

**O**n April 30, the Jordanian weekly newspaper Al-Majd published a story about a 16-page secret document, an "Action Plan for the Palestinian Presidency" that called for undermining and replacing the Palestinian national-unity government. The document outlined steps that would strengthen Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, build up Palestinian security forces under his command, lead to the dissolution of the Palestinian Parliament, and strengthen US allies in Fatah in a lead-up to parliamentary elections that Abbas would call for early this autumn.

The Majd document is based on a Jordanian government translation of a reputed US intelligence document that was obtained by the newspaper from a Jordanian government official. The document, an official at the newspaper said, was drawn up by "Arab and American parties" and "presented to Palestinian President Abbas by the head of an Arab intelligence agency". The document is explosive.

Should Abbas give his agreement to the plan—which is not yet certain—he would be complicit in a program to undermine his own government.

Understanding the implications of the document, Jordanian government officials ordered that the publisher's printing house stop the presses while that edition's plates were confiscated.

"The Jordanian security services, which censor newspapers in advance, intervened during the night to stop our print-run,"

confirmed Fahd Al Rimawi, an editor at Al-Majd.

On May 1, the Jordanian government explained its decision in a statement issued by the president of the Jordanian Press Association, Tareq al-Moumuni. The statement claimed that Al-Majd had repeatedly published reports "based on information taken from intelligence sources and offends the country's security and interests".

## Document Details US Plan To Sink Hamas

Moumuni explained that the printing house of the Jordanian Press Foundation had refused to print the April 30 edition because it included news reports that were harmful to Jordan "and offended a sisterly state". The "sisterly state" referred to is the Palestinian Authority (PA), according to published sources.

On May 2, the Jordanian government and Moumuni gave further background on the Majd case. Moumuni claimed that Al-Majd's report was "totally false" and not based on reliable sources.

Nevertheless, two days later, Moumuni was again being quoted in news reports,

this time saying that the press association demanded "the lifting of the ban and abolition of abolishing any censorship".

The Jordanian government's action brought swift condemnation from the international Committee to Protect Journalists.

"This flagrant act of censorship is further evidence of the poor state of press freedom in Jordan," CPJ executive director Joel Simon said. "Officials should

Israel to begin dismantling a large number of its security obstacles and checkpoints in the West Bank—allowing increased access in the occupied territories.

The appearance of the "Benchmarks" document within days of the disclosure of the Majd document suggests a connection, though despite appearances, the former may not in fact be a component of the latter.

On the contrary, the disclosure of the two plans in quick succession may reflect competing agendas coming from the US State Department and the White House.

Not surprisingly, the US press has failed to pick up on either the Majd or Haaretz story and has ignored the existence of the White House program aimed at undermining the Hamas government.

The Majd document came to the attention of a wider audience when the Amman incident was reported in the weblog Missing Links, which translated sections of the document from Arabic and provided analysis on the proposed plan.

The details of the Majd incident, the publication of the "Action Plan for the Palestinian Presidency", the commentary provided by Missing Links, and the subsequent publication of the additional US document in Haaretz have now made it possible to detail how the United States (or at least one faction of policymakers inside the administration) intends to implement its program to implement a "soft coup" against the Palestinian unity government.

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## Blair's Exit

**F**inally, Blair's going. But why now? And what has Blair left us behind?

There are many reasons one can guess as to why, but perhaps one of the biggest—yet least talked about—is the "cash for peeraages" criminal investigation, which has been getting rather close to home, too close perhaps for Blair's comfort.

After the arrest and questioning by police in July last year of Lord Levy, Blair's chief fundraiser, the Independent ran a piece whose title got straight to the point: "Levy arrest lays trail that leads all the way to Blair".

For anyone who needs reminding, the criminal investigation began in March 2006 after revelations that Blair had "nominated four businessmen for peeraages who had also given donations in the form of loans, which did not have to be declared."

The loans totalled as much as 4 million pounds. The peeraages were scrutinised and blocked by an anti-sleaze committee, all but one which voluntarily withdrew.

When Lord Levy was re-arrested at the end of January this year on suspicion of conspiracy to pervert the course of justice (and later bailed), following the arrest of Ruth Turner, director of government relations at Downing Street, things were really looking bad.

The inquiry ended on 23 April this year when police handed a 213-page file to the Crown Prosecution Service for deliberation.

The scope of Lord Goldsmith's interference in the CPS "deliberations" is impossible to discern. But there is no doubt that the Attorney-General is advocating on behalf of his "old friend".

Just like he did with the Iraq War 2003, where he regressed from his own doubts over the war to advise that the war to advise that the war would be "unequivocally" legal even without a new UN resolution.

For many, this in itself is sufficient evidence that our own Attorney-General suffers from a politicized contempt for the rule of law. But it doesn't end there, because he also "breached" his Government's own freedom of information laws by refusing to make public how he came to the controversial conclusion that war with Iraq would be legal.

Notice the manner in which, under Blair, purportedly independent institutions designed to hold the government to account, in practice act as "damage control organs of the state in times of political crisis. The CPS, the ICO, even the Office of the Attorney-General, all of them fundamentally compromised and caught up in a web of

financial shenanigans.

At least now we know that people like Blair and Perle think that violating international law to go to war on the basis of fabricated pretenses about WMD, and then on top of that manipulating public offices to support such a violation, is very much "the right thing."

The catastrophe that started in 2003 in Iraq is only the end-point of a continuum of genocidal catastrophe that began early in the twentieth century.

The British state has conducted brutal military interventions in Iraq on and off for 90 years or so. Of course for legitimate interests. It continued to do so under the leadership of the United States since 1991.

Dr Gideon Polya, a retired senior biochemist at Le Trobe University working on a scientific analysis of global mortality, has put together a staggering overview of some of most reliable estimates of the number of Iraqi civilians who have died as a consequence of the direct and indirect impact of these interventions and occupations over a period of almost a century.

Since 1950, 5.2 million, during the period in which the CIA and M16 were fostering coups, installing and installing dictators until they finally got Saddam himself in power.

Between 1991 and 2003, about 1.7 million from the UN sanctions regime. Add to this the figures for the 1991 Persian Gulf War, at least 150,000. And after the 2003 war, as many as 650,000. That's just under eight million up to now.

The blood of eight million Iraqi civilians on the hands of the Anglo-American axis since the early twentieth century, and still counting what does this say about "Civilization"? About the fruits of "liberal democracy" as it stands?

About the wonders of "modernization" and "globalization"? Why is the progress of the West tied to the installation of metaphorical gas chambers in the East?

Blair can happily see himself as a leading participant in this genocidal continuum.

He is in the same ranks as Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, and of course Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, among others. But if there's anything that this brief glimpse of Anglo-American historical genocide in the Middle East reveals, it's that Blair's resignation means absolutely nothing whatsoever in the way of halting the genocidal march of the global system.

Blair was one particularly clever cog in a machine that has yet to run its course.

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## Lebanon's Next President



Emile Lahoud

**N**ow that Prime Minister Fouad Siniora has sent a letter to the United Nations urging it to proceed with the creation of a tribunal to try suspects in the killing of former Premier Rafik Hariri, Lebanon is passing the hurdle of one crisis and confronting a new one: the battle over who will become the next president.

The controversy over who will move into Baabda Palace once Emile Lahoud leaves in November cuts closer to the heart of the political divisions in the country than did the dispute over the Hariri court.

Indeed, the debate over the tribunal was largely a non-issue, since all parties long ago accepted the court's creation in principle, even though they differ over the exact wording of the draft agreement with the UN outlining its procedures and mandate.

The foot-dragging and posturing over the creation of the court was both a waste of time and a means of veiling disagreements on more fundamental issues.

The question of the presidency, on the other hand, is one which is much more substantive, and one over which the Lebanese are much more deeply divided.

The key to navigating a way through this potentially explosive crisis will be to ensure the constitutional election of a president who exemplifies all that a Lebanese president should be.

He or she must embody compromise, engender modernity and exhibit a mastery of diplomacy. The new president will need to be inclusive and attentive in his or her approach in presiding over the challenges the country still faces, including the drafting of a new electoral law, the implementation of measures to reduce the staggering national debt and the management of often tumultuous relations with Lebanon's neighbors, Syria and Israel.

Will the Lebanese Parliament be able to identify and elect a candidate who can meet these and other substantial challenges? Identifying the right person for the post is not an impossible feat, although it will require that anyone who aspires to become president perform some homework.

It will no longer suffice for members of either the ruling coalition or the opposition to put forth a favorite candidate without any articulation, explanation or justification.

Any candidate for the post of the presidency will need to start producing a detailed political program explaining the exact goals that he or she will aim to achieve while in office.

This is not something that can be achieved with the use of empty phrases or meaningless slogans. It will take much more seriousness, sobriety and sincerity to capture the imagination of the Lebanese.

DAILYSTAR.COM.LB

## Moment of Truth for Musharraf

**S**even years after seizing control of Pakistan in a coup d'état, President Pervez Musharraf faces the kind of political challenge that army generals tend to find both puzzling and daunting: thousands of middle-class people, many of them lawyers in suits and ties, have taken to the streets to demand democracy and to protest against Gen Musharraf's assault on the remaining vestiges of Pakistan's independent judiciary.

Both Gen Musharraf and Shaukat Aziz, the ex-Citigroup banker who serves as prime minister, argue that they have restored the country's economic fortunes since the corrupt government of Nawaz Sharif was deposed in 1999. Growth has hit 7 per

cent a year and the doors have been opened for foreign investors in sectors from energy to banking.

But Gen Musharraf's determination to be re-elected president while staying on as head of the army has led him into a political blind alley.

His abuse of Pakistan's already battered constitution and his suspension of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary, the popular Supreme Court chief justice who might have stood in his way in the courts, have provoked a popular backlash.

Pakistan's political parties, which have mostly been discredited by their own misuse in previous civilian governments, have predictably tried to take advantage of the Chaudhary phenom-

enon.

They called a general strike to protest against the killing of about 40 people in Karachi over the weekend. Violence erupted when the president's local supporters prevented Mr Chaudhary from addressing a rally in the city.

The US and other western powers have provided strong backing for Gen Musharraf and his government.

His public support for the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan (albeit tainted by suspicions that Pakistani intelligence officers still sympathise with the Islamist militants) and his record of sound economic management made it easier to overlook the embarrassing reality of a military dic-

tatorship.

Gen Musharraf is now in danger of forfeiting that western support. He should do what he first promised—engineer a transition back to democracy in Pakistan. His allies should try to persuade him to hold a general election, step down as army commander and then stand, out of uniform, as a candidate in a presidential election.

The Pakistani president is elected indirectly, being chosen by a college of the upper and lower houses of parliament and the four state parliaments. It is a risk for Gen Musharraf, but one worth taking. Given the economic record of which he boasts, there is a good chance he would win.

FT.COM

## Divided New Orleans

**W**hen President Bush spoke to the nation soon after Hurricane Katrina, he was resolute that the city would be rebuilt. "We will do what it takes," he said. We—the federal, state and city governments; elected officials and the citizens who hire them—have failed spectacularly. Homes and schools remain empty or imaginary; evacuees and survivors wait in cramped trailers, unable to return or rebuild.

A huge silence still hangs over the Lower Ninth Ward, a place every American should see, to witness firsthand how truckloads of promises have filled New Orleans's vast devastation with nothing.

That the Lower Ninth is overwhelmingly black is not irrelevant. African-Americans were the predominant and poorest members of this city before the storm, they bore the worst of it and have the farthest journey back to stability. A study issued by the Kaiser Family Foundation, based on

interviews last fall with residents of Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes, maps the outlines of a sharp racial divide.

In Orleans Parish, twice as many African-Americans as whites said their lives were still "very" or "somewhat" disrupted.

Seventy-two percent of blacks said they had problems getting health care, compared with 32 percent of whites. Blacks were more likely to say that their financial status, physical and mental health, and job security had worsened since the storm.

And they expressed considerably more anxiety than whites about the sturdiness of the rebuilt levees, the danger from future Katrinas and the prospect of living without enough money or health care, or a decent, affordable home.

There was a consensus about broad categories of the recovery: solid majorities thought there had been at least some progress in restoring basic services, reopen-

ing schools and business and fixing levees.

But in three vital areas—rebuilding neighborhoods, controlling crime and increasing the supply of affordable housing—most agreed that there had been no progress or "not too much."

Even with the constant trickle of bad news, you can find minimal improvements. Thousands of building permits have been issued.

A crisis was recently averted when the Bush administration extended temporary housing assistance for tens of thousands of displaced families. Some government housing subsidies that were to expire at the end of August will continue until March 2009.

It is also encouraging that administration of the housing program will shift from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has always been the logical choice, given its experience in housing needy

families.

Other positive signs include the halting progress toward a workable redevelopment plan, and a recent finding that the city's population had grown to above half of its level before the storm.

The Kaiser survey even found signs of hope when it tested for resilience in a proud city. Sixty-nine percent of respondents said they were optimistic about New Orleans's future. And only 11 percent said they planned to leave.

Their faith must not be betrayed. Residents in the survey were keenly aware that their city's fitful recovery would be devastated if the levees failed again.

They put strong levees above all other priorities, including fighting crime and even basic services like electricity and water. And yet National Geographic has reported that an engineer has found signs that levees were poorly rebuilt and are already eroding. There is no room for error here.

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