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### **Sudan's president welcomed at Arab summit**

His participation marks act of defiance against international arrest warrant

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DOHA, Qatar - Qatar's leader embraced Sudan's president in a red-carpet welcome Sunday as he arrived to attend an Arab Summit in his most brazen act of defiance against an international arrest warrant on charges of war crimes in Darfur.

For host Qatar — a key U.S. ally that is home to American warplanes and more than 5,000 U.S. troops — the Arab League meeting beginning Monday also showcases its desire to stake out a prominent role in regional affairs even at the risk of angering the West.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir had promised to attend the 22-nation gathering after assurances from members they would not enforce the International Criminal Court's arrest order issued March 4. But his lavish arrival sent an apparent message that al-Bashir will have a center stage role at the two-day meeting.

Wearing a traditional Sudanese robe and white turban, a smiling al-Bashir was greeted at the airport with an embrace and kiss by Qatar's emir. They later had coffee with the head of the Arab League, Amr Moussa.

Low-risk trip for al-Bashir — It was a low-risk trip for al-Bashir with high symbolic value for his Arab backers, who argue that carrying out the ICC's arrest would further destabilize Sudan as the Darfur conflict between the Arab-led government and ethnic African rebels enters its seventh year.

Only Jordan and two other tiny Arab League members, the Comoros and Djibouti, are party to the ICC charter, but can take no action on Qatari soil. Arab foreign ministers have endorsed a draft resolution for the summit rejecting the ICC's arrest warrant.

ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo has said that al-Bashir should be arrested once he leaves Sudanese airspace, but it was unclear whether any military forces were monitoring his flight. The United States does not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction, citing fears that Americans would be unfairly prosecuted for political reasons. But President Barack Obama earlier this month denounced the "genocide" in Darfur.

The Sudanese government's battle against rebels in the western Darfur region has killed up to 300,000 people and driven 2.7 million from their homes since 2003, according to the United Nations.

"The president is performing his duties and is going to visit more countries either on bilateral bases or for regional meetings," said al-Bashir's foreign policy adviser, Mustafa

Osman Ismail. The Sudanese leader also visited Eritrea, Egypt and Libya over the past week.

"What is required from all of us is to stand with our brothers in Sudan and its leadership in order to prevent dangers that affect our collective security," Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem said.

But the Arab ministers rejected an offer from Sudan to host an emergency Arab summit. Instead, Arab governments promised to increase diplomatic visits to Sudan.

Another chance for Qatar — The Doha gathering is another chance for Qatar to enhance its role as a regional broker — with the growing confidence to occasionally break ranks with traditional regional heavyweights Egypt and Saudi Arabia and their Western allies.

In January, Qatar hosted a Gaza crisis conference that included two leaders sharply at odds with Washington: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal. The following month, Qatar mediated preliminary talks between Sudan's government and the most powerful Darfur rebel group.

But Qatar's rulers are careful not to step too far from the Western-leaning fold.

The nation serves as a strategic military hub for U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Qatari officials who have also invested huge efforts to become an international sports venue — including bidding for the 2022 World Cup — worry that a maverick reputation could harm their chances.

Human Rights Watch issued an appeal for Arab leaders to press Sudan to allow the return of 13 foreign humanitarian aid groups expelled in retaliation for the warrant.

The Arab League also "should not reward Sudan's behavior by supporting a suspension of al-Bashir's case, which would only encourage further abuses," said Richard Dicker, director of the group's international justice program.

Gaza

### **UN criticises Israelis over Gaza**

Mr Falk throws doubt on the legality of Israel's mission in Gaza

A UN human rights investigator, Richard Falk, has questioned the legality of Israel's Gaza incursion in a new report to the UN Human Rights Council.

Many international organisations have raised concerns of war crimes during Israel's recent Gaza operation.

Mr Falk has been highly critical of Israel in the past and Israel has repeated accusations that he is biased.

It comes as an Israeli rights group criticised Israel for hitting medics and impeding medical evacuations.

The Israeli military says it is investigating specific claims of abuses and that it did its utmost to protect civilians during a conflict in which militants operated from populated civilian areas.

Israeli authorities denied entry to Mr Falk, a former Princeton University international law professor, last December, when he attempted to conduct his regular investigative mission to the Palestinian territories.

Israel was angered by a series of comments he had made accusing it of war crimes and comparing its actions in Gaza to Nazi Germany in World War II.

Legality question

Because Mr Falk was unable to enter the Palestinian territories, his latest report focuses on the legality of Israel's January operation in Gaza in general, rather than on specific cases or claims that disproportionate force was used.

Mr Falk said that in order to determine if the war was legal, it was necessary to assess whether Israeli forces could differentiate between civilian and military targets in Gaza. "If it is not possible to do so, then launching the attacks is inherently unlawful, and would seem to constitute a war crime of the greatest magnitude under international law," Mr Falk's report says.

He also points to the fact that Gaza's borders were closed, so civilians were unable to flee the fighting.

Mr Falk is calling for an independent inquiry to examine possible war crimes committed by both Israel and Hamas.

Further, he suggests that the Israeli blockade of Gaza is in violation of the Geneva Conventions and must be lifted.

The report is certain to anger Israel, which has long complained of bias by Mr Falk. The UN Human Rights Council was formed by the UN General Assembly, as a successor to the UN Commission on Human Rights, which was widely criticised for the inclusion of countries such as Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia and China with poor records on human rights.

'Attacks on medics'

Mr Falk's report comes amid mounting concerns that Israel may have committed war crimes in Gaza.

On Monday, the Israeli organisation Physicians for Human Rights released a report saying Israel had violated international law and ethics codes during the Gaza operation. It accused Israeli forces of "attacks on medical personnel; damage to medical facilities and indiscriminate attacks on civilians not involved in the fighting".

"Israel placed numerous obstacles in the course of the operation that impeded emergency medical evacuation of the sick and wounded and also caused families to be trapped for days without food, water and medications," the report said.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has also said Israel failed to honour its obligation to treat civilians wounded in the conflict.

Last week rights group Amnesty International, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and prominent investigators who had worked in Kosovo, Darfur, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, called for a UN commission of inquiry into the actions of Israel and Hamas during the conflict. They said they had been "shocked to the core" by events in Gaza.

Also last week, testimonies emerged from Israel soldiers describing cases where civilians were knowingly killed and questioning the rules of engagement during the conflict.

Defence Minister Ehud Barak told Israel Radio that the findings would be examined seriously, but said: "I still say we have the most moral army in the world."

### **History of hate in Gaza conflict**

GWYNNE DYER

2/01/2009 7:38:00 AM

Yosef Sheinin, the chief rabbi of Ashdod, was distraught at the funeral of Irit Shetreet, one of four Israelis to be killed by Palestinian rockets since Israel launched its bombing campaign against the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip on Sunday.

However, he was wrong to say that her death was "the latest manifestation of 3000 years of anti-Jewish hatred". The hatred is real, but its sources are a good deal closer both in time and in space.

Western media coverage rarely goes into the origins: even what happened last year or 10 years ago is treated as ancient history. So the fury and despair of 1.5million residents of the Gaza Strip can seem incomprehensible the "bottomless hatred of wild beasts", as Sheinin put it.

Why do the Palestinians fire rockets at civilians in Sderot, Ashkelon and Ashdod?

Because that's where they come from. Only about a fifth of the Gaza's population is descended from people who lived there before 1948. The rest are people, or the children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren of people, who were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war, or simply fled in fear and were not allowed to go home. Their former homes were mostly in the south of former Palestine, in places such as Sderot, Ashkelon and Ashdod.

This does not give them the right to launch rockets at the people who now live in those towns, of course, any more than Israel has the right to use its massive air power to pound the crowded Gaza Strip. But it does provide some context. This struggle is still about what it has always been about: the land. And the fact that Israel is killing a hundred Palestinians for every dead Israeli does not mean the Israelis are winning.

Ehud Olmert, Israel's interim Prime Minister, and Tzipi Livni, his successor as head of the Kadima party, and Binyamin Netanyahu, head of the Likud party and her principal rival for the prime ministership in next month's Israeli election, all know that. They are all old enough to have watched Israel try to bash the Palestinians into submission half a dozen times before, and they know it does not work. But that is strategy, and this is politics.

For Israel's political leaders, this is mainly about looking tough in front of an electorate that just wants someone to "do something" about the Palestinians and their rockets.

Nothing much can be done, short of a peace settlement generous enough to reconcile them to the loss of their land, but Israeli politicians have to look like they are trying.

Hamas leaders are equally cynical, since they know that every civilian death, and even every militant's death, helps to build popular support for their organization. The dead are pawns, and the game is politics.

There is a more profound issue behind it all, which is Israel's right to exist versus the right of the Palestinians to their homeland, but we shouldn't get carried away with the

unique moral dimension of all that. It's just one more conquerors-versus-previous-inhabitants conflict.

Israel has the power to hammer the Palestinians endlessly, but they don't give up and go away. They cannot, and neither can the Israelis. That doesn't necessarily mean that the conflict will ultimately be settled by peaceful negotiation and compromise. It may mean that there will be no solution of any sort for the foreseeable future, just an endless series of bloody, indecisive clashes like the present one.

Wednesday, February 18, 2009 at 10:43 am

Gaza Body Count: Were We Duped?

Posted by Scott MacLeod | Comments (56) | Permalink | Trackbacks (5) | Email This

Was the news media--and by extension, world public opinion--outrageously duped by Palestinian propaganda into exaggerating the number of casualties in the recent Gaza war and thus unjustly tarnishing Israel's image? That's the line of a report on Gaza casualties released this week by the Israel Defense Forces, prompting debates and questions in the blogosphere including among commenters on our Middle East Blog.

True, most news reports have relied on figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Health or the Palestinian Center for Human Rights.

On Jan. 19, Palestinian Ministry of Health figures put the number of dead at 1,314, including 522 women and children, or 39% of the total.

On Jan. 22, the PCHR reported that 1,285 people had been killed in the Gaza conflict, including 895 civilians, or 69.6% of the dead.

The IDF report on casualties first appeared in the Jerusalem Post on Sunday. Conducted by the IDF's Gaza Coordination and Liaison Administration, the 200-page report identified more than 1,200 Palestinian deaths and listed casualties by name.

According to the Post, the CLA said "580 of these 1,200 had been conclusively 'incriminated' as members of Hamas and other terrorist groups." The CLA said 300 were "non-combatants"--women, men over 65 and children aged 15 and under. The CLA said the remaining 320 were all men, and estimated that two-thirds were "terror operatives," the Post said.

By this count, according to the CLA, one-third of the Palestinian death toll were civilians--not the two-thirds claimed by the PCHR. "World Duped by Hamas Death Count" read the Post headline on the story.

A controversy over the Gaza toll initially made international headlines on Jan. 22, right after the cessation of major hostilities, when Lorenzo Cremonesi, a reporter for Italy's Corriere Della Sera newspaper, published a report from Gaza disputing the Palestinian death count. Corriere quoted "a doctor" in Gaza's Shifa hospital saying the death toll could not be more than 600, reporting that the dead mainly consisted of young Hamas fighters between 17-23 years old. The paper also said that local journalists knew about

the fabrication and quizzed Hamas officials about why they were "inflating the numbers of victims."

So were we duped? Have Corriere and the IDF managed to shine a light on the truth about the war that the rest of us didn't see?

The media were largely dependent on the Palestinians for the casualty data. It's worth remembering that Israeli authorities barred journalists access to Gaza until the end of the war, hindering independent accounts of the conflict and its effects. Information from one side can be wrong or even deliberately distorted. I can say, though, that I have high regard for PCHR director Raji Sourani, who I know from my many reporting trips into Gaza. He is a dedicated and courageous activist and recognized as such internationally. Certainly, Sourani is in the pocket of no government, having long tangled with Israeli and Palestinian authorities alike in his defense of human rights.

What is more important to note is that the Palestinian figures were effectively accepted and endorsed by independent organizations such as the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Israeli human rights groups. They effectively corroborated the Palestinian figures, not by doing independent body counts, but in most cases by closely observing the war on the ground in Gaza with scores of their own staff people. The ICRC, for example, had a dozen or so foreign staff working mainly in Gaza hospitals, and another few dozen Palestinian staff. Indeed, the CLA report itself basically corroborates the overall death count of 1,300 plus or minus--and indirectly dismisses the figures contained in the Jan. 22 report in Corriere as off base by half.

What the CLA is really disputing is the Palestinian claim of civilian deaths--two-thirds of the overall number killed. Such a figure is an indictment of Israel's Gaza operations as well as of the IDF's commitment to "purity of arms"--the doctrine that vows that "IDF soldiers will not use their weapons and force to harm human beings who are not combatants or prisoners of war, and will do all in their power to avoid causing harm to their lives, bodies, dignity and property." Some 200 groups including the Palestinian Authority have pressed the International Criminal Court in The Hague to investigate possible Israeli war crimes for alleged targeting of civilians and non-military buildings.

The issue of combatant deaths versus civilians deaths is murkier business than totaling the overall body count, even leaving aside the question of the methodology that enabled the CLA to "conclusively" identify 580 and inconclusively tag another 200 of the dead as terrorists. One problem is the conflicting definitions of combatant. Are you a combatant if you are a member of Hamas but do not carry arms? Are you a terrorist if you are not a member of Hamas but still went into the streets to defend your neighborhood against Israel's incursion? The CLA appears to be using the loosest possible definition, which naturally maximizes the number fitting into the category.

"One civilian death is one too many," said an ICRC official to me this week when I asked about the CLA's casualty report. Yes, whether there were 895 civilian deaths in Gaza, or "only" 405, the number the CLA seems prepared to acknowledge, most people

would agree that far, far too many civilians died and suffered during the brief but violent Gaza conflict.

Most people would include Israeli activists such as Rabbis for Human Rights, to whom I'll give the last word. The group wanted to hold its annual retreat this year in Ashkelon, to show solidarity with the citizens of southern Israel who were under the bombardment of Hamas rockets. But military orders forbidding big gatherings that could result in large loss of life forced the retreat to be held elsewhere. During the conflict, RHR jointly published newspaper ads in Israel declaring: "Citizens are not cannon fodder--Not in Sderot and not in Gaza."

In his RHR blog on Jan. 12 at the height of the war, Rabbi Arik Ascherman lamented, "During the first week or so of Cast Lead, we were told that the IDF was not harming citizens. It is perhaps a credit to Israelis that this is what they wanted to believe. However, as the numbers of dead children, reports of the IDF not allowing ambulances to get to the injured for days, etc. are gradually creeping into the Israeli press, the standard response has changed to 'We have no choice.'"

At the end of RHR's retreat, the rabbis issued a communique expressing deep distress at the loss of life on both sides. It also emphasized "the ultimate value of human life in the Jewish traditions: 'One who destroys a single life destroys an entire world. One who saves a single life saves an entire world (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5).'"

--By Scott MacLeod/Cairo

### **Remember What Happened Here**

By Charles Krauthammer Wednesday, Jul. 05, 2006

Israel Invades Gaza. That is in response to an attack from Gaza that killed two Israelis and wounded another, who was kidnapped and brought back to Gaza ...which, in turn, was in response to Israel's targeted killing of terrorist leaders in Gaza...which, in turn, was in response to the indiscriminate shelling of Israeli towns by rockets launched from Gaza.

Of all the conflicts in the world, the one that seems the most tediously and hopelessly endless is the Arab-Israeli dispute, which has been going on in much the same way, it seems, for 60 years. Just about every story you'll see will characterize Israel's invasion of Gaza as a continuation of the cycle of violence.

Cycles are circular. They have no end. They have no beginning. That is why, as tempting as that figure of speech is to use, in this case it is false. It is as false as calling American attacks on Taliban remnants in Afghanistan part of a cycle of violence between the U.S. and al-Qaeda or, as Osama bin Laden would have it, between Islam and the Crusaders going back to 1099. Every party has its grievances--even Hitler had his list when he invaded Poland in 1939--but every conflict has its origin.

What is so remarkable about the current wave of violence in Gaza is that the event at the origin of the "cycle" is not at all historical, but very contemporary. The event is not buried in the mists of history. It occurred less than one year ago. Before the eyes of the whole world, Israel left Gaza. Every Jew, every soldier, every military installation, every remnant of Israeli occupation was uprooted and taken away.

How do the Palestinians respond? What have they done with Gaza, the first Palestinian territory in history to be independent, something neither the Ottomans nor the British nor the Egyptians nor the Jordanians, all of whom ruled Palestinians before the Israelis, ever permitted? On the very day of Israel's final pullout, the Palestinians began firing rockets out of Gaza into Israeli towns on the other side of the border. And remember: those are attacks not on settlers but on civilians in Israel proper, the pre-1967 Israel that the international community recognizes as legitimately part of sovereign Israel, a member state of the U.N. A thousand rockets have fallen since.

For what possible reason? Before the withdrawal, attacks across the border could have been rationalized with the usual Palestinian mantra of occupation, settlements and so on. But what can one say after the withdrawal?

The logic for those continued attacks is to be found in the so-called phase plan adopted in 1974 by the Palestine National Council in Cairo. Realizing that they would never be able to destroy Israel in one fell swoop, the Palestinians adopted a graduated plan to wipe out Israel. First, accept any territory given to them in any part of historic Palestine. Then, use that sanctuary to wage war until Israel is destroyed.

So in 2005 the Palestinians are given Gaza, free of any Jews. Do they begin building the state they say they want, constructing schools and roads and hospitals? No. They launch rockets at civilians and dig a 300-yard tunnel under the border to attack Israeli soldiers and bring back a hostage.

And this time the terrorism is carried out not by some shadowy group that the Palestinian leader can disavow, however disingenuously. This is Hamas in action--the group that was recently elected to lead the Palestinians. At least there is now truth in advertising: a Palestinian government openly committed to terrorism and to the destruction of a member state of the U.N. openly uses terrorism to carry on its war.

That is no cycle. That is an arrow. That is action with a purpose. The action began 59 years ago when the U.N. voted to solve the Palestine conundrum then ruled by Britain by creating a Jewish state and a Palestinian state side by side. The Jews accepted the compromise; the Palestinians rejected it and joined five outside Arab countries in a war to destroy the Jewish state and take all the territory for themselves.

They failed, and Israel survived. That remains, in the Palestinian view, Israel's original sin, the foundational crime for the cycle: Israel's survival. That's the reason for the rockets, for the tunneling, for the kidnapping--and for Israel's current response.

If that history is too ancient, consider the history of the past 12 months. Gaza is free of occupation, yet Gaza wages war. Why? Because this war is not about occupation, but about Israel's very existence. The so-called cycle will continue until the arrow is abandoned and the Palestinians accept a compromise--or until the arrow finds its mark and Israel dies.

Georgia/Russia

**Russia-Georgia conflict: Why both sides have valid points**

As Russian troops prepare to withdraw from Georgian bases and cities they invaded last week, a look at the two contradictory stories of what happened and why.  
from the August 19, 2008 edition

As Russia's flash war with Georgia winds down, two distinct – and contradictory – stories about what happened and why are taking shape. The Moscow press paints a one-sided picture of a beleaguered Russia forced to respond to naked aggression by a pro-Western adventurer, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, in order to save Russian citizens from "genocide." In the West, some depict the war as a replay of the USSR's invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan, and warning that a resurgent, oil-rich Russia is returning to Soviet-style domination of its neighbors with brute force.

But close examination reveals a more complex picture – one that suggests each side also has some valid points in its defense. Correspondent Fred Weir gives an overview from his longtime perch in Moscow.

Who started the conflict?

There seems little doubt that the conflict began with a massive military assault, launched overnight by Georgia on Aug. 7-8, apparently aimed at retaking the breakaway republic of South Ossetia before Moscow could react.

Human rights monitors and Western journalists now being admitted to the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali can find little evidence to back up Russian claims that the Georgians committed genocide.

But their reports so far implicate the initial Georgian artillery and rocket bombardment of the city of 10,000 people as causing the massive destruction they're finding, including schools, churches, and the main hospital.

Also crucial, from Moscow's point of view, is that the Georgian attack on Aug. 8 killed 15 Russian peacekeeping troops, stationed there under 1992 peace accords, and injured dozens.

But the causes of the conflict run deep and, like the layers of an onion, the conflict has many different levels.

What is Georgia's view?

When the USSR broke up in 1991, Georgia won its independence and was admitted to the United Nations as a sovereign state within its Soviet-era borders. Under international law, therefore, the breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia belong to Georgia. Tbilisi alleges, with considerable evidence, that Russian meddling during the bitter civil wars that followed helped the two statelets win their de facto independence and that Moscow's support has been crucial to keeping them going ever since.

In 2003, the pro-democracy "Rose Revolution" brought Mr. Saakashvili to power on pledges to reunite the country and lead it into the premier Western military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Georgia claims that Russia, which brutally suppressed its own separatist uprising in Chechnya, backed the Ossetian and Abkhazian rebels in order to keep Georgia weak and dependent upon Moscow.

After Saakashvili was elected, Russia began upgrading its relations with the two rebel statelets and issued Russian passports to the majority of its citizens – in preparation, Tbilisi says, for a showdown. It contends that this year, as NATO considered Georgia's application for entry, the Russian 58th Army – which roared into South Ossetia 10 days ago to blunt the Georgian assault – massed provocatively near Georgia's border.

The separatists' case?

Abkhazians and Ossetians are both distinct ethnic groups with a long history of tense relations with their Georgian neighbors. Both groups claim that they were folded into the Soviet Republic of Georgia against their will by dictator Joseph Stalin (an ethnic Georgian), who also ordered Georgian settlers to flood into their territories. Abkhazia and Ossetia argue that their citizens were Soviet citizens, never Georgians, and therefore they had a right to declare independence as Soviet Union was collapsing. Tbilisi's reaction, which was to attempt to suppress both rebellions with military force, invalidated Georgia's rights to sovereignty, they say.

Abkhazian Deputy Foreign Minister Maxim Gunjia says that Tbilisi's latest attempt at reconquest settles the issue. "Neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia will ever be part of that country; Georgia has shown us its true face," he says in a telephone conversation from Sukhumi, Abkhazia.

Georgia has traditionally responded to such claims by saying that any independence referendum in the breakaway territories must take into account the views of the Georgian population displaced by the wars of the early 1990s. Nearly a quarter of a million Georgians were driven out of Abkhazia in 1993 and workers from the New York-based Human Rights Watch have found evidence that ethnic Georgian civilians were targeted in the latest fighting in South Ossetia, where nearly a third of the population was Georgian. The UN refugee agency says more than 150,000 have been displaced by fighting in Georgia, including 30,000 in South Ossetia.

What is the Russian position?

Many Russians bristle defensively in the face of Western accusations of "aggression" against Georgia, maintaining that the Kremlin was left with few choices when the Georgians began bombarding Tskhinvali – the capital of South Ossetia, where 9 in 10 residents carry a Russian passport.

Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel, while calling some of Russia's actions "disproportionate" after meeting with President Medvedev, said that "it is rare that all the blame is on one side. In fact, both sides are probably to blame. That is very important to understand."

Many Russian officials here argue that it's not so strange that, as the successor state to the Russian Empire and the USSR, post-Soviet Russia should have ongoing obligations to former subjects such as the Ossetians and the Abkhazians. Russia was a key party to the accords that ended the cycle of conflicts in the early '90s, which left Russian peacekeeping troops holding the tripwire position in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Under a 1992 law that entitled any former Soviet citizen to apply for a Russian passport, most inhabitants of the two breakaway republics have since acquired Russian citizenship. Alexei Mukhin, director of the independent Center for Political Information in Moscow, says that Americans ought to be more understanding, since the US has guaranteed the security of at least one breakaway statelet, Taiwan, with its own military force for over half a century.

More recently, Russian officials point out, NATO fought a 1999 war that was labeled a humanitarian intervention, which wrested the Albanian-populated province of Kosovo away from Serbia. Despite the fact that Serbia, a member of the UN, includes Kosovo within its sovereign territory, most Western powers recognized Kosovo's self-declared independence earlier this year.

Russia opposed the Kosovo war and later argued that the West should preserve Serbia's territorial integrity by convincing the Kosovars to accept Serbian offers of sweeping autonomy instead of independence. Now that Kosovo's independence has been effectively granted – though it has not been admitted to the UN – the Kremlin warns the West has upset the rules that formerly covered separatist movements around the world. Some extreme nationalist politicians in Moscow, jubilant about this Kosovo precedent, say it's only a matter of time before Russia follows suit, and unilaterally recognizes Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and perhaps other breakaway statelets in the post-Soviet region as well.

Are President Saakashvili's democratic credentials solid?

The West has rallied around Georgia and its embattled president, Saakashvili, who was overwhelmingly elected by Georgians after leading the "Rose Revolution," which culminated in Saakashvili and his supporters storming the parliament building mid-session. But no Georgian transition of power has ever occurred in a constitutional way: Saakashvili's predecessors, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Eduard Shevardnadze, were removed by revolutions, not democratic elections.

Saakashvili's own record in power has been mixed. He's made great strides in fighting Georgia's endemic corruption and, in 2004, he peacefully persuaded another breakaway region, Adjara, to return to central government control.

But last November, he shocked many by ordering riot troops to violently disperse peaceful protesters in Tbilisi, and declaring a draconian state of emergency – though he quickly rescinded it. His decision to invade South Ossetia has Georgia's opposition muttering that it may be time for him to go.

[Editor's Note: The original version misidentified NATO.]

Kosovo

### **'The Balkanization Of Europe'**

The European Union, NATO and the United Nations are all turning a blind eye to the troubles in the Balkans.

By Denis MacShane | NEWSWEEK

From the magazine issue dated Jun 16, 2008

Europe's recurring nightmare in the Balkans has returned. On June 15, Kosovo will announce full statehood. But NATO is allowing Serbs to turn northern Kosovo into a new law-free zone for criminal activity. In March, in the northern city of Mitrovica, Serb thugs, unleashed and armed by Belgrade, launched a full-scale assault against NATO and United Nations forces, killing one soldier and wounding 83 others. During Macedonia's election earlier this month, the police opened fire and killed a political activist who was angry about the open stuffing of ballot boxes and other crude election manipulation. The strange thing was that the ruling party did not even need to fix the election—it had the votes it needed to win. But like the scorpion in the fable, Balkan politicians just keep stinging themselves to death.

The West's response: near silence. More than 100 years ago, Bismarck dismissed the region's travails with his remark that "the Balkans were not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier." Today, Brussels, NATO and the United Nations are also turning a blind eye, lacking the will or the leadership to face down the Balkans' problems, which include a resurgent Serb nationalism that prefers its Balkan history to a European future. NATO intervened massively in Kosovo in 1999 and two years later in Macedonia to curb the anti-Albanian ethnic hostility of Macedonian nationalists. In 2001, NATO General Secretary George Robertson, with EU foreign-affairs duo Chris Patten and Javier Solana, shuttled to Macedonia and forced the Slav majority to treat the minority Albanian population with respect.

But now NATO and the others have let Kosovo slip down their priority list. Crack French troops failed to stop the Serb's March assault on the Mitrovica courthouse, and waited for days while political messages about whether to use military force to face down the Serbs went back and forth between the United Nations and Paris. Britain pulled its soldiers out of Kosovo in 2002 with the hopes that the turmoil in the region would die down. Now, for six short months an Iraq-hardened British Army battle group has been sent to Kosovo, but the Serbs wait patiently, knowing British Army chiefs need their soldiers in Afghanistan.

The EU leadership has also eased pressure on the Serbs. Brussels recently dropped its demand that the Serbs deliver the butcher of Srebrenica, Ratko Mladic, to the Hague tribunal as a pre-condition for talks on EU membership. Worse, while most EU nations recognized Kosovo's right to form its own government, Spain and Greece broke ranks to side with Russian and Serb intransigence. Further undermining the prospect of bringing lasting peace to the region, Spain is now helping Serb nationalists roll back Kosovo's declaration of independence by mounting a diplomatic campaign in Latin America to

dissuade that regions' leaders from granting diplomatic recognition to the fledgling nation. For its part, the United States promised to open NATO's doors to Kosovo's neighbor Macedonia. But at end of George W. Bush's presidency, the United States has little diplomatic leverage, leaving Greece confident enough to snub Washington and kill Macedonia's NATO hopes in a surreal dispute over what Macedonia's name should be. Into this power vacuum comes Russia, which has always seen the Balkans as its backyard and has meddled endlessly in the region. For many Balkan Slavs, Russia remains popular as the 19th-century liberator of the Balkans from Ottoman rule. Today, Moscow is seeking to cast its authority over the region in an effort to prove to Washington and Brussels that it has returned as a foreign-policy heavyweight. Montenegro is almost a new Russian colony, as rubles flow in to buy property and business in the tiny state, and Russia is using money and energy contracts to buy favors and influence in the rest of the Balkans. Serb nationalists talk openly of siding with Moscow and ditching Belgrade's proclaimed EU ambitions. The United Nations has also allowed Russia to block the implementation of the carefully balanced plan put up by former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari, which set out how Kosovo could move toward independence with full protection for Serb and other minorities.

And so the Balkans now moves backward, toward sectarian nationalism, flawed elections, lawless economics and a politics corroded by corruption, cronyism and criminality—all of which confirm the ancient prejudices about the region. In Bismarck's era it was possible to leave the Balkans to stew in its own mess. But now a bad bit of southeast Europe contaminates the whole continent. Rather than using the rule of law to defeat the traffickers, smugglers, election fraudsters and mobsters, the EU member states' desire to placate Belgrade is allowing bad old Balkans behavior to re-emerge. EU member nations like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Spain openly defy the rest of the Union's desire to allow Kosovo to govern itself. Instead of coming together, the EU and NATO members are squabbling with one another and putting their own national obsessions and interests ahead of a common European policy. This trend gives rise to the fear that instead of seeing the Europeanization of the Balkans, we are witnessing the creeping Balkanization of Europe.

MacShane, a Labour M.P., was Britain's Europe minister in Tony Blair's government.

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Pakistan