

Northern

news

BRINGING YOU THE LATEST NEWS
FROM OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS
AROUND THE WORLD

DECEMBER 2008

You can stay in my stable tonight....

Editorial Ramblings

As we think of the real meaning of Christmas, brought home to us by the Nativity Play at Little lad's school (*cover photograph*), we would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a great year in 2009. This newsletter is the 25th monthly edition, and will be sent out early (*for a change!*) as we are expecting to be without an internet connection from 20 December 2008 to 3 January 2009, so, we won't be able to reply to your e-mails until next year - sorry.

We have all been quite unwell this month, with dreadful colds and 'flu. I'm writing this in a rather poorly state. Last evening (12 Dec.), I was wrapped up in bed under a very thick duvet and with the heating full on and I started shivering so much that my teeth chattered. I got up and put several layers of clothes on, as well as a thick outdoor jacket, hat and gloves - and my teeth still chattered!

Also yesterday, we went to the hospital in Stoke on Trent where Grace was subjected to an endoscopy - rather an ordeal. Nothing serious was found, for which we thank God, However, the mystery of her medical problem remains unsolved. What happens next, we have no idea.

As some of you will have noticed, recent editions of our little magazine have contained more photographs taken by Grace. Grace has a natural eye for photographic composition, particularly portraits. Certainly better than I have. Grace's photographs of the nativity play at Little Lad's school were much better than mine. For many years, I have been encouraging her to take her photography seriously, but she won't. I suggested that I retire from photography and let her take over, but she wasn't very impressed with that idea. I told her I was going to buy her a really good camera for her birthday (19 Dec.) and Christmas presents, but nearly got beaten-up for my trouble. She was horrified!

As I was writing this, Grace called me in to see the TV where it was being announced that- another 4 Royal Marines had been killed in Afghanistan. Please pray for the families of all our lads serving in wars overseas. It always seems a little worse when a tragedy occurs just before Christmas. We also got the sad news that Grace's grandfather passed away on 11 December 2008. He was aged in his nineties. There is a last family portrait on page 4 that I took on 28 June 2008.



Photographs above: Little Lad doing his bit, mixing the Christmas Puddings, and in the nativity play at his school.

Cover photograph: Little Lad as the Innkeeper who offered Joseph and Mary his stable for the birth of Jesus. During the Nativity Play at Goldthorn Park Primary School on 11 December 2008 (*ALL Photograph by Grace*).

Greetings from Nadia and Michelle in Qatar



Nadia and Michelle are still in Qatar (*Ed: I wish I was!*). These photographs were taken on 5 December 2008 at Al-Khor.





*Four generations:
Left to right, back row: Granddad's wife, Prima, Grace's father, Leopoldo Jnr., Grace.
front row: Granddad, Leopoldo Snr., and John Paul Alan.*

*The view of our garden from our lounge on a very cold (-6°C) at about 0900hrs in the morning in England - Wish you were here?
The frost lies thickly on the ground and on all around, despite the sun being well above the horizon.*



The continuing British trance of denial

By: Melanie Phillips

Daily Mail, 1 December 2008

Around the world, people have reacted with horror to the vile atrocities in Mumbai.

For three days, our TV screens transmitted images of carnage and chaos as the toll of murder victims climbed to upwards of 190 people, with many hundreds more injured.

Despite the fact that British citizens were caught up in the attacks, there is nevertheless a sense in Britain that this was nothing to do with us — a horrible event happening in a faraway place.

Among commentators, moreover, there has been no small amount of confusion. Were these terrorists motivated by the grievance between Muslims and Hindus over Kashmir, or was this a broader attack by al Qaeda?

If British and American tourists were singled out over Iraq — which many assume is the motive for such attacks — why were Indians targeted in the Victoria railway station? And why was an obscure Jewish outreach centre marked for slaughter?

Such perceptions and questions suggest that, even now, Western commentators still don't grasp what the free world is facing. This was not merely a distant horror.

We should pay the closest possible attention to what happened in Mumbai because something on this scale could well happen here.

But because we don't understand what we are actually up against, we are not doing nearly enough to prevent this — or something even worse — occurring on British soil; and if it were to happen here, we would be unable to cope.

The Mumbai atrocities show very clearly what too many in Britain obdurately deny — that a war is being waged against civilisation.

It is both global and local. It is not 'our' fault; it has nothing to do with Muslim poverty, oppression or discrimination.

The Islamic fundamentalist fanatics use specific grievances — Kashmir, Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya — merely as recruiting sergeants for their worldwide holy war against all 'unbelievers'.

The Mumbai attackers targeted British, American and Indian citizens simply because they wanted to kill as many British, American and Indian 'unbelievers' as

possible. Where they found Muslims, they spared them.

They also singled out for slaughter the occupants of the Chabad House, a pious Jewish outreach organisation with no Israeli or political agenda — underscoring the point that at the core of the Islamists' hatred of Israel festers their hatred of the Jews.

This was not, as is so often described, 'mindless violence'. On the contrary, the terrorists precisely calibrated both their choice of targets and the way in which they attacked them. This tells us many things.

India was chosen in order to further two aims. First was to foment greater tension between India and Pakistan.

No less important was the wish to destroy the ever more vital strategic alliance between India and the West in common defence against the Islamist onslaught.

That was why British and American visitors in those two grand hotels were singled out. And that was why Mumbai itself was chosen — as the symbol of India's burgeoning commerce and prosperity and its links with the West.

The manner of these attacks also carried a message. Many hostages were taken, but no attempt was made to use them to demand redress of any grievances. They were simply killed. That made a statement that the terrorists' agenda is non-negotiable.

The attacks demonstrated, above all, the reach of the perpetrators and the impotence of their designated victims. Those who believe that Islamist terror can be halted by addressing grievances around the world are profoundly mistaken.

With these atrocities, moreover, Islamist attacks have moved much closer to war than conventional terrorism.

The Iranian-born foreign affairs specialist Amir Taheri has pointed out that the Mumbai attacks embody the plan outlined by a senior Al Qaeda strategist after the U.S. decided to fight back following 9/11 — a decision that the Islamists had not expected.

This new strategy entails targeting countries with a substantial Muslim presence for 'low-intensity warfare' comprising bombings, kidnappings, the taking of hostages, the use of women and children as human shields, beheadings and other attacks that make normal life impossible.

Such a simultaneous, multi-faceted onslaught quickly reduces a city and a country to chaos. It can be repeated anywhere — and British cities must be among the most vulnerable.

This is because — astoundingly — Britain now harbours the most developed infrastructure of Islamist terrorism and extremism in the Western world.

The security service has warned that it is monitoring

at least 2,000 known terrorists, and has said repeatedly that although many outrages have been averted a major attack may not be preventable.

Indeed, British security officials have sleepless nights about the various ways in which the Islamists are trying to cause mass casualties in Britain — and the fact that even now this threat is not taken seriously.

This point was made yesterday by the former head of Scotland Yard's Counter Terrorism Command, Peter Clarke.

As an example, he noted that Kazi Nurur Rahman, a convicted terrorist who was arrested shortly after 7/7 with a machine-gun and 3,000 rounds of ammunition, had been trying to buy machine-guns, rocket-propelled grenades and missiles — undoubtedly for use against British targets.

Far from the popular caricatures of bumbling, impressionable and socially alienated misfits, he said, there was a capable and motivated enemy spanning the globe which would try to replicate the Mumbai atrocities in Britain.

Even more chilling was the warning by a former head of the SAS that Britain has made no adequate preparations to deal with such an onslaught upon a British city — even though that is precisely the 'doomsday scenario' that the security world fears.

Such synchronised attacks, he said, required a 'military-type response', either by squads of soldiers or armed police. But we have neither in place.

This country is simply not trained, equipped or prepared in any way to deal with something on this scale.

Yesterday, Gordon Brown said that the Mumbai attacks had raised 'huge questions' about how the world should address violent extremism. But the first question he must answer is how the British approach will now change.

For the fact is that not only is Britain hopelessly unprepared for attacks of this kind, but the Government's approach to the problem of home-grown radicalisation is misguided.

Wrongly believing that it can use religious fundamentalists to counter terrorist recruitment and that it must at all costs avoid causing offence, it is failing to stop extremists spreading their propaganda, handling their demands with kid gloves and undermining genuine moderates among Britain's Muslims who have been left exposed, vulnerable and abandoned.

The reason for such flawed policies is the false analysis on which they are based. The Government and security establishment refuse to acknowledge that what we are facing is a religious war. Instead, they think that Islamist terrorism is driven by grievances which are basically the fault of the West.

But you have only to look around the world or at the history of the past four decades and more to see the absurdity and ignorance of this view.

Look at Thailand, for example, currently convulsed by Islamist terrorism in the south with bombings, beheadings and the murder of Buddhists.

Look at the persecution of Christians in Nigeria. Look at the Islamist terrorism in the Philippines. Look, as Peter Clarke noted, at the attacks variously upon New York, Bali, Istanbul, Jakarta, Sharm el Sheikh, Casablanca, Madrid, London and India.

If we don't understand what we are fighting, we cannot defeat it. Mumbai is yet another wake-up call — to a Britain that is still in a trance of denial.

Courtesy of Melanie Phillips at URL:

<http://www.melaniephillips.com/articles-new/?p=628>

Iran's Power At The United Nations

By: Claudia Rosett,

How can Obama navigate the U.N. without stepping on Iranian land mines?

With Iran racing down the homestretch toward a nuclear bomb, the United Nations Security Council has spent more than two years expressing "serious concern." By now, Iran is under U.N. sanctions, and in flagrant violation of five Security Council resolutions demanding that it stop enriching uranium. If anything, as a chronic abuser of the U.N. charter, Iran's despotic, terrorist-backing, nuclear-wannabe regime ought to qualify for expulsion from the 192-member U.N. At the very least, one might suppose that on U.N. premises, Iran would be something of a pariah.

But at the U.N., that's not how it works. Although Iran lost its bid this year for a seat on the 15-member Security Council, Iran's government has the U.N. so well-wired, in so many ways, that it's hard to find an angle Iran is not busy exploiting. That ought to be of serious concern to President-elect Obama, who has promised to give the U.N. a far bigger role in U.S. policy.

As it is, America provides the main U.N. premises in New York, suffers the related traffic jams and tries to ride herd on the alleged spies (two Iranian guards at Iran's U.N. Mission in Manhattan were deported in 2004, after they were seen filming landmark buildings and parts of the transportation system). American taxpayers bankroll roughly one-quarter of the U.N.'s total budget, now swollen to well over \$20 billion, and on top of that look likely to get stuck with the \$2 billion-plus tab for the renovation now underway of U.N. headquarters.

Meanwhile, Iran, which pays a paltry 0.18% of the U.N.'s core budget, or less than 1/100th of the U.S. contribution, has wangled itself an astounding array of influential U.N. slots, which by next year will include seats on the governing bodies of at least eight prominent U.N. agencies. That setup serves both to legitimize the same Iranian regime that is busy violating the U.N. charter, and gives Iran a say in how billions in U.N. funds--much of that money supplied by U.S. taxpayers--get spent around the world.

For a glimpse of this setup, you don't have to wait for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's annual rant on the U.N. General Assembly stage. All you have to do is stroll through the main visitors' lobby of the landmark U.N. building in Manhattan. In that lobby, by far the most prominent display is a row of eight portraits, framed in gold, and showing the lineup of secretaries-general from the U.N.'s founding at the end of World War II, through the current Ban Ki-Moon. But these are no ordinary portraits. Each is actually a silk carpet, and under the woven picture of each secretary-general, there appears the woven inscription: "Presented by the Islamic Republic of Iran."



Photograph courtesy of: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/04/United_Nations_General_Assembly.JPG

The first seven of these carpets were accepted from Iran en masse by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1997. The eighth, depicting Ban Ki-Moon, was accepted by Ban last year and placed beside the others. And though the U.S. State Department seems oblivious to this use of the U.N. lobby as a showcase for Iranian gifts tailored to flatter the secretariat's top boss, it's a good bet that both the Iranian delegates and Ban are aware, when they look at those rug-portraits, that beneath the name of each secretary-general is inscribed the name of Iran's Islamic Republic.

But that's just the lobby. Next year, Iran is slated to begin a three-year term on the 36-member executive board of the U.N.'s flagship agency, the U.N. Development Program, or UNDP. The UNDP fields a presence in 166 countries and disperses some \$9 billion around the globe every year--\$5 billion from its own budget, and another \$4 billion on behalf of other U.N. operations. The UNDP is the agency that early last year, when North Korea was rounding out a term on its board, became embroiled in the cash-for-Kim scandal--in which it turned out that the UNDP, in violation of its own rules, had been serving both as a source of hard cash for the rogue nuclear state of North Korea and as a money laundering vehicle for North Korean weapons and nuclear proliferation networks.

Iran's seat on the UNDP board will automatically confer seats on the governing boards of the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Iran also sits on the governing bodies of the U.N. Agency for Human Settlements (U.N.-Habitat), and the U.N. refugee agency, the UNHCR. While board memberships entail broad decision-making powers rather than hands-on management, in the U.N. system, such seats can confer a handy advantage in the backroom deals that are the real basis of U.N. business.

On the climate front, which the U.N. is currently turning into a multibillion-dollar global business, Iran is also an executive player. Iran has a seat until 2011 on the governing council of the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP) in Nairobi. An Iranian serves on the governing council of the

Global Environment Facility, based in Washington. And an Iranian serves as the first vice-president of the executive council of the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva--where Iran is also one of 49 members of the U.N. Disarmament Conference.

At the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, a veteran Iranian diplomat, Mohammed Saeid Noori-Naeini, chairs the 49-member governing council. The FAO has a budget of more than \$850 million per year, to which the U.S. contributes the biggest single share. Iran also sits on the executive board of the related U.N. World Food Programme (to which the U.S. last year contributed more than 40% of the WFP's \$2.7 billion in global expenditures).

With all that Iranian involvement in the U.N.'s programs for global food distribution, it's no surprise that Iran's President Ahmadinejad flew to an FAO food security conference in Rome this past June, where he used the FAO platform to urge "the formation of an independent and powerful body, obeyed by all countries, to justly regulate the food market and organize all its related issues from production to consumption." Lest anyone wonder who might qualify to run such a mighty regulator of the world's entire food supply, Ahmadinejad went on to urge universal efforts to achieve "the coming to power of pure and monotheistic managers."

Iran was also the original sponsor of a 2001 U.N. initiative called the Dialogue of Civilizations. Proposed by former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and embraced by Kofi Annan, this "dialogue" was then transformed in 2005 into its successor, the New York-headquartered Alliance of Civilizations. The Alliance features a 20-member panel of "eminent persons" including Iran's Khatami, who in September 2006 made use of this connection--as Iran was thumbing its nose at one of the Security Council ultimatums on uranium enrichment--to visit the U.S. and deliver a series of anti-American speeches. The Alliance is part of the campaign now gathering steam at the U.N. to impose Islamic anti-blasphemy laws worldwide, gagging free speech.

Inside Iran, the U.N. fields big operations, including a UNDP office staffed largely by Iranian nationals, and an office of the U.N. cultural organization UNESCO, which serves as a hub for UNESCO operations not only in Iran, but in Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Iran is also one of the 43 countries in which the U.N. this year offered exams to recruit new members to its global, professional staff.

Iran is not on the governing board of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (though some of its pals, such as Cuba and China, are). But last year, the office of the Iranian ambassador to the IAEA did take advantage of the Vienna location to place an ad in the International Herald Tribune, soliciting bids to build two new nuclear reactors in Iran. To get the bidding specs, interested parties were asked to pay a nonrefundable fee of 15,000 euros into an account at Bank Austria Creditanstalt--which, for the

convenience of U.N. personnel, maintains banking facilities on the premises of the U.N.'s Vienna office complex.

Beyond that, Iran holds influential spots on the two most powerful, overlapping lobbying blocs inside the U.N. General Assembly: the G-77 and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. That latter position is how Iran's ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva ended up as one of 19 vice-chairs of the preparatory committee for the U.N.'s 2009 conference on racism.

The above list of Iran's doings at the U.N. is far from comprehensive, but you get the idea. If Obama is still banking on tough diplomacy to stop Iran's race for the nuclear bomb, there are really only two ways to deal with this U.N. minefield: He can start by trying to kick Iran out of the U.N., or he can bypass the U.N. altogether.

Claudia Rosett, a journalist-in-residence with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, writes a weekly column on foreign affairs for Forbes.com.

Courtesy of:

http://www.forbes.com/opinions/2008/12/10/iran-un-obama-oped-cx_cr_1211rosett.html

The view from our lounge on a cold, grey, damp, miserable, foggy morning in England - Wish you were here?



The Wider View

THEY are the biggest submarines ever built in Britain – and the most technologically advanced in the world. HMS Astute and HMS Ambush are the Royal Navy's first two Astute Class nuclear-powered subs. Each is 318ft long and will displace 7,400 tons of water... as much as 62 blue whales.

With a unique life-support system that converts sea water into oxygen and drinking water for the 98 crew members, these leviathans will be capable of travelling under the sea, without surfacing, for 25 years, the lifespan of the nuclear fuel stored in their Rolls-Royce PWR2 reactors.

However, they will need to return to the surface to replenish food supplies every three months – enough time for their multi-bladed silent propellers, undetectable to sonar, to power them right around the globe.

Astute, left, and Ambush are being completed in BAE Systems' 276,000sq ft Devonshire Dock Hall in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria. The small cabin just above Astute – which is due to enter

service next year – houses a virtual-reality viewing system that allows the construction teams to see the plans in 3-D.

The green horizontal band on Astute's bow is algal staining from a sea trial to check its more than one million components, 23,000 pipes and 62 miles of electric cables. After the sub completed a dive and simulated weapons test, a giant ship lift was used to return it to the hall.

More than 4,000 people are involved in the production of these hunter-killer submarines, which cost about £1 billion each. They will not carry nuclear warheads but will have a greater firepower than any previous attack sub – with the ability to fire 38 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the hatches visible above their bows, as well as Spearfish torpedoes from lateral tubes, one of which can be seen through the scaffolding beside Astute.

Instead of periscopes, masts carrying thermal imaging and low-light cameras will be attached to the conning towers and will provide the captain with a 360-degree picture.

