

June 30, 2003

IN THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

The road movie in the Middle East is on again, as Israeli tanks rumbled out of Northern Gaza and Palestinian flags went up over what had been military checkpoints. Already there has been a shooting of a Romanian “guest worker” not an Israeli, but this process will continue. Bethlehem is next and after that we can expect Palestinian Prime Minister Abbas at the White House. He has been invited by Condoleeza Rice, who was all smiles on television this morning shaking hands with the new hope as peace breaks out. One image on BBC showed a Palestinian policeman carrying a portrait of Yasser Arafat into a tent.

Remember, it's just a three-month deal. The various Palestinian factions have proclaimed cease-fires – you can actually read what they have to say in today's New York Times, possibly the first time the texts of their statements have been published. (Not all the factions signed on.) Israeli commentators are saying it marks the end of the “1000 day war” that has stretched over 33 months. But any serious incident, as we know from the past, could get the pot stirring again. For now, peace has broken out.

A new proposal on a website called organicMD.org, advocates diet as a way to bring real peace to the “land of milk and honey.” It features an endorsement from Dr. Seth Ward, Director of the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies at the University of Denver, who says: “I don't think anyone has considered diet as a way to solve the problem.

Politicians think that looking at political goods is the way to go: security, lands, human and political rights, and so forth. Looking at things like health and cultural considerations is off the scope for politicians and that is absolutely wrong. I don't think the goals of the Roadmap or any other plan can be achieved without attention to the kinds of issues you have indicated.”

ISRAEL TO BOYCOTT THE BEEB

AS Israel puts one war on hold for now, it has declared a new one on the BBC. Ha'aretz reports: “Israel declared over the weekend that it is cutting off ties with the BBC to protest a repeat broadcast on non-conventional [i.e. nuclear] weapons said to be in Israel. The program was broadcast for the first time in March in Britain, and was rerun Saturday on a BBC channel that is aired all over the world.

“The boycott decision was made by Israel's public relations forum, made up of representatives from the Prime Minister's Office, the Foreign Ministry and the Government Press Office. It was decided that government offices won't assist BBC producers and reporters, that Israeli officials will not give interviews to the British network, and that the Government Press Office will make it difficult for BBC employees to get press cards and work visas in Israel.

“Before the broadcast Saturday, Israeli officials tried to pressure the BBC to cancel the broadcast,

saying that the program was biased and presented Israel as an evil dictatorship, ignoring the existential threat it was facing.”

THE (NEW) BATTLE OF BRITAIN

THIS is a new front in other wars the BBC is fighting. In Britain, criticisms of the Beeb by Tony Blair Spinmeister Alastair Campbell continue to reverberate. Just check out some of today’s stories in the British press which is still milking the controversy. The Independent: “Norman Tebbit, one of the BBC’s fiercest critics, has rallied behind the corporation in its bitter fight with Alastair Campbell.” The Sun: “BBC bosses were under pressure to apologize last night after Alastair Campbell was cleared of tampering with an intelligence dossier.” P2 The Guardian: “The foreign affairs select committee is likely to clear Alastair Campbell of allegations made in a BBC report that he “sexed up” last September’s Iraq weapons dossier. ... If nothing else, the BBC row has exposed Alastair Campbell to public scrutiny,” according to former BBC political correspondent Nicholas Jones.

WARRING WITH WORDS IN IRAQ

OVER in Iraq, another US soldier’s body has been found. US troops went on more raids arresting 60 people, but finding few weapons capable of any destruction. US administrator Paul Bremer says Washington will not be deterred in its efforts to impose control.

There is a bit of embarrassment in Iraq as well over a slight faux pas. AFP reported last week: “US authorities in Iraq have been forced to change the name of the planned Iraqi armed forces, after learning that the original title they came up with

created an unfortunate acronym in Arabic.

“The planned force was originally entitled the New Iraqi Corps, whose initials in English produce a colorful Arabic synonym for fornication.

“I am told reliably but unanimously that that acronym is not a nice word in Arabic,” a senior official from the Coalition Provisional Authority said Tuesday. “Therefore we had to come up with another word.” The force is to be known as the New Iraqi Army.”

WHO IS IN CHARGE?

OF course, the hunt for those weapons of mass destruction goes on and on. Time Magazine this week offered a revealing anecdote about the priority it is being accorded:

“Meeting last month at a sweltering U.S. base outside Doha, Qatar, with his top Iraq commanders, President Bush skipped quickly past the niceties and went straight to his chief political obsession: Where are the weapons of mass destruction? Turning to his Baghdad proconsul, Paul Bremer, Bush asked, “Are you in charge of finding WMD?” Bremer said no, he was not. Bush then put the same question to his military commander, General Tommy Franks. But Franks said it wasn’t his job either. A little exasperated, Bush asked, “So who is in charge of finding WMD?” After aides conferred for a moment, someone volunteered the name of Stephen Cambone, a little-known deputy to Donald Rumsfeld, back in Washington. Pause. ‘Who?’ Bush asked.”

BLIXED OUT

WE know who is NOT looking anymore: “UN chief weapons inspector Hans Blix retires today. On the Scoop website in New Zealand Justin Leopold reports: “Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy sec-

retary of defense, was so eager to see the United States launch a preemptive strike against Iraq in early 2002, that he ordered the CIA to investigate the past work of Hans Blix, the chief United Nations weapons inspector, who in February 2002, was asked to lead a team of U.N. weapons inspectors into Iraq.

“Earlier this month, Blix accused the Bush administration of launching a smear campaign against him because he could not find evidence of WMD in Iraq and, he said, he refused to pump up his reports to the U.N. about Iraq’s WMD programs, which would have given the U.S. the evidence it needed to get a majority of U.N. member countries to support a war against Iraq. Instead, Blix said the U.N. inspectors should be allowed more time to conduct searches in Iraq for WMD.

“In a June 11 interview with the London Guardian newspaper, Blix said “U.S. officials pressured him to use more damning language when reporting on Iraq’s alleged weapons programs.” “By and large my relations with the U.S. were good,” Blix told the Guardian. “But toward the end the (Bush) administration leaned on us.”

G.I. JOE

THE New York Times gave first page status this morning to a story about the “GI Joe Collectors Club” convention in San Francisco. The Times explains that “at a moment when American troops are in Iraq and Afghanistan and support for the military is high, the cultural mythology of G.I Joe . . . is in the air.” Well, if support for American troops is high, why are so many bitching that they are being betrayed. Army Times, the real world newspaper for our real GI Joes is steaming editorially about Bush Administration-led cutbacks for the men they are praising.

“In recent months, President Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress have missed no opportunity to heap richly deserved praise on the military. But talk is cheap - and getting cheaper by the day, judging from the nickel-and-dime treatment the troops are getting lately. For example, the White House griped that various pay-and-benefits incentives added to the 2004 defense budget by Congress are wasteful and unnecessary – including a modest proposal to double the \$6,000 gratuity paid to families of troops who die on active duty. This comes at a time when Americans continue to die in Iraq at a rate of about one a day.”

MOVEON ONLINE PRIMARY

PROGRESSIVE democrats are debating the outcome of an online poll of support for Democratic presidential contenders. The results came out last Friday with Howard Dean, the Vermont Governor who just revealed he has raised \$9 million dollars for his campaign, in the lead. He received 43% of the vote with Congressman Dennis Kucinich next with 24% and Senator John Kerry third with 16% of the vote. Since none of the candidates received 50% of the vote, MoveOn will wait to officially endorse anyone until this fall.

Radical journalist Norman Solomon is questioning Dean’s political orientation. “When Dean officially announced his presidential campaign on June 23, some news stories identified him with the left. It’s a case of mistaken identity. “He’s really a classic Rockefeller Republican – a fiscal conservative and social liberal – according to University of Vermont political scientist Garrison Nelson.

“In an interview on NBC’s “Meet the Press,” Dean delivered a one-two punch against economic justice. He advocated raising the retirement

age for Social Security, and he called for slowing down the rate of increases for Medicare spending. Later in the day, at a Rainbow/PUSH Coalition forum, Dean went out of his way to emphasize support for out-of-control military spending after a rival candidate, Rep. Dennis Kucinich, said that “the only way we’re really going to close the (digital) divide in this country is to start cutting the Pentagon budget and put that money into education.” Dean’s response: “I don’t agree with Dennis about cutting the Pentagon budget when we’re in the middle of a difficulty with terror attacks.”

MOVEON IS BRILLIANT

MANY in the progressive media are enthusing about MoveOn’s work. Writes The Nation’s Eric Alterman: “MoveOn.org, the savviest progressive organization in recent memory, is brilliantly exploiting the communications potential of the Internet to bring pressure to bear on politicians, support progressive campaigns, and raise money for the right causes. Its recent “presidential primary” is just one of the group’s innovative ideas.

Terrence Hackett explains the phenomenon on GRASSROOTS. “Groups all along the political spectrum can now reach hundreds of thousands of people instantaneously on-line, raising funds and organizing events with targeted e-mail campaigns.

“The speed and reach the Internet provides to organizers became most apparent to people like Joan Blades in March when the idea for a candlelight peace vigil that originated in New Zealand became a reality worldwide in just six days. The event spawned nearly 7,000 vigils in 142 countries. “I certainly think it has changed the landscape,” says Blades, co-founder of the liberal Web site MoveOn.org, “but we’re just beginning to realize

the possibilities to let people participate.”

“Based in Berkeley, Calif., Blades and her husband, Wes Boyd, founded MoveOn.org somewhat accidentally during the impeachment hearings involving then-President Bill Clinton. Creating an on-line petition titled “Censure and Move On” that urged Congress toward a quick resolution, Blades says they sent e-mails to about 100 people. In less than a week they had 100,000 signatures. By the end of the impeachment hearings, more than 500,000 people had signed. Blades says that today, MoveOn has a worldwide membership of about 2 million people, 1.4 million of whom are in the U.S.”

COVERING THE CANDIDATES: A READER’S TALE

SPEAKING of candidates, a reader, S. Smith writes: “I had a fantastic day yesterday with 5 of the Democratic candidates for President. They debated at UCLA on the issue of the environment, and I was able to video them for about an hour in an intimate setting backstage prior to the debate. Sen. Joe Lieberman, Gov. Howard Dean, Sen. John Kerry, Rev. Al Sharpton and Sen. Carol Moseley-Braun. Stayed with them all the way onto the stage. Great footage. John Kerry clearly was the candidate that seemed to possess it all. Not who I expected. Really down to earth guy, with the best grasp of the issues. My gut was with him.

“In contrast to the warm reception I got from the Democrats, I went to the Century Plaza Hotel today to video the arrival of Pres. Bush for a 4 million dollar fund raiser tonight. I arrived at 12:30 pm, about 30 minutes from the time he was supposed to arrive. Video taped the lobby, press room, the actual banquet hall with the Bush-Cheney 2004 banner, but could not find any secu-

rity or press credential reps anywhere, on any floor. It seemed really odd, but I kept looking. Finally I found a room of what appeared to be 40 Secret Service guys sitting around drinking coffee and chatting. Next to them a room of LAPD, sitting around having a good chat. I walked into the LAPD room and asked where the press credential room was, and asked if I could tape them. They were all friendly, until one officer asked me for ID. Well, within under a minute I was escorted into a stairwell with about 8 LAPD and 5 Secret Service agents surrounding me. They put me against the wall, and told me to spread em! Thoroughly searched me, and I mean thoroughly!!! Ouch! Took my camera, my video, my driver's license. Made me sit on the concrete floor for 45 minutes. Asked me a million questions like, "How do you feel about the President?" Interviews from LAPD and the SS, background checks, etc. Told me I had violated a secure area and could be arrested. Really secure, the only security (or people) I saw the whole time I was on the floor was in the room I casually walked into asking for help.

"In the end they found that I was an outstanding citizen. Was there ever any doubt? After all the Republican Party had named me "California Republican of the Year 2002." I never got my certificate, or got to go to the luncheon in Washington D.C., after I told them I was actually a lifelong Democrat and wouldn't be interested in making that \$5,000 donation to the Republican party. But people make mistakes. I was escorted off the property by two SS agents and told if I came back in the building I would be arrested, and it would be a very long day for both of us."

CLINTON: ROLL BACK THE FCC

FORMER President Bill Clinton has joined the

campaign against the FCC. Writing in the New York Daily News, he calls the federal agency "out of control."

"Why is this bad? Because more monolithic control over local media will reduce the diversity of information, opinion and entertainment people get. Interesting local coverage will be supplanted by lowest-common-denominator mass-market mush.

"But don't cable TV and the Internet give people more sources of information? In theory, yes. In practice, not necessarily. Big media firms own most of the cable networks and supply much of the content for major Internet sites.

"Is this another Democrat vs. Republican battle? Is my concern motivated by the growing influence of right-wing voices in the broadcast media?"

"While it's true the FCC vote split along party lines – Republicans for looser standards, Democrats against – and while I have noticed the conservative slant in more media organizations these days, the debate over media ownership is not a partisan one."

THE COMMISH WE MISS THE MOST

SPEAKING of the FCC, your news dissector is proud to report that former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson who was THE hero in earlier fights to assure that the airwaves belong to the people has now endorsed our new Mediachannel.org book on Iraq War coverage called "Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception." (See our home page). He writes: "It was 1926 when a prescient Congressman, Luther Johnson, warned that should we allow our media to fall into the hands of the few then "woe be to those who would dare to differ with them." There are many

MEDIA DIARY DANNY SCHECHTER

illustrations of the woe we suffer today from the power of our global media conglomerates. Danny Schechter details one of the most dangerous. And woe be to you if you don't read it."

Woe is right. Actually woe to us if we don't sell more copies and attract more donations to keep Mediachannel.org alive, channeling criticism and

debate about our media environment. You can help. Tell others about the book and pick up one yourself.

Also, share your comments and responses to the issues we cover. You can write to me, Danny Schechter your news dissector at: Dissector@mediachannel.org

