AFRICA'S DICTATORS: MADE IN THE U.S.A.
ANDREW RICE

THE INCREDIBLE LAMENESS OF BUSH'S WIRETAP DEFENSE
JEFFREY ROSEN

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IDENTITY GOES TO WAR

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nomic engine driving the city's tourism industry, one of the few industries left in town, and therefore something of a sacred cow, even beyond its historical and cultural significance. Pro-Carnival boosters were fond of pointing out Carnival's multiplier effect to the economy: It pumped some $1 billion into the city, directly and indirectly, each year. To attack Carnival, then, was to attack not only the city's social fabric, but also its economic base.

After Katrina, the economic argument for Carnival doesn't really hold water, so to speak. This year, the city is expecting far fewer tourists, and no one seems quite sure how the city will pay the $2.7 million it's going to have to spend on police overtime and other expenses. For the first time, the city has hired a p.r. firm to drum up corporate support, but, so far, only Glad Products, the trash bag maker, has come through with a commitment.

But, perhaps because Carnival has less of an economic purpose this year, its symbolic one is heightened. A number of Mardi Gras Indians, who come from the city's poorest neighborhoods, are making new suits this year, and they plan to march on Mardi Gras day as an act of defiance. Hamilton talks about the decision to march not only in terms of stake-holding but also in terms of civic duty, explaining, "Some people are saying we shouldn't participate. But we have to take the lead in putting normalcy back into the city." It is the same argument that members of the city's tourism industry—as well as members of the city's white Carnival clubs—have made.

But that goal—normalcy—remains elusive, even on Mardi Gras day. Zulu will parade with only one-third or so of its usual number of floats, and it has had to advertise on the Internet for riders. The St. Augustine Marching 100, the legendary black high school marching band, has been merged—along with the school itself—with an uptown prep school, and the combined band will march on Mardi Gras day with Rex instead of Zulu. Missing, too, will be the black throngs that used to picnic on Claiborne Avenue, under the I-10 overpass, where thousands of junked cars are now parked.

It is this backdrop that is keeping former marchers like Belfield, a onetime king of Zulu, away. To hold Carnival under these conditions, Belfield says, is a "frivolous gesture." Belfield wrote Mayor Ray Nagin asking that the city put Carnival on hold until its exiled citizens could return, but neither Nagin nor Zulu has heeded his call.

Still, no one is under the illusion that this will be Carnival as usual. In recognition of that, Zulu added a jazz funeral to Saturday's memorial service. As the men marched through the city to the dirge and dance rhythms of the Pinstripe jazz band—past ruined houses still spraypainted with rescue markings—the parade felt like a tentative step in trying to take back the streets and to hold them in trust for those who couldn't be there. But, even with Zulu leading the way home for the black community, as their theme declares, it is going to be a very long road back. ■

Beirut Dispatch

Comic Relief

BY ANNIA CIEZADLO

For the Western news media, always eager to revisit Lebanon's bloody 15-year civil war, the Muslim rampage through a Christian neighborhood in Beirut on February 5 was a disappointment. A mob of predominantly Sunni Muslims threw stones at a Maronite Catholic church—a desecration most militias refrained from even during the civil war—and yet Beirut's Christians turned the other cheek. A peaceful counter-demonstration that night felt like a Cedar Revolution class reunion: Young men and women milled around chanting desultory slogans, then went home. By nightfall, what was assumed to be a ham-handed Syrian attempt to stir up sectarian trouble in Lebanon had fizzled. "We will not fall in the trap," proclaimed Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. "Our national unity is stronger than Syrian destruction."

The cartoon intifada—as the sometimes violent protests over a Danish newspaper's publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed have come to be known—has been portrayed in the Western press as an epic struggle between West and East, Christendom and Islam. The image of angry, stone-throwing Muslims assaulting the Christian neighborhood of Ashrafiyeh fit right into that clash-of-civilizations paradigm.

But, as the world tuned in to watch a classic Christian-Muslim image from Lebanon's last war, it missed another picture: mainstream Sunni clerics frantically trying to hold back a bandana-wearing, brick-throwing Sunni mob that no longer respects their clerical robes. "I asked those troublemakers, 'What do the people who live in Ashrafiyeh have to do with the people who published those blasphemous cartoons about our Prophet?' " lamented one Sunni cleric from Dar Al Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni spiritual authority. "I asked them, 'Why were those men destroying cars and public property? Why did they throw rocks at a church, which is a house of God?' Those people were not true Muslims. They had other agendas."

In Lebanon and Syria, the cartoon jihad is not a battle between West and East. It's a struggle by mainstream Sunnis to contain a growing network of radical Islamists. The Sunnis who burned Beirut's Danish Embassy weren't there to defend their Prophet from Lurpak butter or an obscure Danish newspaper. They weren't even there, really, to assault Christians. They came to Ashrafiyeh—from Lebanon's northern Islamist pockets, its Palestinian camps, and from neighboring Syria—to teach the mainstream Sunni estab-

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lishment a lesson. Most of all, they were there to send a message to Saad Hariri, the Saudi- and U.S.-backed figurehead of Lebanon's current parliamentary majority and the ostensible leader of Lebanon's Sunni community. The message was this: You cannot control us. What's frightening is that they might be right.

HERE'S A STORY from Lebanon that didn't make the international news: On February 2, someone detonated a small, one-kilogram bomb at a Lebanese army barracks in Ramlet Al Baida, a wealthy seafront neighborhood in predominantly Muslim West Beirut. Three hours earlier, someone claiming to represent "Al Qaeda in Lebanon" called a Lebanese newspaper and threatened to bomb several security bases unless the government freed 13 members of the group arrested in early January. The phone call was traced to Ain Al Hilweh, the most squalid and desperate—and the most militant—of Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps.

Today, Lebanese security forces are worried that Al Qaeda–linked networks have decided to set up a military infrastructure in Lebanon, perhaps even forging ties to Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. On February 11, Lebanon's acting interior minister admitted as much to a French newspaper, adding that "the soil is fertile." According to the Lebanese newspaper *As Safir*, some of the Al Qaeda suspects confessed to planning the same types of terrorist attacks in Lebanon as in Iraq.

In fact, they already tried once. In September 2004, Lebanese security forces uncovered a plot to bomb, among other sites, the Italian Embassy—in the heart of Beirut's rebuilt downtown—as retaliation for Italy's support of the Iraq war. When a suspect named Ismail Khatib died in custody, residents of his hometown, Majdal Anjar, erupted with rage, destroying shops on the Beirut-Damascus road, smashing windows, and blocking the highway with burning tires. Long before the February 5 demonstrations, the Majdal Anjar riots revealed a deep current of support for Al Qaeda–style terrorism: "The Interior Ministry accuses Ismail Khatib of recruiting fighters against the American invaders in Iraq. Well, this is an honor for him that should earn him respect, not death in a Lebanese detention center," raged pro-Syrian activist Maan Bashour at the dead man's funeral. Last week, in a disquieting sign of interconnected loyalties, the anonymous Ain Al Hilweh caller threatened that his group would not permit "the tragedy of Ismail Khatib" to be repeated.

For the Lebanese government, northern Islamist pockets like Majdal Anjar have been a perennial embarrassment. In theory, Lebanon's prime minister—and its leading Sunni families—represent the Sunni minority. But even Rafik Hariri, the powerful and popular former prime minister slain a year ago, had a hard time controlling Lebanon's Islamist backwaters. Hariri came from the relatively peaceful southern city of Sidon, not from the restive Sunni north. His son Saad is now the putative leader of the anti-Syrian majority in parliament. But inexperienced Saad is not as strong a figure as his father. "The radical Sunni fringe has a lot of control outside Beirut," says Eugène Sensenig-Dabbous, an assistant professor of political science at Lebanon's Notre Dame University and co-head of the Libanlink Diversity Center, a Beirut-based interfaith nonprofit.

After the February 5 clashes, some Lebanese are worried that Syrian dictator Bashar Assad may be using Lebanon's radical Sunnis against Hariri in a battle for the Sunni street. But, in doing so, the Syrian regime risks repeating the mistake the United States made when it funneled billions of dollars to Afghan mujahedeen: feeding a jihad it cannot keep caged. Take the Ahbash, a cultlike movement carefully groomed by Syrian intelligence into a Lebanese proxy. German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, who conducted the U.N. investigation into Rafik Hariri's murder, found evidence that the Ahbash played a key role in planning Hariri's killing. "After the Hariri assassination, the Ahbash adopted a low profile, but it doesn't mean that their influence is decreasing," says Lokman Slim, leader of Hayyabina ("Let's Go"), a civil society group that promotes a secular Lebanon.

FOR YEARS, THE Syrian regime's rationale for occupying Lebanon was this: Without Syria to babysit, Lebanon's warring factions would collapse back into civil war. That's the rationale that led the United States to back the Syrian dominion over Lebanon for more than a decade. Similarly, the Baath regime has always used radical Sunnis as bogeymen. Without its dictatorship, goes the argument, the Muslim Brotherhood would ignite the Levant.

Syria has cried the Islamist wolf for so long that the West, and perhaps even the Lebanese government itself, has begun to underestimate the real threat. That miscalculation became painfully obvious on February 5, when Lebanese security forces made a miserable showing despite ample warning that trouble was on its way: first the burning of the Danish Embassy in Damascus, then busloads of Islamists massing in cities like Tripoli, in northern Lebanon. "It takes two hours to get from Tripoli to Beirut—they could have stopped them, but nothing was done," says Farid El Khazen, a member of parliament and a political science professor at the American University of Beirut. "And they knew that, the day before, there was a rehearsal, so to speak, when they burned down the Danish Embassy in Damascus."

Ever since the Iraq war, and especially in recent months, Assad's government has shown an increasing willingness to play with Islamist fire. After all, a bulwark isn't much use without something to hold back. As the Syrian regime grows increasingly desperate, it is more and more willing to entertain the kind of Islamists that could pose a threat to its own existence and the entire region—a threat that the Lebanese government has, until recently, been loath to acknowledge. "It proves that the Lebanese have learned very well the message of the Syrian Baath regime," says Slim. "Instead of saying, 'We have a problem inside the country,' we are hiding it." Until now. ■