

Relations Re Israel and Nations Other Than Palestine

-- Israel and Palestine still aren't talking, at least not productively, but how is Israel faring with the rest of its neighbors? --

BACKGROUND:

Israel-Syria It seems fair to say that when it comes to politics in the Middle East, things get a bit, complicated. Everyone seems to hate each other and no one wants to talk about it. But according to numerous, albeit rather oblique reports regarding talks that may or may not have happened, relations between countries in the Middle East may be on the up and up. At least that is what the press is hinting.

The countries in question, Syria, Egypt, Israel, Libya, (Israel-Palestine relations haven't been mentioned in the up and up articles) all seem to want to at least begin the long process back to diplomatic relations, although none are all too eager to admit it.

Israel and Syria haven't been too friendly ever since, well, Israel's inception. Syria wasn't too pleased when Israel captured the Golan Heights in 1967, it seems they thought it rather rude, and relations haven't been the same since. The two countries are still, technically, at war.

Recently Israel has announced that it plans to build more settlements in the area, while Syria is says it wants the Golan Heights back as part of a future peace settlement.

Strategically speaking, Golan is a valuable property for either country because it overlooks North-Eastern Israel. And according to Israel military officials, Israel was repeatedly shelled from this region before the war. The region also has good water sources and arable land.

Israel came close to returning most of Golan to Syria in 2000, but that deal fell apart and now Sharon is saying that Israel needs Golan for housing, industry, and tourism.

Israel-Libya Relations between Israel and Libya haven't exactly been a model for diplomacy either. One aspect of the countries relations that

has been a bump in the road is Libya's refusal to acknowledge Israel as a nation. On top of this Libyan leader



The Golan Heights today.

Muammar Gaddafi has repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel, without a hint of irony in his voice either. But are things getting better? Perhaps the question is, how can the get any worse? To be fair, only two Middle Eastern nations, Egypt and Jordan, have full diplomatic relations with Israel. So it's not as if Libya is the only one that has an issue with Israel.

Not helping the matter is the U.S. stance on Libya. Libya recently stated it would renounce weapons of mass destruction and allow inspections into its nuclear facilities. The U.S. applauded the announcement, but President Bush stated that, "Despite the positive developments, the crisis with respect to Libya has not been fully resolved. I have therefore determined that it is necessary to... maintain in force the comprehensive sanctions against Libya."

The U.S. is looking for Libya to show its compliance and allow inspections before removing the sanctions. As for Israel, it seems they are waiting to see how relations between the White House and Gaddafi play out before they make any moves.

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geologist walking the surface of Mars. The mast-mounted cameras are mounted 1.5 meters (5 feet) high and will provide 360-degree, stereoscopic, humanlike views of the terrain. The robotic arm will be capable of movement in much the same way as a human arm with an elbow and wrist, and will place instruments directly up against rock and soil targets of interest. In the mechanical "fist" of the arm is a microscopic camera that will serve the same purpose as a geologist's handheld magnifying lens. The Rock Abrasion Tool serves the purpose of a geologist's rock hammer to expose the insides of rocks.

Between 1991 and 2001, the use of most major drug types increased among 8th and 10th graders. After 6 years of increases, 8th graders' past month marijuana use began to decrease in 1997, falling to 10.2%. This decline continued through 2001 to 9.2%. The use of inhalants declined after peaking in 1995. In 2001, 8th graders reported past month use of inhalants at 4%, a higher rate than the 2.4% reported by 10th graders and the 1.7% reported by 12th graders.

STORY:

The Middle East is awash with diplomatic initiatives. Libya is talking to Israel. Egypt is talking to Iran. Turkey is passing messages from Israel to Syria.

In fact, almost the only people who are not talking to each other are Israel and the Palestinians.

This is big picture diplomacy. The discussions are not about this settlement or that road, but about and between states not on speaking terms for a generation.

"The war against terrorism launched by the Americans in Afghanistan and Iraq has brought Israel and its Arab neighbours closer than ever

before," said Efraim Halevy, the former head of Mossad.

Briefing foreign journalists in Jerusalem, Mr Halevy said the potential for change in the region was more now than during the early part of the 20th Century, when the great powers redrew the map of the Middle East.

Exaggerated hopes? There was certainly a mood of genuine excitement in Israel when news broke that some "initial contacts" had been made with Libya. But Israeli officials have been playing down expectations that normal ties can be restored easily or quickly.

There is still less optimism about Syria. President Bashar al-Assad wants talks. Israel has conditions. These seem to reflect Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's caution in dealing with the Jewish state's old enemy.

First of all, Damascus will have to curb the activities of Hezbollah as it wages a sporadic guerrilla war against Israel on its northern border.

Other demands include closing Hamas and Islamic Jihad offices in Damascus, arranging prisoner swaps for Israeli soldiers missing in Lebanon, and allowing the remains of the spy Eli Cohen to be returned for burial in Israel.

Some Israelis believe President Assad is not serious about talks. If he was, they say, he would have used diplomatic back channels rather than calling for talks in an interview with Britain's Daily Telegraph.

Newspapers here also quote US officials as saying that even if President Assad wanted to sign a peace deal with Israel, they are not convinced he is strong enough to do so.

The principle demand of both Israel and the United States is that Syria close down what are held to be its chemical and biological weapons programmes. Syria has stopped short of fully acknowledging it has such programmes.

American officials say President Assad has not yet come to terms with the fact that US troops are on his border. Others disagree.

"Syria is an isolated country, with a tyrannical regime trying to survive in the face of



Some in Israel are pressing for peace talks with Syria

an historic tidal wave that is removing such tyrannies," said the influential former Prime Minister, and current Israeli Finance Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu.

He told Israeli radio: "Syria needs a peace arrangement with us like the air they breathe; they need it much more than we do. The advantage is totally on our side."

It is Mr Netanyahu's calculation that Syria is weak now and can be pressured into peace without Israel having to give up all of the Golan Heights.

This is why some in Israel are pressing for a positive answer to Syria's overtures.

The head of the Knesset's defence and foreign relations committee - an ally of Mr Netanyahu's - has called for President Assad to be invited to talk peace in Jerusalem, just as President Sadat of Egypt once did.



Events in the region have put pressure on Assad

All this is a sign that the Iraq war has transformed the strategic situation in the Middle East. Wars have a way of doing that.

Some things remain the same. Glancing over the Israeli papers on Friday, there was one of those stories which just makes you despair about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

SIGNIFICANCE:

How significant are these behind the scenes talks? When one gets right down to it, it is hard not to be pessimistic. It could be out of fear that countries with despotic regimes such as Libya are hinting at change. Are rulers like Gaddafi putting on a mask to stay in power, or are these hints and comments genuine?

In assessing such a situation many factors have to come into play, but the one that has to be considered first is, are what these governments proposing in their best interest? If it is in Libya's best interest to get on better terms with the U.S.

and Israel then there might be a future. The question is what does Gaddafi think is in his country's best interest? And that is a question that he might not even know the answer to, and if he does, it may only make sense to him.

Predicting what Syria wants, and why, may be easier. The U.S. has been putting pressure on Damascus to crack down on Islamic extremist groups or there could be sanctions. Syria has shown that it doesn't want to move in that direction and has focused its attention on Golan. What Syria seems to be doing is implying that if the Israeli's give back Golan, they would be more inclined to do as the U.S. says.

But if there is one thing the Middle East has consistently shown over the years it is a region ripe with unpredictability. The only constant in the region is hatred and intolerance among the various religions and factions of religions. And while Middle Eastern governments might be taking small steps towards better relations, it remains to be seen if the ideologies implied in those steps represent the ideologies of the nations' people.

Reflecting Pools for 9-11 Memorial

BACKGROUND:

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) is administering the World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition. The LMDC received an enormous outpouring of ideas from across the globe with 13,683 registrants and 5,201 Memorial submissions from 63 nations.

Competitors were advised to design concepts that are consistent with the Memorial Mission Statement and Program developed by committees convened by the LMDC that included family members, residents, survivors, first responders, arts and architecture professionals and community leaders. These committees premised their work on an initial memorial mission statement and program.

The first stage (Stage I) required the submission of design concepts on a single presentation board. Members of the Memorial Competition jury evaluated the submissions. Stage I evaluations were anonymous. At the end of Stage I, the jury selected these finalists to proceed to a second stage (Stage II) during which the finalists would further develop their design concepts. The jury selected these finalists based on how their designs met the principles of the Memorial Mission Statement and Program as well as excellence in design.

World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition

Total Number of registrants:	13,683
Number of Submissions Received:	5,201
Number of Countries that Submitted:	63
Number of US States that Submitted:	49

The jury reviewed 5,201 submissions beginning last summer, narrowing the field to eight in November. By the time the jury convened on Monday, it had chosen three finalists: "Garden of Lights," "Passages of Light: the Memorial Cloud" and "Reflecting Absence."

"Garden of Lights" featured a public area filled with lights, one for each victim. The three-level memorial had a garden on the top and a private area for families of the victims at the twin towers' footprints, connected by a path and a stream of water.

"Passages of Light," by three New York designers, included an open-air structure with cathedral-like vaults and a glass walkway and would have an altar for each victim.

STORY:

AP - A design consisting of two reflecting pools and a large grove of trees was chosen for the World Trade Center memorial after an eight-month competition that drew more than 5,000 entries from around the world, officials announced



Tuesday. The "Reflecting Absence" memorial, created by designers Michael Arad and Peter Walker, was chosen by a 13-member jury of artists, architects and civic and cultural leaders. The winning memorial was announced by the Lower Manhattan Development Corp., the agency overseeing the rebuilding of the site.

The reflecting pools will mark the footprints of the World Trade Center towers. The development group said a revised version of the memorial will be unveiled next week, with significant changes that add trees and greenery around the footprints and expose the slurry wall, the last surviving piece of the trade center.

The development agency also said it is flexible about the grouping of victims' names at the memorial, a point bitterly fought by rescue workers who want separate recognition for their colleagues. Still, the memorial drew an icy reception from some victims' families, who accused the jury of ignoring their input during a hasty deliberation and said the design failed to convey the horror of the attack.

The memorial, considered the long shot of three finalists chosen by the jury in November, will remember all of the victims of the Sept. 11 attack, including those killed at the Pentagon, in Pennsylvania and aboard the hijacked airliners. It also will honor the six people killed in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

The two pools in the design would sit 30 feet below street level, connected by an underground passageway and a small alcove where visitors can light candles.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The memorial will be one of two focal points at the trade center site, along with the 1,776-foot glass skyscraper known as the Freedom Tower. Four other buildings are planned where the trade center once stood.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY / BIOGRAPHY:

The Great Pyramid

On this day, an international panel overseeing the restoration of the Great Pyramids in Egypt overcomes years of frustration when it abandons modern construction techniques in favor of the method employed by the ancient Egyptians.

Located at Giza outside Cairo, some of the oldest manmade structures on earth were showing severe signs of decay by the early 1980s. Successful repair work began on the 4,600-year-old Sphinx in 1981, but restoration of the pyramids proved destructive when water in modern cement caused adjacent limestone stones to split. On January 12, 1984, restorers stopped using mortar and adopted the system of interlocking blocks practiced by the original pyramid builders. From thereon, the project proceeded smoothly.

The ancient Egyptians built nearly 100 pyramids over a millennium to serve as burial chambers for their royalty. They believed that the pyramids eased the monarchs' passage into the afterlife, and the sites served as centers of religious activity. During the Old Kingdom, a period of Egyptian history that lasted from the late 26th century B.C. to the mid-22nd century B.C., the Egyptians built their largest and most ambitious pyramids.

The three enormous pyramids situated at Giza outside of Cairo were built by King Khufu, his son, and his grandson in the Fourth Dynasty. The largest, known as the Great Pyramid, was built by Khufu and is the only one of the "Seven Wonders of the World" from antiquity that still survives. The largest single building ever erected on the planet, the Great Pyramid was built of approximately 2.3 million blocks of stone and stood nearly 50 stories high upon completion. Its base forms a nearly perfect and level square, with sides aligned to the four cardinal points of the compass.

The Great Pyramid is composed primarily of yellowish limestone blocks and was originally covered in an outer casing of smooth light-colored limestone. This finer limestone eroded and was carried away in later centuries, but the material can still be found in the inner passages. The interior burial chamber was built of huge blocks of granite. It is believed that construction of the pyramid took 20 years and involved over 20,000 workers, bakers, carpenters, and water carriers. The exact method in which this architectural masterpiece was built is not definitively known, but the leading theory is that the Egyptians employed an encircling embankment of sand, brick, and earth that was increased in height as the pyramid rose.



In addition to Khufu's mummy, interior rooms of the pyramid held objects for the deceased to use in the afterlife. Many of these items were valuable, and tomb robbers had long ago robbed the pyramids of their treasures before modern archeologists began studying the structures in the 17th century.

King Khafre, the grandson of Khufu, built the Great Sphinx, which was carved from a single block of limestone left over in a quarry used to build the Pyramids. The Sphinx has the body of a recumbent lion and a human face meant to represent Khafre. There are no known inner chambers in the structure.

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SPORTS:

Rose



Pete Rose's return to the game remains very much in question.

Doubts that Pete Rose's second autobiography would sell out its first printing of 500,000 books are quickly fading.

In Rose's two book signings -- one in Ridgewood, N.J., on Thursday and another near Wall Street in New York City on Friday -- Rose has signed more than 2,500 books and one publishing insider told ESPN.com that the book's publisher, Rodale Press, already has

ordered multiple printings.

Hundreds of people filled Borders bookstore on 100 Broadway on Friday waiting for Rose's autograph and chance to meet baseball's all-time hit king, who admits to betting on baseball -- for the first time since he was banned in August of 1989 -- in his book "Prison Without Bars." The line zig-zagged between book shelves and continued onto another floor.

Throughout the signing, Rose had his share of laughs and was gracious to those buying his new book. The flashes by the 20 or so photographers seemingly never stopped.

Rose wasn't signing everything for fans that bought his books. No memorabilia and no copies of his 1989 book, "Pete Rose: My Story," which claimed he never bet on baseball. That book sold 65,000 copies. There was very little uproar over Rose's new version of his betting story after 14 years of lying or the fact that the book was released just days after the Hall of Fame Class of 2004 was announced.

Luckily for Rose and Rodale, the majority of the people in the store were there in support of

him. The table in the front of the store, piled high with books at 11:30 a.m., was down to its final copies two and a half hours later.

ENTERTAINMENT:

EBERT AND ROEPER'S TOP TEN OF 2003

2003 was a year for imagination at the box office. You have to let yours run a little wild if you plan on seeing Finding Nemo, Pirates of the Carribean, or Lord of the Rings. Those were the top grossing films released in 2003, respectively. It is probably only a matter of time before Lord of the Rings passes both movies and claims the top spot. As movie goers are concerned, one has to wonder if this is a sample of things to come.

Hollywood always makes movies in bunches; if war movies are in, someone each studio better have a war movie in the pipeline, if fantasy is in, same goes. It will be interesting to see what the studio execs take away from 2003 and how they apply it to forthcoming releases. Those are the top grossing movies of 2003, now here are Ebert and Roper's individual picks for last years ten best movies.

EBERT	ROEPER
1. "Monster"	1. "In America"
2. "Lost in Translation"	2. "Mystic River"
3. "American Splendor"	3. "Lost in Translation"
4. "Finding Nemo"	4. "21 Grams"
5. "Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World"	5. "Elephant"
6. "Mystic River"	6. "The Barbarian Invasions"
7. "Owning Mahowny"	7. "The Station Agent"
8. "The Son (Le Fils)"	8. "Whale Rider"
9. "Whale Rider"	9. "Monster"
10. "In America"	10. "Seabiscuit"

FEATURE:

Civil War:

Part V

GRANT'S CAMPAIGN IN THE WEST

On the western front, Grant waited for permission from his superior, Henry W. Halleck, to strike at the Confederates in Tennessee. Grant had picked his targets: Fort Henry on the Tennessee River; then Fort Donelson a few miles to the east on the Cumberland River. In January 1862 Halleck ordered the advance. It was to be a joint campaign with naval forces under the command of Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote. Foote's gunboats attacked Fort Henry on February 6. The fort surrendered before Grant's troops could be engaged. Fort Donelson proved to be a different story. Fighting began on February 12, but Fort Donelson held out until February 16. The two victories lifted spirits in the North, and Grant's demand for "unconditional and immediate surrender" in response to the Confederate commander's request for terms made the Union general famous.

The North, its elation heightened by a decisive Union victory in the Battle of Pea Ridge, also known as the Battle of Elkhorn Tavern, in Arkansas, on March 7 and 8, soon received more good news with a victory at Shiloh.

BATTLE OF SHILOH After taking Fort Donelson, Grant had wanted to move on the Confederate base in Corinth, Mississippi, where Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate commander in the West, was known to be assembling troops. Grant was ordered to delay his advance until Union General Buell, who had been operating in East Tennessee, could join him.

Early on Sunday, April 6, 1862, Johnston's army, which had come up to the federal lines undetected, struck Grant's army, which was encamped at Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River. The Battle of Shiloh followed. At the end of the second day of fighting the Union forces

drove back the attackers. Shocking losses, 13,000 out of more than 62,000 Federals and 10,700 out of 40,000 Confederates, appalled both sections of the country. Although victorious, Grant was accused of lacking elementary caution and found himself reviled in the North. The South mourned the loss of Johnston, one of its ablest commanders, who was shot and bled to death.

MONITOR AND VIRGINIA In the spring of 1862, McClellan proposed to Lincoln that the North invade Virginia by way of the peninsula between the James and York rivers. However, an unexpected development in that area threatened to prevent the offensive. On March 8 the Confederate ironclad vessel, the *Virginia*, which was made from the salvaged *Merrimack*, entered Hampton Roads, Virginia, at the mouth of the James. A number of wooden men-of-war of the Union fleet were in the roads enforcing the blockade. The *Virginia* destroyed two ships and disabled another. The North was thrown into panic. The next morning, however, the *Virginia* was challenged by the *Monitor*, a Union ironclad. The two armored ships bounced shells off each other's sides for four hours without doing any serious damage. Although the battle ended in a draw, the *Virginia* no longer controlled the area's waters. Soon after, when the Confederates withdrew from Norfolk, they destroyed the *Virginia* to keep it from falling into Northern hands. McClellan continued with his plans for invading Virginia.

INVASION PLANS Lincoln agreed with McClellan that an attempt should be made to capture Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy. Lincoln favored an overland invasion route. McClellan, however, insisted on moving the Army of the Potomac by water to the peninsula between the York and James rivers and attacking Richmond from the southeast. Lincoln finally consented to this plan on condition that generals Irvin McDowell and Nathaniel P. Banks be left behind for a short time with about half of the army to defend Washington, D.C.

Stay Tuned...

Quote of the Week:

Man fears Time, yet Time fears the Pyramids.
-Arab Proverb

Fact of the Week:

The ancient Egyptians built nearly 100 pyramids over a millennium to serve as burial chambers for their royalty.

Word of the Week:

Foment (fo' * ment) v.t. to encourage or instigate; to bathe with warm water to relieve pain.

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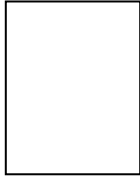
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