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No ...

In late February Iranian and Russian nuclear officials carried out a test run of the nuclear power plant outside the south port city of Bush-ehr.

During the talks on Tuesday, the two sides also drew plans for future cooperation in nuclear field.

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Israeli ...

During that period Dr. Blachar surprised many colleagues by expressing support for Israeli interrogators' use of "moderate physical pressure" in a letter to *The Lancet*, the British medical journal. The phrase covers a wide range of practices from beatings and binding prisoners in painful positions to sleep deprivation. It is regarded by human rights organizations as a euphemism for torture.

Despite the 1999 court ruling, a coalition of 14 Israeli human rights groups known as United Against Torture concluded in its latest annual report in November that Israeli detention facilities are still using torture systematically. Israeli doctors are also being relied on to treat the resulting injuries.

Last week, Physicians for Human Rights and the Public Committee against Torture in Israel published a joint report examining hundreds of arrests in which Palestinians were bound in "distorted and unnatural" ways to inflict "pain and humiliation" amounting to torture.

The report noted instances where prisoners, including a pregnant woman and a dying man, were shackled while doctors carried out emergency procedures in a hospital.

According to the report, the doctors violated the Tokyo Declaration, the key code of medical ethics adopted by the WMA in 1975 that bans the use of cruel, humiliating or inhuman treatment by physicians.

Ishai Menuchin, the head of the Public Committee, said his group had been lobbying strenuously against Israeli doctors' complicity in torture since it issued a report, *Ticking Bombs*, in 2007, arguing that torture was routine in Israel.

The Public Committee highlighted the testimonies of nine Palestinians who had been tortured by interrogators. The report also noted that in most cases Israeli physicians treating detainees "return their patients to additional rounds of torture, and remain silent".

In June last year, Physicians for Human Rights drew the IMA's attention to two cases in which the attending doctor failed to report signs of torture on a Palestinian.

Anat Litvin of Physicians for Human Rights told the IMA: "We believe that doctors are used by torturers as a safety net — take them out of the system and torture will be much more difficult to enact."

The groups stepped up their pressure in February, writing to Avinoam Reches, the chairman of the IMA's ethics committee. They demanded that his association investigate six cases of doctors who failed to report signs of torture.

In one case, a prison doctor, under pressure from interrogators, agreed to retract a written recommendation that a detainee be immediately hospitalized for treatment.

Prof Reches promised to conduct an inquiry. However, last month the two human rights groups criticised him for failing to investigate their claims, accusing him of holding only "amicable and unofficial" conversations over the phone with a few of the doctors concerned.

"We have sent to the IMA many testimonies from victims of torture who were referred to doctors for treatment," Dr. Menuchin said. "But the IMA has yet to do anything about it."

"A significant number of doctors in Israel, in detention facilities and

public hospitals, know torture is taking place, but choose to avert their gaze."

This month, Defence for Children International issued a report on the torture of Palestinian children, noting that in several of the cases it cited, Israeli doctors had turned a blind eye. A boy of 14 who was beaten repeatedly on a broken arm reported the abuse to a doctor who, he said, replied only: "I had nothing to do with that."

The report stated that the group "has not encountered a single case where an adult in a position of authority, such as a soldier, doctor, judicial officer or prison staff, has intervened on behalf of a child who was mistreated".

Campaigners against Dr. Blachar's appointment as the head of the WMA say its Israeli sister association's inaction on torture is unsurprising given its chairman's public stance.

Derek Summerfield of the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, said: "The IMA under Dr. Blachar is in collusion with the Israeli state policy of torture. Its role is to put a benign face on the occupation."

Dr. Blachar told the Israeli website Ynet last week that such criticisms were "slandorous", saying he and the IMA denounced all forms of torture.

The WMA, with nine million members in more than 80 countries, was established in 1947 as a response to the abuses sanctioned by German and Japanese doctors during the Second World War.

In 2007, the WMA's general assembly called on doctors to document and report all cases of suspected torture.

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Amnesty ...

The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly condemned Moscow for its abuses in the predominantly Muslim Caucasian republic.

Russia has fought two wars there to crush a separatist movement and eventually installed a pro-Moscow government.

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Iraqi ...

"We have concerns. Some towns still have trouble -- mixed areas -- but those concerns should not prevent the withdrawal," said Mahmoud Othman, senior lawmaker from the main Kurdish alliance in parliament. Officials see tensions between Arabs and Kurds as the biggest threat to Iraq's long-term stability.

"Those divides between communities would be there even if the Americans stayed. It's between Iraqis. If they can't get together and solve their problems, what can the Americans do?"

Others noted that U.S. troops have moved to areas very close to the cities -- two of the biggest bases are next to Baghdad airport -- and so can be called on to help if needed.

"It is a redeployment rather than a pullout," said Basim Shareef, a member of the Shi'ite Islamist Fadhila party.

The office of Anti-American Shi'ite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who bitterly opposed the pact to extend the U.S. presence, issued a statement calling the withdrawal a "medal of honor in the history of Iraqi resistance."

"This is the right decision ... it is a message that the time is ticking (for the U.S. military presence)," said independent parliamentarian Safia al-Souhail. "We have enough Iraqi security forces on the ground."

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OAS ...

Zelaya has vowed to return, accompanied by foreign leaders, to serve out his term ending in 2010,

defying a warning from an interim government that he faces arrest if he arrives in Honduras, a major coffee producer.

The OAS resolution, formally agreed in the early morning hours of Wednesday in an emergency session at its headquarters in Washington, D.C., condemned the coup and demanded the "immediate, safe, and unconditional return of the president to his constitutional functions."

It declared that "no government arising from this unconstitutional interruption will be recognized."

Zelaya, who was at the session, denounced the coup as a "cruel, bloody, backward step" and offered his "heartfelt thanks" to the 34-member OAS.

"It is the very first time that this organization has spoken so vehemently, with such conviction, condemning an aggressive act, where power has prevailed over reason and where the peace of a society has been broken."

After earlier vowing to return to Honduras on Thursday, Zelaya told reporters that because of the 72-hour time frame in the resolution, he did not now expect to go back before the weekend.

"Basically, the decision is to condemn, very clearly, the military coup," OAS chief Jose Miguel Insulza earlier told reporters during the meeting of the region's top diplomatic body over the crisis in Honduras.

The resolution instructed Insulza to undertake "diplomatic initiatives aimed at restoring democracy and the rule of law and the reinstatement" of Zelaya.

"Should these prove unsuccessful within 72 hours, the Special General Assembly shall forthwith ... suspend Honduras' membership," it said.

Zelaya had said on Tuesday the Argentine and Ecuadorean presidents and the U.N. General Assembly and OAS chiefs would accompany him back to Honduras.

The UN General Assembly on Tuesday called on its 192 member states to recognize only Zelaya's government, calling in a resolution for "the immediate and unconditional restoration of the legitimate and constitutional government."

But the interim government, established after Zelaya was forced out by troops, said the leftist would be detained if he returned home.

"As soon as he enters he will be captured. We have the warrants ready so that he stays in jail in Honduras and is judged according to the country's laws," Enrique Ortez, the interim government's foreign minister, told CNN. He said Zelaya faced charges ranging from violating the constitution to drug trafficking.

Several thousand demonstrators on Tuesday rallied to applaud Zelaya's ouster in the capital Tegucigalpa, after a day of clashes between riot police and the toppled leader's supporters broke out near the presidential palace.

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Iraq ...

This disgusting conflict of choice has even broader consequences. The neoconservative dream of pax-Americana is dead. The credibility of the U.S. and Britain has been eroded along with their ability to gain international support in the future for what can be termed "good" conflicts for want of a better word. President Barack Obama knows this only too well and this is one of the main reasons he is reaching out to lapsed friends and foes alike in an attempt to limit the damage caused by his predecessor.

As a fresh — and very likeable — face, the U.S. president is well placed to draw a line on previous mistakes. He was against the invasion from day one and with a failing economy to worry about along with growing tensions with Tehran he is no mood to regurgitate the past.

BRITISH Prime Minister Gordon Brown isn't so lucky. There is little doubt he would like to bury the entire episode as he was in a senior government position throughout and could be implicated if any wrongdoing is brought to light. The fact that, according to colleagues, he expressed doubt about the war early but chose to display his support publicly doesn't bode well for him. But opposition parties and a large swathe of the British public refuse to let him off the hook. Under pressure, Brown has agreed to sanction an inquiry provided the results aren't publicized prior to the next general election.

Brown's decision should be interpreted as good news. But don't hold your breath. Previous inquiries related to the war, in particular the Hutton Report which covered the death of Dr. David Kelly and Lord Butler's verdict on the intelligence used to justify the invasion were both received as establishment "whitewashes." For instance, the latter found that "it would be rash to say now that no evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs will ever be found." Maybe Butler imagined they were still lurking inside one of Saddam's mattresses.

It has been five years since the Butler Report was issued and evidence has since come to light that Tony Blair knew all along that Saddam was no real threat. Certainly, his famous "45-minute" claim has been ridiculed along with his infamous dossier filched from a student's thesis on the Internet with typos and all. It should be easy to prove that Blair dressed up the truth to sell the war to the British public but his motives for doing so aren't so easily proven. For what it's worth, it is my belief that he simply decided to stand shoulder to shoulder with his best buddy in the White House in true poodle style, irrespective of the rights and wrongs. No wonder George W. Bush gave him a medal! Special relationship or not, for those millions of Britons who flooded the streets to protest Blair's decision was a betrayal.

Word has it that Blair recently sent Gordon Brown the message that he wants the inquiry to be held behind closed doors. Brown would like nothing more but has been forced by shouts of an establishment stitch-up to compromise, promising that some sessions will be open to the public. Other Brown stipulations ensure that the real truth will remain elusive. He says the enquiry will not be mandated to apportion blame or open criminal investigations. He has implied that the investigatory committee will only have access to British citizens and documentation retained by Britain's archives, and will not be allowed "the most sensitive information touching on Britain's security." In other words, nobody is to be held accountable, which means Blair can continue getting a good night's sleep.

However, according to *The Mirror*, Blair and Brown are being blamed by "army bosses" for the "botched occupation" or Iraq. A 100-page leaked document titled "Stability Operations in Iraq" prepared by former military head honcho Gen. Sir Mike Jackson "attacks Mr. Blair for uncritically accepting flawed U.S. plans for the March 2003 invasion, which led to tens of thousands of deaths, including those of 179 British troops." The report also alleges that Brown blocked vital funding for humanitarian aid, clean water and the reconstruction of Basra, which contributed toward the loss of Iraqi hearts and minds. Shamefully, this military report is destined to remain officially secret.

Will anyone ever be brought to book for willful destruction of a country? I doubt it! The establishment, as always, will close ranks as the British public's appetite for the unvarnished truth wanes.

(Source: Arab News)

Israel intercepts Free Gaza Movement's aid ship

GAZA CITY (AP) — The Israeli navy intercepted a ship carrying foreign peace activists trying to break a blockade of Gaza on Tuesday and forced it to sail to an Israeli port, the military said.

A statement said the Greek-registered freighter *Arion* ignored a radio message from the Israeli military saying it would not be allowed to enter Gaza waters and ordering it to turn back.

The statement said naval personnel boarded the small vessel without any shots being fired.

The military said those on board would be handed over to immigration authorities on arrival in the southern port of Ashdod, and humanitarian cargo would be trucked into the Gaza Strip after a security check. The ship arrived at Ashdod port after nightfall.

An earlier statement by the voyage's organizers, the Free Gaza Movement, said the vessel, renamed the *Spirit of Humanity*, left the Cypriot port of Larnaca on Monday bound for Gaza with three tons of medical supplies.

The 20 passengers include former U.S. Representative Cynthia McKinney, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire and other activists from Britain, Ireland, Bahrain and Jamaica.

The ship was flying a Greek flag, but no Greek citizens were aboard. The Greek government issued a statement saying it sent a message to Israel demanding that it release the ship, crew and passengers.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said Israel was planning to free the crew and passengers. "Nobody wants to keep them here," he said. "They will be released as soon as they are checked."

The Free Gaza Movement has organized five boat trips to Gaza since August 2008, defying a blockade imposed by Israel when the Islamic resistance movement Hamas took control of the territory in June 2007.

Two other attempts were stopped by Israeli warships during Israel's three-week war in the territory in December and January. Nobody on board was harmed.

U.S. seeks European funds, troops for Afghanistan

BERLIN (AFP) — Europe must commit more funds and troops to stabilize Afghanistan after the August presidential elections, the U.S. envoy to NATO Ivo Daalder said Wednesday.

"The U.S. is doing its part -- Europe and Germany can and should do more," Daalder told a conference on transatlantic relations in Berlin.

"Additional troops (sent to Afghanistan to provide security during the elections) must stay after the elections."

Daalder said the United States estimated 17 billion dollars was needed to train and equip the Afghan army and two billion dollars per year to sustain it.

"There is no way Afghanistan can pay for its force," he said, noting that the Afghan government had taken in about 750 million dollars in revenues last year.

He said the United States would pay 5.5 billion dollars this year and 7.5 billion dollars next year but said it was crucial that Europe make up the difference.

"This is a weakness in our effort that we cannot afford," he said, adding that more training for Afghan police was also essential.

Daalder noted that the United States had consulted with European allies "for two months" in redefining its strategy in Afghanistan and incorporated several of their demands including a stronger focus on reconstruction and diplomacy.

He said it was now up to the allies to reciprocate by stepping up to the plate.

The German government's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Bernd Muetzelburg, acknowledged at the conference that Europe had a bigger role to play but that financial constraints made this difficult to realize.

"Obviously the Europeans will have to do more," he said. "In this financial crisis it is not going to be easy."

Between 8,000 and 10,000 international troops are to join the around 60,000-strong NATO-led military force in Afghanistan for August 20 presidential elections, the alliance has said.

NATO recently launched an anti-insurgent drive to dislodge Taliban militants from their strongholds ahead of the polls.

The insurgency has gained pace in recent weeks, raising fears for the security of Afghanistan's second ever presidential ballot.

There are about 90,000 foreign troops -- mostly from the United States -- stationed in Afghanistan to battle the Taliban and help train Afghan forces.

The polls, for president and provincial councils, are seen as a test of international efforts to help spread democracy in Afghanistan, but they come as Taliban-led violence has reached record highs there.

Thousands of mostly U.S. troops are moving in to provide security for the elections and to reinforce the turbulent south, a Taliban stronghold.

In remarks published Wednesday, NATO's outgoing top commander, General John Craddock, had a few parting shots for Europe as he formally handed over his post, criticizing the continent's engagement in Afghanistan.

Work on disputed Tigris dam to resume: Turkey

ANKARA (Reuters) — Turkey vowed on Wednesday to resume work to build a disputed 1.2 billion euro dam on the Tigris river in its impoverished south-east and said suspension ordered by foreign backers would be lifted.

German, Swiss and Austrian underwriters said last December they were halting work for 180 days on the Ilisu dam, which would flood ancient sites and displace thousands of Kurdish residents, because it failed to meet international standards.

The Tigris river flows from Turkey into Iraq, which already suffers from frequent droughts and opposes the loss of further water from upriver dams.

Turkish Environment Minister Veysel Eroglu told a news conference on Wednesday the suspension, which expires this month, would be lifted and work could start next week. Energy-hungry Turkey, which is seeking European Union membership, began work in 2006 on the power plant whose dam on the Tigris river will bury part of the ancient town of Hasankeyf and force the relocation of thousands of people.

The German, Austrian and Swiss governments had said the project must meet some 150 conditions affecting the environment, relocation, cultural heritage and neighboring states. A spokeswoman for the Swiss Economy Ministry said: "The (suspension) period lasts until July 6. Switzerland is still examining the issue and will decide together with Germany and Austria on how to proceed."