of the main themes in the history of the state system has been the repeated and determined efforts of alliances of states to prevent any of their number from achieving systemic hegemony, even at the cost of long and bloody wars. Phillip II of Spain in the 16th century, Louis XIV in the 17th and early 18th centuries,

Napoleon at the beginning of the 19th century, the Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany and Hitler in the 20th century each tried for domination; all were eventually thwarted. And millions were killed in the process.

Britain played a prominent part in forming coalitions to balance and oppose the would-be dominant power, changing its allies as the challengers changed. Then, in the 19th century, Britain itself became very powerful. It dominated the world industrially, commercially, and financially. Its navy ruled the seas. It had a vast empire and established a Pax Britannica in large areas of the world. All this has led some to claim that in the middle of the 19th century Britain had indeed achieved global hegemony. But it is not a convincing claim. For Britain never achieved or sought to achieve dominance in continental Europe, which was the heart of the state system, where things were finally decided. It never acquired the formidable land army that would have been necessary to exert such dominance. Indeed the German chancellor, Bismarck, used to say derisively that if the British army was to land on the North German coast, he would send a policeman to arrest it.

During the time of their greatest power, the British followed a prudent policy of “Splendid Isolation,” keeping their distance from matters that did not

affect them seriously and not taking too assertive a role in European affairs. They played the role of offshore balancer, aiming not at achieving hegemony but at preventing any other states from doing so, while Britain itself dominated much of the rest of the world. So, no, Britain in the Victorian era was not a true global hegemon.

Stronger states have typically joined together against the prospective hegemon—as England, Austria, Holland, and Russia allied against the France of Louis XIV, or as France, England, and Russia joined together to balance a very powerful and assertive Germany before 1914. On the other hand, weaker and more vulnerable states, or those that for some reason—ethnic, cultural, or ideological affinity; a history of past friendly association—have hopes that they may receive favorable treatment at the hands of the ambitious state, may opt to become its associates or accomplices. Balancing or bandwagoning is basically the choice for all those caught in the scope of the hegemon’s ambition.

But how can they know in advance the scope of that ambition? The answer is that they cannot know, but as a matter of prudence they must assume. That is, they must assume that in a system of independent states coexisting in a state of anarchy, without any superior authority to restrain them or common loyalty