

Good news from the Arab world



FAREED ZAKARIA

SINCE September 11, 2001, I've written a column once a year pointing out the good news, which is that Islamic extremism is losing. The movement, in all of its variations, has been unable to garner mass support in any Muslim country. While people still despise many of their governments—and that of the United States—this has not translated into support for Osama bin Laden's ideas. It doesn't mean the end of terrorism by a long shot. Small groups of people can do great harm in today's world. But it does mean that the political engine producing this religious radicalism is not gaining steam.

In those places in the Muslim world where political life is open, the evidence is overwhelming. The 2004 elections in Malaysia and Indonesia saw secular parties trounce Islamic ones. Malaysia's case is particularly instructive. Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi ran on a platform of reform and good government, reckoning that voters cared more about ending corruption than enacting Islamic law. The result was a devastating defeat for the Islamist party, its worst showing in 30 years.

In 2004, however, one can point to more than simply the absence of support for fundamentalism. There are glimmers of reform, even in the Arab world, the place which remains the locus of the problem. Governments are talking about changing their economic and even political systems. Some are even doing more than talking. Jordan has begun serious economic reforms. Egypt, which remains the most tragic case of lost potential in the Arab world, could be rousing from its slumber. An energetic new prime minister has appointed a team with strong reformist credentials, including businessmen in the Cabinet (a first in Egypt). The reforms they have proposed are bold and far-reaching. Markets are taking note: Egyptian stocks are up 100 per cent this year.

This early enthusiasm could

easily dissipate. Arab elites remain enormously resistant to reform and will try to scuttle plans for change. But I sense that the dinosaurs are on the defensive. For the first time other views are being aired. Consider the contrast between two conferences on reform held in the last 10 days. The first, the official Forum for the Future held in Morocco, ended with the

Maktoum, Dubai's ruler, said pointedly in his opening address, "I cannot see why a crisis, no matter how severe, should delay economic reform or plans to eradicate illiteracy...What is the relation between foreign affairs and corruption?"

Interestingly, these voices are mainly being heard from the Persian Gulf, which has now become the centre of reform in the Arab world.

creasing divide in the Arab world between the small, nimble states on the periphery—the Gulf states, Jordan, Morocco—and the slumbering giants.

Although many in the region would be dismayed by this division, it is a healthy development. Pan-Arabism, which was never more than hot air anyway, has been one of the ideologies that has kept Arabs



Ex-US president Bill Clinton with Dubai ruler al-Maktoum (right) at Arab Strategy Forum

The Persian Gulf has now become the centre of reform in the Arab world. Dubai is far ahead of all others in terms of economic openness and efficiency. But Qatar and Bahrain are moving in the same direction. It is a strange reversal. In the 1950s and 1960s, the large Arab states, led by Egypt, were seen as the modernising forces in the region. The Gulf monarchies were backward Bedouin societies

foreign ministers of the region endorsing reform, but adding that it couldn't happen until the establishment of a Palestinian state. Some also insisted that Iraq be free of foreign troops. These are the usual, strange excuses for repression and oligarchy in the Arab world. "Until foreign policy problems are solved," the governments seem to be saying, "we have no choice but to keep punishing our people."

But now there are Arab voices saying, "enough". At Dubai's Arab Strategy Forum a few days later, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-

Dubai is far ahead of all others in terms of economic openness and efficiency. But Qatar and Bahrain are moving in the same direction with radical plans. It is a strange reversal. In the 1950s and 1960s, the large Arab states, led by Egypt, were seen as the modernising forces in the region. The Gulf monarchies were backward Bedouin societies. Now progress, at least economic progress, is coming from the Gulf, while countries like Syria appear to be stuck in the Stone Age.

Indeed, despite the stirrings in Egypt, what is most likely is an in-

from modernising. Competition will force each state to focus on its own future. And as some succeed, others will follow, and regional trade and tourism—currently abysmally low—will expand. Perhaps this will forge a new Arab community, one created by the realities of contact, culture and commerce rather than war, rhetoric and politics.

We're a long way away from all this. But in the spirit of the season, let's give thanks for glimmers of hope.

Courtesy Newsweek Inc

23 DEC 2004

INDIAN EXPRESS

Saudis recall envoy from Libya over plot

Riyadh, Dec. 22 (Reuters): Saudi Arabia recalled its ambassador in Tripoli today over what it called an "atrocious" Libyan plot to assassinate the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Abdullah.

The Saudi action is the latest sign of the near-collapse in ties between Saudi Arabia and the north African state, though Libya has denied the accusation.

"The procedure we took is to recall the Saudi ambassador from Libya and ask that Libya withdraws its ambassador," foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal said. "A memorandum will be handed over to the Libyan government today." Prince Saud said the kingdom's move was a restrained response to an "atrocious" incident. A US court sentenced prominent Muslim activist Abdurahman al-Amoudi in October to 23 years jail for illegal financial dealings with Libya and for his role in the plot.

Amoudi, founder of the American Muslim Council and head of the American Muslim Federation, said in court documents that he had contacted Saudi dissidents in London on behalf of some Libyan officials to kill the crown prince.

A Saudi diplomat had said that Mohamed Ismael, a Libyan intelligence officer, and his four-man team were organising the plot in the holy city of Mecca last year and that a bank account with \$1 million had raised suspicion about them.

He said the money trail led to the exposure of the team, after which Ismael fled to Egypt, which then extradited him to Saudi Arabia.

The US, backed by Britain, asked the UN yesterday to freeze the assets of exiled Saudi dissident Saad al-Fagih, who Riyadh also accuses of involvement in the assassination plan.

Prince Saud said the request was connected to the "Libyan conspiracy ... the kingdom has suffered from".

Fagih heads the London-based Movement for Islamic

Reform in Arabia, which says it aims to topple the monarchy by peaceful means. He said the US action was an attempt to appease the Saudi royal family.

Saudi officials accuse Fagih of exploiting social and economic discontent in the kingdom to further his radical Islamic cause. His group recently called for anti-government demonstrations in the kingdom, but they failed to materialise after the authorities took sweeping security precautions.

The US has listed Fagih as a "specially designated global terrorist" and accused him of supporting al Qaida and its leader Osama bin Laden.

The US investigation into the plot began as Washington

and London were welcoming back into the international community their long-time adversary, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, after he decided to dismantle his weapons of mass destruction.

23 DEC 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

Saudi Arabia alert over anti-monarchy protests

Associated Press

RIYADH, Dec. 16. — Saudi police arrested two men who fired a pistol in the air near a spot where anti-monarchists had planned an illegal demonstration today.

Officials said police did not return fire after the incident in the Red Sea port of Jeddah, but chased down the two and arrested them.

The two are likely to be linked to exiled, London-based dissident, Saad Al-Fagih, who had called for the protests in Jeddah and Riyadh.

Saudi police, some in riot gear and bearing clubs, were on the streets here from early morning today.

ready to stop anti-monarchy protesters from holding the illegal demonstration. Security was also beefed up in Jeddah.

A helicopter flew in an overcast sky as policemen in brown winter uniforms stood next to their parked cars along two parallel thoroughfares — Olaya Street and King Fahd Road. The roads run along the Al-Faisaliah complex which houses hotels, an office tower building and a popular mall. Scores of helmeted riot police carrying short clubs also were in the area. Around noon, some of the riot police bowed to pray along one of the main roads near the assembly point. But protesters did not gather after mid-day prayers as planned.

The American and British embassies have warned their citizens to stay away from protest areas.

The complex where the Riyadh protest was planned belongs to the children of the late King Faisal, who introduced girls' education in the 1960s despite fierce objections from conservative Saudis.

Saad Al-Fagih, head of the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, had called via his TV, radio and web site for simultaneous protests in Riyadh and Jeddah.

The group failed to pull off protests last month. Last year, it mobilised only about 100 protesters in Riyadh and similar numbers in Jeddah, Dammam and Hail, partly because of security measures.

While some Saudis question Al-Fagih's motives and liberal credentials, he is believed to have strong support among the masses, where his criticism of the Saudi royal family's excesses strikes a chord.

Al-Fagih's web site had maps and directions for demonstration sites in Riyadh and Jeddah today. The maps designated special places for women and others for men — mixing of the sexes in public is banned in this country.

Some Saudi intellectuals, however, scoff at Al-Fagih. "Al-Fagih, a liberal? That's a joke," said Turki al-Hamad, a columnist and former political science professor. "Does he want to set up a Taliban-like regime in Saudi? Any corrupt government will be better than that," he said.

Osama targets Riyadh



DUBAI, Dec. 16. — Osama bin Laden today called on his fighters to strike Gulf oil supplies and warned Saudi leaders that they risked a popular uprising in an audio message purportedly delivered by him.

"Take *Jihad* (holy war) to stop (the Americans) getting hold of (the oil). Concentrate your operations on the oil, in particular in Iraq and the Gulf," the voice said. The lengthy message also warned Riyadh's rulers that "the people have woken up" and laid the blame for the deadly unrest gripping the country on the kingdom's own regime. "Muslims are determined to recover their rights, whatever the price. Either you give them back what they entrusted you with (power), by allowing them to choose their rulers, or you refuse to give power back to them." It was the first purported statement from Osama, since 29 October. — AFP



An army helicopter hovers over Riyadh streets on Thursday. — AFP

17 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

আল কায়দা হানা জেড্ডার মার্কিন দূতাবাসে, নিহত ১২

জেড্ডা (সৌদি আরব), ৬ ডিসেম্বর: কড়া নিরাপত্তাবেষ্টিত সত্ত্বেও জেড্ডার মার্কিন কনসুলেটে ঢুকে আজ হামলা চালিয়েছে ইসলামি জঙ্গিরা। সংঘর্ষে পাঁচ জন সাধারণ মানুষ, চার সৌদি নিরাপত্তারক্ষী ও তিন জঙ্গি নিহত। আহত অবস্থায় গ্রেফতার করা হয়েছে আরও দুই জঙ্গিকে। তবে কোনও মার্কিন নাগরিক হতাহত হননি। আঠারো জন নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীকে জঙ্গিরা পণবন্দি করে রেখেছিল। পরে তাঁদের মুক্ত করা হয়। এখনও পর্যন্ত কোনও জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী এই হামলার দায় স্বীকার না-করলেও সৌদি স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রকের ইঙ্গিত, হামলায় লাদেনের আল কায়দা গোষ্ঠীরই হাত রয়েছে। মে মাসে খোবারের আবাসন চত্বরে আল কায়দা হামলার পর সৌদি আরবে এটাই বড় মাপের জঙ্গি-হামলা।

সৌদি স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রকের মুখপাত্র টিভিতে এক বিবৃতিতে বলেছেন, কনসুলেটের মূল প্রবেশপথ এড়িয়ে পাশের একটি ছোট গেট দিয়ে হ্যান্ড গ্রেনেড ছুড়তে ছুড়তে ভিতরে ঢুকে পড়ে জঙ্গিরা। সি এন এন-এর খবর, তারা দুটি গেটে গ্রেনেড ছুড়ে ঢুকেছিল। কড়া পাহারার জন্য গাড়ি নিয়ে ভিতরে ঢুকতে পারেনি। মার্কিন ও সৌদি নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীদের ডিঙিয়ে কনসুলেটে ঢুকে জঙ্গিরা মার্কিন পতাকাটি নামিয়ে তাতে আগুন লাগিয়ে দেয়। চত্বরের ভিতরেই ১৮ জন রক্ষীকে কিছুক্ষণ পণবন্দি করেছিল

জঙ্গিরা। পরে নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীরা তাঁদের মুক্ত করেন। দূতাবাসের মুখপাত্র ক্যারল কালিন বলেছেন, “কনসুলেটে যে ক’জন মার্কিন আছেন, তাঁদের সবাইয়ের খোঁজ নেওয়া হয়েছে। কেউ পণবন্দি হয়নি। সকালের শিফটের স্থানীয় কর্মীদের খোঁজ চলছে।” নিরাপত্তাবাহিনী সূত্রের খবর, নিরাপদে আছেন কনসুলেটের সব কর্মীই। আহতের সঠিক সংখ্যা জানা না-গেলেও দূতাবাস চত্বর থেকে বহু অ্যাড্‌ভল্যান্স বার হতে দেখা গিয়েছে। বাড়িটি থেকে আগুনের শিখা ও ধোঁয়ার কুণ্ডলীর বের হতে দেখেছেন প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীরা। নিরাপত্তার কারণে রিয়ারের মার্কিন দূতাবাস এবং জেড্ডা ও দেহরানে বিভিন্ন দেশের কনসুলেট আপাতত বন্ধ। মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট বুশ ওয়াশিংটনে বলেছেন, “সন্ত্রাসবাদীরা এখনও সক্রিয়, ওরা চাইছে আমরা ইরাক, সৌদি আরব ছেড়ে চলে যাই।”

২০০৩ সালের মে মাস থেকে সৌদি আরবে বিদেশি ও নিরাপত্তা রক্ষীদের উপর বার বার হামলা চালাচ্ছে আল কায়দা। গত দেড় বছরে বিচ্ছিন্ন জঙ্গি হামলার ঘটনায় নিরাপত্তা রক্ষী, বিদেশি নাগরিক ও জঙ্গি-সহ প্রায় ১৭০ জন নিহত হয়েছেন।

স্পেনে বিস্ফোরণ। স্পেনের বিভিন্ন জায়গায় আজ সাতটি বিস্ফোরণে আহত হয়েছেন অন্তত তিন জন। বাস্ক বিচ্ছিন্নতাবাদীরাই এর জন্য দায়ী বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। — রয়টার্স

Arab fury at murder by Marine

Agencies
Dubai, November 17

ARABS WERE torn between seething rage at images of a US soldier shooting dead a wounded Iraqi in a mosque and dismay at Iraqi insurgents in Fallujah for turning holy mosques into battlegrounds.

Viewers said images, which Arab televisions aired repeatedly of a Marine killing a severely injured Iraqi, fuelled growing hatred against America and helped create more "terrorists".

"I am not a jihadi, I am just a normal Muslim but such scenes are pushing me to Jihad," said Dubai-based engineer Abdallah. "We don't expect this from the representative of democracy in the world." "This is one of the things we saw on TV. God knows

how many crimes they have committed which we have not seen," he added. "When I saw the video, I wished I had a stronger gun and (could) spray that soldier with 100 bullets in his head," said 39-year-old Issam Mohammed, who sells sodas.

Ironically, the video's very existence is because of the US military's prewar decision to "embed" journalists with troops. That decision was inspired in part by a hope that bringing reporters along would help counter any distorted charges about what US troops were doing.

The scene was captured by Kevin Sites, a freelance reporter working on contract for NBC News, and his photographer. They were with Marines on Saturday when the troops entered a mosque in Fallujah.



A displaced Iraqi girl waits to be evacuated from Fallujah.

In Saudi Arabia — the birthplace of Islam and of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, whose group carried out bombings in the country — residents said insurgents were to blame for tak-

ing their battle into mosques.

"If I was in the US soldier's place I would have killed all the insurgents because they are mercenaries," said Saudi Zaher al-Saleh, a 32-year-old teacher. "They have turned the mosques into battlefields and they're killing civilians."

Islamist extremists called for revenge through their websites and cursed pro-US Muslim leaders for remaining silent. "Oh God your enemies have killed your believers in one of your houses. God take revenge for us," one chatter said.

Some Muslims saw the killing as a personal affront. "It's as if they had killed every one of us. Today, it's that poor man, tomorrow, it will be me," said Sherine Mohamed, 27, a financial analyst. "Even if militants didn't re-

spect mosque sanctities, US soldiers should have done so because they claim to help Iraqis."

Muslims said pictures showing Marines lounging with their guns in a Fallujah mosque were "insulting". They said soldiers "sullied the ground with their boots" at the mosque where Muslims are obliged to take off their shoes in respect for the house of God.

International human rights groups said the killing could amount to a war crime and showed the need to better train US forces about the laws of war.

The UAE's *Al-Ittihad* newspaper said the killing was "shocking and provocative". "If this crime goes unpunished it will set a dangerous precedent in US policies and will destroy everything (good) it has done for Iraq," it added.

60 cops abducted, dozens killed

Agence France-Presse
Baghdad, November 17

DOZENS OF people, many of them women and children, were killed or wounded in attacks across Iraq today amid reports that more than 60 Iraqi policemen have been kidnapped.

The policemen were seized on Sunday as they returned from training in Jordan, one of only two men who managed to escape the ambush said today.

They were staying in a hotel near the Jordanian border in western Iraq when they were attacked by a group of up to 20 armed men, said the policeman from the southern Iraqi town of Karbala.

"We were around 65 policemen returning from training in Jordan when around 20 masked gunmen entered our hotel in Trebil on Sunday morning," he said. "They hooded all the policemen, tied their hands and took them away." Leith Naama al-Kaabi said. Iraq's security forces are the target of almost daily attacks by insurgents across the war-torn country.

On October 16, nine policemen from the Karbala region were killed, also on their way back from a training session in Jordan, when their convoy was ambushed in the so-called "death triangle" south of Baghdad.



US troops take cover after they came under fire following a car bomb attack on a civilian convoy in Baghdad on Wednesday.

18 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Riyadh announces Al-Qaida leader's death

AGENCIES

RIYADH, June 19. — Saudi Arabia announced today it had dealt a body blow to al-Qaida gunmen who have terrorised Western residents of the kingdom, by killing their alleged chief Abdul Aziz al-Muqrin and three associates and arresting 12 others.

The Interior Ministry said the four were shot dead by security forces in Riyadh last night, shortly after "al-Qaida in the Arabian peninsula" posted grisly photos on websites showing the beheading of American aeronautics engineer Paul Johnson. The victim's head was placed on his back.

The beheading, which sparked international outrage, climaxed in a spate of fatal attacks against Westerners in Riyadh and other parts of the kingdom since early May.

Malaz district by security forces, and a heavy exchange of fire" ensued.

The television showed photos of the bloodied dead bodies of Muqrin and the other slain militants.

The statement and footage came after a communique in the name of al-Qaida was posted on an Islamist website denying that the network's Saudi chief had been killed.

The authenticity of the denial, appearing on an Internet forum where past statements and claims have been posted, could not be verified.

"Some satellite networks and news agencies have been propagating the false news that Abdel Aziz al-Muqrin, God preserve him, has been killed," the statement said. "We would like to say that such claims, unleashed by the tyrants of Saudi Arabia, are aimed at dissuading the

holy warriors and crushing their spirits."

The killing of al-Muqrin, 31, would be a coup for the Saudi government, which has been pressed to halt a wave of attacks against Westerners in the kingdom.

One of the photographs, the Saudi TV announcer said Muqrin was the kingdom's most-wanted terror suspect. It showed the face of a young man, clean-shaven except for his moustache and resembling past pictures believed to be of al-Muqrin, apparently dead.

US company hosts video footage: Hackers commandeered the website of a California company to post videos of the American hostage before he was beheaded. The company broke the link when it learned its servers were being used to disseminate the footage, said the owner.



A TV grab of the Al-Qaida leader's body. — AFP

"Abdul Aziz bin Issa al-Muqrin, who claimed to head the gang of takfeer and issued statements (claiming responsibility) for assassinations and kidnappings" was one of four gunmen shot last night, said an interior ministry statement on state television.

The four "were besieged in a gas station in the Al-

NEW YORK, June 19 — President Mr George W Bush said the beheading of American hostage Paul Johnson Jr in Saudi Arabia by Islamic militants showed "the evil nature of the enemy we face," and British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair called the slaying "an act of barbarism."

He said: "This shows the nature of the people we are fighting day in, day out, around the world."

French President Mr Jacques Chirac said he was "horrified" by it, denouncing the act as beastly, inhuman and shameful. "I am horrified by the beastly methods... they are at the complete opposite of everything we consider respectable as humans," Mr Chirac said at a summit of European Union leaders in Brussels.

"I can only express the shame that we all feel faced with the behavior coming from human beings of this nature."

ASSOCIATED PRESS

UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi

World condemns killing of hostage

Nawaf Obaid, a security consultant to the Saudi government, said Friday in an interview from London.

Speaking a day after the State Department strongly urged Americans to avoid going to Saudi Arabia and those there to leave, Secretary of state Mr Colin Powell said in a radio interview on Friday: "If they leave, then the terrorists have won, and I don't think either the Saudis, the Americans, or these brave folks who work in Saudi Arabia want the terrorists to win." — AP

those responsible to the brought to justice. "Such acts do not represent the values of Islam," the statement said. Condemnation also came from one of America's staunchest foes, Syria, who called it a "shameful crime."

Johnson's family: Grieving over Jr, are hoping for privacy as they decide what to do next, according to a family spokesman.

Americans not leaving yet...

WASHINGTON, June 19. — If the recent past is any guide, the beheading of Paul Johnson is unlikely to trigger a mass exodus from Saudi Arabia.

Most Americans in the kingdom have not heeded repeated State Department warnings that they get out, security consultants and analysts said.

"You can't expect 30,000 Americans to pack up and leave,"

Annan said "these kinds of brutal acts do not help anybody." "My sympathies go to his family and loved, and I hope the perpetrators would eventually be brought to justice because we cannot tolerate this kind of behavior in today's world," he said at the UN headquarters in New York.

In Amman, the Jordanian government issued a statement condemning the "barbaric act" and calling for

Qaida threatens to kill US hostage

Reuters

Riyadh, June 16

THE AL-QAIDA has threatened to kill an American hostage if the Saudi government fails to free jailed militants within 72 hours.

The guerrillas have released images of a blindfolded hostage wearing an orange uniform on a website. "My name is Paul Marshall Johnson and I am a US citizen," a slurred voice with an American accent said in a recording on an Islamist website on Tuesday. "I work for Apache helicopters."

The threat to kill Johnson, which follows a spate of suicide bombings and shootings in the past six weeks, raised the stakes in al-Qaida's war to topple the kingdom's pro-US monarchy and drive out Westerners from the

world's largest oil exporter.

"If the tyrants in the Saudi government want to secure the release of the American, they must release our mujahideen held hostage in its jails. They have 72 hours from today or else we will sacrifice him," said an al-Qaida statement carried on Sawt al-Jihad website.

The statement justified kidnapping Johnson, saying, "The gunfire of Apache helicopters was killing Muslims in Afghanistan and Palestine."

It was signed by the al-Qaida Organisation in the Arabian Peninsula. Sawt al-Jihad has carried similar messages in the past. It also claimed responsibility for killing American Kenneth Scroggs, who was shot dead recently.

A Saudi government spoke-

sman said they were looking into the situation and would consult the US on what actions to take.

A US State Department official said Washington would use appropriate resources to gain Johnson's safe release in cooperation with the Saudi government. The US embassy in Riyadh declined to comment on the latest Internet statement and images of Johnson.

"The blood of Muslims is being spilled all over the globe and by the will of God, the blood of this parasite will flow in the rivers of blood of Crusaders that will run this blessed year," the statement said.

"Muslims in the East and the West, we took a vow upon ourselves to make you victorious and we will not fail," it added.



AP

A videograph of blindfolded American hostage Paul Johnson being held in Saudi Arabia.

Mass exodus fear stalks hostage-hit Riyadh

Riyadh, June 13 (Reuters): Saudi and US authorities are working closely to locate an American engineer who al Qaeda said it had kidnapped after it killed another US national in the capital Riyadh, security sources said today.

The kidnapping added a new twist to al Qaeda's campaign to drive Western "infidels" from the kingdom and oust the Saudi royal family who they deem "ungodly and subservient to America".

Riyadh's police chief denied reports that the body of a Westerner had been found in the streets of the capital. Earlier today, diplomats and security sources said a body, thought to be

that of a westerner, had been found dumped near a building.

Saudi and US authorities are still trying to locate US engineer Paul M. Johnson, 45, who al Qaeda claimed it had kidnapped yesterday.

"We are working with local authorities to find him," a US embassy spokeswoman said.

Yesterday's killing of a US national, the sixth attack on Westerners in six weeks, rattled tens of thousands of expatriates in the world's largest oil exporter, prompting fears of mass exodus.

Police, hunting for militants, said they sealed off two areas in Riyadh and arrested two suspects. It was not immediately clear whether the action was

linked to the killing and kidnapping.

US secretary of state Colin Powell today cited a worsening security situation in Saudi Arabia and said the US was determined to do all it could to defeat "terrorists".

"Clearly this is a dangerous time for Saudi Arabia and we're working with them and cooperating with them in every way we can to defeat these terrorists," Powell told NBC. "It's not unraveling, but it's certainly a dangerous situation."

Powell told Fox News that Riyadh could do more to combat the attacks, though he was satisfied with their efforts so far.

"The Saudis now know that

they have a very serious problem within the kingdom and they know that it is going to require all their resources," Powell said.

Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for kidnapping Johnson and killing American Kenneth Scroggs yesterday in a statement on an Islamist website.

Witnesses said Scroggs, who worked for Advanced Electronics Co., was shot as he parked his car in front of his villa in a Riyadh suburb.

Britain said today it had authorised non-essential staff at the British embassy and their relatives to leave the country if they wished. The US has urged its citizens to leave.

Saudi-born Osama bin

Laden's al Qaeda, blamed for the September 11, 2001 attacks on US cities, has vowed 2004 would be "bloody and miserable" for the kingdom, a key US ally.

Fears about Saudi security helped push world oil prices to record highs this month before producers pledged to hike output.

Al Qaeda said yesterday's killing and kidnapping were to avenge US mistreatment of Muslim prisoners in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Expatriates are concerned that the assaults are increasing in momentum and that militants are escaping unharmled from Saudi security forces. So far,

none of the militants responsible for the latest attacks have been arrested.

But Saudi analysts said the government must improve intelligence rather than carry out a random military crackdown.

"These groups are divided into small cells which are spread out. The only way to know when they are going to hit next is to penetrate them. You cannot guard the entire kingdom so it is a matter of intelligence," Khalid al-Dakheel said.

The website that carried the kidnapping claim also posted a video showing the purported killing of another American, military contractor Robert Jacobs, in Riyadh on Tuesday.



Paul M. Johnson

The Al-Qaida attack at Al-Khobar over the weekend has only deepened the divide in the Saudi royal family. Who are the reformists, will they triumph? What is the identity and gameplan of the conservatives in the House of Saud? MICHAEL BINYON provides an overview

Princes jostle in power game

THE House of Saud is one of the world's most enduring ruling dynasties. Its stability has given it experience and family ties have held it together through strains and emergencies. Now the royal family faces a crisis.

Its leading members are all in their late 70s. It has no strategy for succession. Disagreements on policy are sharpening. And, faced with an open declaration of war by Al-Qaida, it is fighting for its existence.

With its many branches, the Saudi royal family comprises at least 20,000 members in all. Most have little power or influence, but all have had a claim on the public purse. Their collective extravagance and antics abroad are a main reason why the family is perceived as corrupt by many religious Saudis and why there is widespread resentment of royal privileges.

The real rulers, however, are a far smaller, close-knit group, mostly the immediate children of Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, the founder and unifier of the kingdom, who died in 1953.

The present King, Fahd, is largely out of the picture after his stroke in 1996. A shrewd and experienced monarch who came to the throne in 1982, he has become an invalid incapable of further rule.

His younger half-brother, Abdullah, is the *de facto* ruler, and he is now 80. Abdullah was considered more cautious and conservative than Fahd, closer to the Wahhabi religious establishment and less dependent on Washington for backing. But the crisis in relations with the USA after 9/11 has changed his views.

Crown Prince Abdullah is now a regular visitor to Washington, a confidant of President Bush and has promised to crack down on Al-Qaida terrorism "with an iron fist". He has also gone further than any previous king to offer an accommodation with Israel, in the hope of a settlement that would defuse anger in the Arab world and ease widespread anti-US sentiment in Saudi Arabia.



The assumption is that another of the so-called "Sudairi Seven", the powerful sons of ibn Saud's favourite wife, will take over from Abdullah when he dies. The next in line is Prince Sultan, defence minister since 1962, who has close links with the USA. His son, Prince Bandar, is the long serving Saudi Ambassador to Washington.

Two other brothers are in the line of succession. One is Prince Nayif, the hardline interior minister, who has been in office since 1975 and is largely responsible for the crackdown on liberals and attempts at reform. He is seen as conservative, strongly anti-Western and close to the religious establishment.

The other is Prince Salman, the Governor of Riyadh. A pragmatist and moderniser, he has less influence with the Wahhabi religious hierarchy.

Succession is not automatic, however; it is decided by a grand family council. And there are other plausible contenders from the younger generation. The most experienced is Prince Saud-al Faisal, the son of the former revered King, who was assassinated in 1975. He has been foreign minister for more than two decades. His brother, Prince Turki, is Ambassador to Britain. The youngest son of King Fahd, Prince Abdul Aziz, has also been groomed for power, and both Prince Bandar and his brother, Khalid, deputy defence minister since 2002, have strong claims to office.

The family is divided over how much the government should encourage reform to satisfy calls for democracy and how much it should launch a conservative crackdown to appease the Islamists and the religious establishment.

Crown Prince Abdullah is thought to favour gradual reform; but the recent violent attacks have strengthened the calls of Prince Nayif and others for a purge of the liberals and a more Islamic policy.

WITNESS SAYS 'THEY TARGETED AMERICANS AND WESTERNERS' Hostage crisis over, 22 dead

Agencies

DUBAI, May 30. — Commandos today ended a 25-hour hostage drama storming a luxury housing complex in the Saudi Arabian oil city of Al-Khobar, freeing over 50 people held captive by the militants who carried out twin attacks killing 22 persons including eight Indians.

While Lawrence Gregory Monice from Mangalore, Karnataka, one of the eight Indians, was killed in the cross-fire between Saudi forces and the ultras, the other Indian nationals were gunned down by the Al-Qaida operatives, sources in Saudi Arabia said.

The other Indians, mostly employees of Saudi maintenance company Saad Corporation and located in the Oasis Housing Complex, were identified as 45-year-old PK Pradeep Kumar (Kerala), JN Jose (Kerala), Charles Clethens Carlos, John Fernando (Goa), Suresh Kumar and J Ram (both from Rajasthan) and Vikram (Bihar), the sources said.

A statement issued by Saudi interior ministry said while three of the four Al-Qaida terrorists who

carried out the attacks, managed to escape, one of them was arrested in an injured condition.

Beside the Indians killed in the incident, the other dead comprised three Filipinos, three Saudis, two Sri Lankans, an American, a Briton, an Italian, a Swede, a South African and an Egyptian, the interior ministry statement said.

At least one Indian — Qasim Abdul Gaffar — was among the 25 people injured in the 25-hour assault and he was admitted to a hospital where he was stated to be out of danger.

An Indian national, Venkatamani Bhaskar, an employee of Hewlett and Packard in Dubai, was among those rescued by the Saudi security forces, an Indian embassy official said.

American, European and other hostages, including an Indian, were freed after nearly 40 commandos jumped from helicopters on to the roof of the multistoried building called Oasis Housing Compound where the captives were held, the *Al-Jazeera* TV reported.

The Saudi ministry statement read out on national television said security



Saudi special forces take up position in front of the Oasis housing compound on Sunday. — AFP

Saddam's pistol on George Bush's desk

WASHINGTON, May 30. — Mr George W Bush has been given a pistol Saddam Hussein had with him when he was captured and now proudly shows it to selected guests. *Time* magazine reported today. The gun was taken from Saddam by US special forces when they caught the ousted President in a spider hole near his hometown Tikrit last December, the report said. The military had the pistol mounted, and it was presented to the President privately by some of the troops who ferreted out Saddam, *Time* said. Mr Bush now takes select visitors to see the pistol in a small study next to the Oval Office, *Time* said. "He really liked showing it off," the report quotes an unnamed recent visitor to the White House as saying. — AFP

forces evacuated 241 people of different nationalities from the residential complex and a hotel that were targeted by the militants.

An Internet statement signed by "Al-Qaida in the Arab Peninsula" and claiming the attack in the name of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Brigade claimed all of hostages had been killed.

A resident of the Oasis compound, Abdul Salam al-Hakawati, said he, his wife and their two-year-old son hid upstairs after hearing gunfire yesterday morning. Downstairs, he heard gunmen rummaging around and say that "this is a Muslim house," apparently seeing the framed Koranic verses on his walls.

Still, al-Hakawati said a young man in his early 20s, carrying a machine gun and wearing an ammunition belt, came upstairs, spotted him and greeted him in Arabic. The man asked if he was Arab and Muslim. When he said yes, al-Hakawati said the gunman told him: "We only want to hurt Westerners and Americans. Can you tell us where we can find them here?"

Our holy war is against Americans and Westerners, not against Muslims."

Libya pulls out of Arab meet over Israel issue

Tunis, May 22 (Reuters): Libya withdrew from an Arab summit in Tunis today in protest at the agenda and at the Arab League's failure to take up Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's proposal for a single Israeli-Palestinian state.

"Unfortunately, Libya is forced to boycott the summit because it does not agree to the agenda of the Arab governments. Libya wants the agenda of the Arab peoples," Gaddafi told a news conference after walking out of the summit. He said he hoped Libya's basic people's congresses, local councils which decide Libyan policy, would agree to Libyan withdrawal from the Arab League.

Libya has repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the 22-member league and Gaddafi was a reluctant participant in the Tunis meeting, which was meant to present a united Arab front on Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and political reform. Gaddafi criticised the secretariat of the Arab League for shelving his plan, known as a "white paper", to revive a one-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The one state, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river, would include Israelis and Palestinians as equals. Most Arab states favour separate Israeli and Palestinian states living side-by-side.

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Images cause outrage in Arab world

CAIRO, APRIL 30. Arab television stations led their newscasts on Friday with photographs of Iraqi prisoners being humiliated by U.S. military police, with one network saying the pictures were evidence of the "immoral practices" of American forces.

The pictures are potentially inflammatory in the Arab world, where nudity is considered dishonourable. Many Arabs are already angry about the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq.

"This will increase the sense of dissatisfaction among Iraqis toward the Americans," said a member of the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council, Mahmoud Othman. "The resistance people will try to make use of such painful incidents."

Al-Jazeera introduced the pictures by saying they showed the "immoral practices" of Iraq's occupation forces. The anchor reported that some of those responsible would face trial and could be discharged from the Army.

The images caused outrage among viewers as well.

Al-Arabiya's reporter said the pictures posed the question of how many more abuses were occurring without coming to public light. Amnesty International issued a statement from its London headquarters on Friday saying its research indicated that the abuse "is not an isolated incident."

Yemeni human rights activist Mustafa Rageh agreed. "I believe lots of similar scenes are still hidden, and what we have seen today is just a sample," Rageh said. "Such hideous scenes are severely violating human rights' basic principles."

In March, the U.S. Army announced that six members of the 800th Military Police Brigade faced court martial for allegedly abusing about 20 prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The charges included dereliction of duty, cruelty and maltreatment, assault and indecent acts with another person. In addition to those criminal charges, the military has recommended disciplinary action against seven U.S. officers who helped run the prison, including Brig. Gen. Janice Karpinski, the commander of the 800th Brigade. — AP

Tunisia dumps Arab summit, Egypt steps in

Tunis, March 28 (Reuters): Egypt stepped in today to host an Arab summit after Tunisia stunned the Arab world with a unilateral decision to scrap the meeting on its soil, citing the reluctance of some countries to embrace democratic reform.

Delegates to the Tunis summit, which would have opened tomorrow, disputed the Tunisian explanation, saying Tunisian President Zine el-Abdine Ben Ali was unhappy that some Arab leaders did not plan to attend, and wanted to prove his democratic credentials to the US.

Egypt expressed "astonishment and regret" at the Tunisian decision. The summit had been expected to talk about reform, Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Egypt welcomes holding a summit conference in the country of the (Arab League) headquarters at the earliest time that can be agreed," said an Egyptian presidency statement. The headquarters of the 22-member Arab League is in Cairo.

Tunisia hit back at Cairo's offer, saying a change in venue was no solution and it reserved the right to be host.

"Trying to change the place is to hide the real reasons which lie behind the decision to postpone... Tunisia stands by its right to host the summit which will look into these matters (democratic reforms)," the Tunisian foreign ministry said in a statement attributed to an anonymous official.

Syria said the Tunisian decision was unjustified and Jordan's foreign minister Marwan al-Muasher also cast doubt on the need for the Tunisians to back out as hosts. "In any summit there are differences of views but that does not mean

that the summit was not well on its way to a successful conclusion," he told CNN.

The Tunisian government news agency said Tunisia had insisted that the summit explicitly endorse democracy and reject what it called "extremism, fanaticism, violence and terrorism" — and that other countries had balked at this.

But a Gulf delegate linked the Tunisian decision to Ben Ali's stormy visit to Washington in February when President George W. Bush told him he wanted to see a free press and an "open political process" in Tunisia.

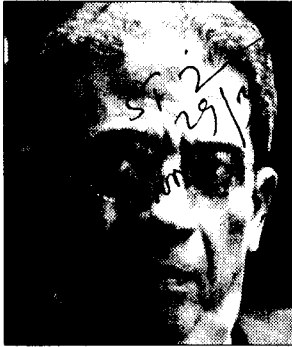
Many of the delegates who were in Tunis with foreign ministers to prepare the summit insisted there had been little or no arguing, and that talks on a communique had gone well.

"It's all about the Tunisian approach to the US, the Tunisian attempt to win US favour," said an Arab diplomat who attended the last two days of preparatory meetings. "Ben Ali was asked to deliver a certain scenario at the summit and, when it was clear that he couldn't deliver, the Tunisians announced they were calling it off," said the Gulf delegate, citing a report from his foreign minister.

The summit preparations had been in trouble for some time because some Arab leaders were reluctant to attend and some had decided to send relatively low-level delegations.

Leaders of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates planned to send deputies. Diplomats said some Arab leaders were worried the summit could not meet Arab popular demand for decisions on issues such as the Iraq occupation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Arab meet postponed



Arab League secretary-general Mr Amr Moussa has said the postponement of the summit will have grave repercussions on collective Arab action. — AFP

Associated Press

TUNIS, March 28. — Egypt today offered to host a new meeting of Arab leaders, but the head of the Arab League said there were no immediate plans to do so following the collapse of the Arab summit two days before its scheduled opening.

The two-day Arab League summit was postponed indefinitely late yesterday after foreign ministers failed to bridge differences over how to tackle a US reform plan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Arab leaders had hoped to use the conference, which was to begin tomorrow, to relaunch a Saudi-crafted peace initiative to Israel and to submit their own proposals for political reforms in response to US calls for greater freedoms.

Arab League secretary-general Amr Moussa, speaking in Tunis, tried to put a brave face on the collapse, saying it was just a postponement, not a cancellation.

He said the Egyptian proposal to host the summit would be pursued. "It's important to have a summit, and the effort is continuing. I hope the summit will be held soon."

Arab countries seek UN condemnation

United Nations Arab countries on Thursday pressed the Security Council to adopt a resolution condemning the killing of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin even as visiting Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom defended the Sheikh's assassination and asked the UN to hold a special session to condemn terrorism.

After meeting secretary general Kofi Annan on Wednesday, Shalom said targeting terrorist leaders was the only way to end terrorism.

During the day-long intensive political activity, Algeria, the only Arab member of the council, revised its draft resolution. While earlier Algeria had condemned Yassin's assassination, in its the changed draft Algiers said it condemned

all terrorist attacks against civilians.

The council is expected to take up the draft resolution soon, but it is unclear when it would be put to vote, for, in its current form, it is bound to attract veto from the US. Washington's ambassador to the UN John Negroponte said resolutions or statements could not be unbalanced and condemn one side without looking at the overall context of the situation.

Even as Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said he was not afraid of Israeli pronouncements putting him next in line, the armed wing of the Hamas on Thursday promised an "un-

precedented" response to Yassin's killing. "Our action will be like a volcanic explosion, the extent of which will be unprecedented and which will strike the Zionist entity," said Mohammed Deif, chief of the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, in a statement.

Dismissing any fears, Arafat said, "We are a mountain that is not shaken by any wind. This is not the first time that they have made such threats."

Meanwhile, top Hamas leaders went into hiding on Thursday as the three-day mourning period over Yassin's killing came to a close. Newly appointed chief Abdelaziz Rantissi and leaders like Mahmud al-Zahar and Ismail Haniya had been receiving the condolences of Palestinians in a tent at a Gaza City soccer stadium the last three days.

At Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon tried to win the US' backing for his plan to disengage from the Palestinians by pledging to evacuate six West Bank settlements along with a comprehensive pullout from the Gaza Strip. In exchange, Sharon reportedly wants the US to formally approve Israel's maintenance of settlement blocs in the West Bank as well as a declaration saying that Palestinian refugees will have no right to return to Israel after the creation of their own state. Agencies

YASSIN'S KILLING

He's 16, and ready to blow himself up

Hawara Checkpoint: A 16-year-old Palestinian with a suicide bomb vest strapped to his body was caught at a crowded West Bank checkpoint on Wednesday, setting off a tense encounter with Israeli soldiers whom, the army said, he was sent to kill.

The soldiers, taking cover behind concrete barriers, sent a yellow army robot to bring scissors to the teenager so he could cut off the vest. They then made

him strip to his underwear to ensure that he was unarmed before detaining him.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the latest in a series of foiled attacks on Israel by Palestinian youths.

The family of the teenager, identified as Hussam Abdo, said he was gullible and easily manipulated. "He doesn't know anything, and he has the intelligence of a 12 year old," he brother said. AP

Blair at side, Gaddafi agrees to fight Qaida

Tripoli, March 25 (Reuters): Britain's Tony Blair sealed Libya's return to the international fold today with an historic handshake for Muammar Gaddafi and an agreement to fight al Qaida together.

After more than an hour of talks, the Prime Minister said Libya's rejection of banned weapons and rapprochement with the West could act as a template for other Arab nations to turn their back on Islamic extremism.

"We are showing by our engagement with Libya today that it is possible for countries in the Arab world to work with the United States and the UK to defeat the common enemy of extremist fanatical terrorism driven by al Qaida," he said.

"It is a very, very important signal for the whole of the Arab world."

On the first visit to Libya by a British leader since 1943, Blair was whisked to a ceremonial tent outside Tripoli to meet the Libyan leader, once condemned by former US President Ronald Reagan as the "mad dog of the Middle East".

There, the pair symbolically shook hands for the cameras before vowing to work together to oppose militant Islamism.

"You are looking good, you are still young," Gaddafi told Blair, 50, speaking in English.

Blair said Gaddafi recog-



Tony Blair (left) and Muammar Gaddafi shake hands in a tent outside Tripoli. (Reuters)

nised "a common cause with us in the fight against al Qaida, extremism and terrorism, which threatens not just the western world but the Arab world also".

The UK leader pledged not to forget the pain caused by the 1988 Lockerbie bombing which killed 270 people but said Libya should be welcomed back into the international fold. "In reaching out the hand of partnership today, we do not forget the past," he said. "But we do try in the light of the genuine changes happening to move beyond it."

Gains to British business from the diplomatic thaw were

notched up even before Blair arrived. Oil giant Royal Dutch/Shell won a \$200 million gas exploration deal with Libya.

Blair also announced that defence contractor BAE Systems would also clinch a major Libyan deal shortly and that a trade mission would visit Tripoli in April.

But experts said the major spoils may go to the US. "Gaddafi knows the only game in town is Washington, so there will be a big slice of Libyan oil for the Americans," said Fred Halliday of the London School of Economics.

YASSIN'S KILLING / PALESTINIANS VOW TO RETALIATE

Arab, Muslim world outraged

CAIRO, MARCH 22. Israel's assassination of the Hamas leader, Ahmed Yassin, incensed the Arab and Muslim world today, triggering calls for revenge against the Jewish state amid and predictions that the region would plunge deeper into anger and violence.

Mohamed Mahdi Akef, leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, called it "an unforgivable crime" and said the Palestinians should not lay down their arms because violence was the only language that Israel understood.

"We will not rest, we will not sleep until the last Zionist leaves our territory," Akef told Reuters. The influential Brotherhood shares the Islamist views of Hamas.

In Nablus, West Bank, thousands of Palestinians, promising bloody retaliation.

The Palestinian leader, Mr. Yasser Arafat, condemned the assassination, saying Israel had "crossed all red lines," and declared a three-day mourning period. Flags at his headquarters in Ramallah were lowered to half-staff, and he held an emergency meeting of the Palestinian Cabinet.

And in Jerusalem, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, justified the assassination saying the Jewish people had a "natural right" to pursue those who would destroy them.

Clearly frustrated, Egypt's President and Jordan's king — two men who'd put their prestige on the line — denounced the assassination that obliterated their efforts to push ahead the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Arabs demonstrated by the thousand in refugee camps and on university campuses in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, the Palestinian territories and Yemen in loud but generally peaceful protests, burning



The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, reacts to the death of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, at his office in the West Bank town of Ramallah on Monday. — AFP

tyres or Israeli flags and demanding revenge for the killing of Yassin.

"What peace process when the situation is on fire?" a fed-up Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak retorted to reporters asking how Yassin's death would affect the process.

King Abdullah II of Jordan said Yassin's killing would only lead to more violence and regional instability.

The Lebanese President, Emile Lahoud, said Israel was mistaken if it thought violence could suppress the will of the Palestinians.

A report from Beirut said the largely dormant Lebanese-Israeli front erupted in fighting today, with Hezbollah guerillas shelling Israeli positions in a disputed area and Israel retaliating with air strikes. — Reuters, AP