

[MIDEAST]

EXIT, DON'T ESCALATE

On Jan. 2, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested much that during his December visit, CIA Director Porter Goss did not—as had been reported—request overflight rights or intelligence assistance for a possible attack on Iran.

“These speculations based on the claim that the U.S. asked for military base from Turkey to attack some neighbor countries are not true,” the statement read. “Turkey defends the view that problems should be solved through dialogue and negotiation, our region doesn’t need new problems and that everybody should fulfill his/her obligations in that regard.”

Problem is, the Bush administration still presumes a mandate to make the world safe for democracy, and Israel won’t rest easy as long as Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad preaches that it should be “wiped off the map.” Add Iran’s announcement that it will resume nuclear-fuel research and its heavy hints that it will reject the Russian compromise aimed at defusing international concerns about uranium enrichment, and the table is set.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist writes, “Iran’s mullahs have waged a 26-year campaign to suppress dissent, support terror and pursue a nuclear weapons program. ... The U.S. needs to act before a regime that denied the real Holocaust unleashes another.” Soon we’ll be hearing what a cakewalk it will be to collect the flowers strewn before us in Tehran.

Iran is playing a dangerous game. But so too is the U.S. Democratizing has proved a costly hobby, and a showdown with Iran—in addition to exacting an incalculable toll all its own—would only deepen our Iraqi woes by rallying the Shi’ites against us.

Now is the time for exit, not escalation. America’s own allies have had secret weapons programs—Israel tops



the list—while Iran still adheres to the letter of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. And while Ahmadinejad should not expect a call from the Nobel committee, he’s no Saddam. If we find a war here, it will be because we went looking for one.

[POSTWAR]

LANDSLIDE AHMAD

Elections work differently in the world’s youngest democracy, where getting thrown out of office is no obstacle to power. Don’t blame the voters—in the Dec. 15 elections, Iraqis tried to rid themselves of Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Chalabi. With 95 percent of ballots tallied, Chalabi had won just 0.36 percent of the vote in Baghdad. In Basra, where his fellow Shi’ites are a majority, he fared even worse, scoring 0.34 percent. The at-large Iraqi voters overseas or in prisons, hospitals, or the army liked him enough to give him nearly nine-tenths of a percent.

But that didn’t stop Chalabi from becoming Iraq’s oil minister—one of the most powerful posts in the country—before the New Year was rung in. Ostensibly it’s an interim appointment, until the new parliament, *sans* Chalabi, convenes. But speculation abounds that Ahmad the Thief will yet find a way to keep his position. “I object to the decision of putting me on leave and the mechanism by which it was done,” said

outgoing Oil Minister Ibrahim al-Uloun before resigning. The people of Iraq might well object too—but then, they’ve already had their say.

[BELTWAY]

BORDERING ON ENFORCEMENT

Christmas came early for the majority of Americans who are tired of the sieve-like nature of their country’s borders. On Dec. 16, the House of Representatives passed the strongest immigration-enforcement bill to advance on Capitol Hill in some time.

The House voted to build a 700-mile security fence, with lights and cameras, along the southwestern border and to direct the Department of Homeland Security to study erecting similar barriers in the north. The legislation also establishes a mandatory system for verifying employees’ legal status. Local law enforcement gains new powers to arrest and detain illegal aliens. Eligibility requirements for federal immigration benefits are tightened, and loopholes that prevent thorough background checks closed. Thanks to an amendment supported by 57 Democrats, the Diversity Visa Lottery would also be repealed.

Just as important, the House didn’t approve amnesty in any form. Even non-binding language recommending the eventual adoption of a guest-workers program was rejected. An amendment

to cut the maximum sentence for illegal entry and presence to just six months failed. This bill is enforcement-only.

In February, the action moves to the Senate, where there is nothing comparable to Tom Tancredo's Congressional Immigration Reform Caucus. Open-borders interest groups are counting on senators to attach a guest-workers program and otherwise dilute the bill's enforcement provisions, setting the stage for the conference committee to produce a much weaker final version.

[CULTURE]

MOGADISHU, MASS.

All is not onward and upward with the 90 Somali refugees in the Springfield, Massachusetts school system. Last month the *New York Times* did an inquiry. One Somali fourth grader, two years in the United States, could not read the words "for" and "horse." His sister, a ninth grader, could not read a word of her history book. An eighth-grade Somali in his second year in the school's English immersion class could not meaningfully speak or understand any English. The *Times* failed to find one instance of a Somali who was advancing in school and successfully integrating.

The *Times* implies that the difficulties are due to the Springfield school board's failure to provide a Somali language bilingual-education program, which would have been mandatory before Massachusetts voters abandoned bilingual education three years ago. (The schools do provide two Somali translators who travel from school to school for the entire district.) Others say the Somalis would do better if they could be clustered in the same school—but that recourse would bring the school's test scores down and perhaps render it failing under the No Child Left Behind law.

It's a dilemma: for the Somalis who are growing up in a new country without the most rudimentary language skills,

for the school board of a city facing bankruptcy, for the school administrators now facing lawsuits after being handed an intractable problem.

We're not sure whether the agency that sponsored the Somali settlement—Jewish Family Services of Western Massachusetts in this case, but church sponsorship of exotic refugees is widespread nationally and altogether ecumenical—anticipated these difficulties. But it does seem logical that groups that believe America is an appropriate place to settle the world's refugees should not be exempt from helping to solve the problems generated by their broad-mindedness. It's not as if the Springfield taxpayers were consulted about bringing a Somali tribe into their midst—though, clearly, they should have been.

[NUMBERS]

DISGRUNTLED GRUNTS

The latest Military Times poll of armed forces personnel shows the president's popularity, while still significantly higher than among the general public, is slipping.

According to the magazine group, "In 2003 and 2004, supporters of the war in Iraq pointed to high approval ratings in the Military Times poll as a signal that military members were behind ... the president's policy." But 2005's results "found diminished optimism that US goals in Iraq can be accomplished, and a somewhat smaller drop in support for the decision to go to war in 2003."

Backing for Bush's overall policies fell 11 points, and support for Bush on Iraq is down to 54 percent. Sixty-one percent of respondents served in Iraq or Afghanistan; nearly two-thirds believe our military is stretched too thin. Iraq War enthusiasts often argue that supporting our troops necessitates supporting the Bush administration's policies. Someone forgot to tell the servicemen themselves. ■

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Russian Roulette

No issue did more to bring Ronald Reagan to power than the failed policy of détente, the absurdity of which was revealed when Russia invaded Afghanistan as

Carter fretted over hostages at the embassy in Tehran.

Among Reagan's first moves was to abort a British-German plan to finance a new gas pipeline from Russia to NATO Europe, which would have garnered Moscow \$8 billion in annual hard currency and left NATO as dependent on Russian gas as Europe is today.

The wisdom of the Gipper was on display this New Year's, as Vladimir Putin cut off gas to Ukraine and Kiev siphoned off Russian gas headed for Europe. Instantly, the supplies on which EU industries from Italy to the Baltic depend fell by 20, 30, and 40 percent.

Howls across Europe caused Putin to back down. He turned the gas back on for Ukraine, pressure in the pipelines rose, and gas began to flow again to the factories of Europe. But for a brief moment, the vulnerability of Europe was exposed. Russia has the power to shut the continent down and cause European peoples to freeze to death in the dark. This is a power over Europe as great as if one Islamic regime controlled the Persian Gulf.

Putin is being portrayed as the heavy for hiking the price of natural gas for Ukraine from \$50 per 1,000 cubic feet to \$230, which is near the world market price. But Putin has a case. That \$50 price is a subsidy, a gift from Moscow, though Kiev wishes to break out of Russia's orbit and join the EU and a NATO that squats on the doorstep of Mother Russia.

Russia is behaving as great powers always do. When Castro pulled Cuba out

of America's orbit, the United States cut off sugar purchases and imposed an embargo that endures to this day. As we give foreign aid to some nations and deny others access to our markets, Putin plays hardball, too. Moreover, as a condition of membership in the WTO, Russia is under pressure to permit oil and gas prices to rise to market levels. And this is overdue, as the waste of subsidized oil and gas in Russia is scandalous.

This dramatic episode points up the absurdity of pushing NATO to the borders of the old Soviet Union and into the Baltic republics. How exactly would our military rescue Estonia or Ukraine in a confrontation, if Moscow's weapon of choice were to cut all oil and natural gas in the dead of winter? Europe would be screaming for us to end the crisis, and the nations we had set out to rescue would suffer more resisting Russia than from appeasing Russia.

Moving NATO eastward and interfering in the internal affairs of the old Soviet republics to wean them away from Moscow has been a failed policy. Why overthrow a friend in Georgia in the name of democracy if the result is to alienate and antagonize the largest nation on earth, which is an imperiled part of our own civilization?

No greater folly has been committed by President Bush than his midlife conversion to the notion that America was put on this earth to advance some "world democratic revolution" and no non-democrat can be a friend of the United States.

From Louis XVI, who helped us win our Revolution, to Alexander II who sold us Alaska to keep it out of the paws of the British Lion, to Franco in Spain, Diem in Vietnam, Salazar in Portugal, Marcos in the Philippines, and, yes, Pinochet in Chile during the Cold War, this has been true, while democrats like Olof Palme in Sweden, Trudeau in Canada, and Nehru and Krishna Menon in India were often less than useless.

Reagan recognized this. Why can't Bush?

And as we look around the world and see Chavez in Venezuela, Kirchner in Argentina, Morales in Bolivia, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Chirac in France, we note they have two things in common. All either hold power or are advancing to power through free elections, and none has a nice word to say about the United States of George W. Bush.

Russia today is in a desperate condition and may be a dying nation. "Russia's population has plummeted by almost 7% to 143 million in the last 15 years," writes Tom Parfitt of *The Guardian*, "and is predicted to drop by another 20 million by 2025." And as Russia dies, the West dies, too.

As Mexicans reoccupy our Southwest, Muslims and Chinese move north into Russia to recapture lost lands from the 19th century. We have much in common with Russia. We are both sitting in the same leaky boat.

The first order of business of the next administration should be to dump the democratist ideology and start looking out for national interests first. Let us repair relations with Russia and worry a little less over who wins the next election in Turkmenistan. ■