

New York Times

60 Miles From Islamabad

If the Indian Army advanced within 60 miles of Islamabad, you can bet Pakistan's army would be fully mobilized and defending the country in pitched battles. Yet when the Taliban got that close to the capital on Friday, pushing into the key district of Buner, Pakistani authorities sent only several hundred poorly equipped and underpaid constabulary forces.

Washington Post

At Risk in Sri Lanka's War

At this moment, at least 60,000 civilians trapped in a tiny strip of land along the northern coast of Sri Lanka are being deployed as human shields by the insurgent force known as the Tamil Tigers -- while artillery shells fired by the Sri Lankan army land indiscriminately among rebels and noncombatants alike. The United Nations asserts that at least 4,500 civilians have been killed since January as the government has sought to decisively end a bloody rebellion that has lasted for a quarter-century. The army is said to be preparing a final assault that, according to U.N. Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes, could produce a "bloodbath." Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has spoken of "tens of thousands" of lives at risk. Yet the conflict has barely been reported, and the international community has barely stirred.

Sound the Alarm

The Taliban raised fears in Pakistan last week by briefly seizing new territories near the capital, Islamabad. But in its own way, the Obama administration offered as much reason for panic about the deteriorating situation in that nuclear-armed Muslim country. In the course of just three days, the U.S. secretaries of State and Defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the commanding general of American forces in the Middle East all publicly warned, in blunt and dire language, that Pakistan was facing an existential threat -- and that its government and Army were not facing it. "I think that the Pakistani government is basically abdicating to the Taliban and to the extremists," said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Eyes Wide Shut

Over the past two weeks, the world has been inundated with specifics about the abuse of terrorism suspects during the Bush administration: repeated episodes of waterboarding, snarling dogs, forced nudity, severe sleep deprivation, extended confinement in small, dark boxes.

The Accountability Question

The apparent confusion within the Obama administration about whether to prosecute officials of the previous administration for committing torture is not surprising. Two fundamental principles are colliding in this matter, and it's not easy to achieve a fair outcome that reconciles both.

Obama's Foreign Policy Challenge

The vast diplomatic agenda that the Obama administration has adopted will test its ability to harmonize national priorities such as relations with Iran and North Korea with global and multilateral concerns. President Obama has come into office at a moment of unique opportunity. The economic crisis absorbs the energies of all the major powers; whatever their differences, all need a respite from international confrontation. Overriding challenges such as energy, the environment and proliferation concern them to a considerable degree and in an increasingly parallel way. The possibility of comprehensive solutions is unprecedented.

The Guardian

Cheney and the apologists of torture distrust democracy

The trouble with torture is that sometimes it works; and when it does, the devil sings. Scarpia may have ended with Tosca's knife in his chest, but his torturers got what they needed from Cavaradossi. When Dick Cheney, the former US vice-president, said this week that his favoured interrogation methods had saved America from another 9/11, who could gainsay him?

Iran: Lost in translation

Not for the first time, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has got everyone scrambling for their Farsi phrasebooks. The Iranian president did not describe the Holocaust as "ambiguous and dubious" in his speech to the UN conference on racism, as first reported. He dropped the phrase at the last minute, but not in time for it to be deleted from the English text handed out by his officials after he spoke. In either version, Mr Ahmadinejad is hard put to disguise the views of a crude anti-semitic. And that colours how people see his remarks on the establishment of Israel. Nobody is going to get anywhere discussing 1948. Matters will only progress if all sides address the here and now.

The Economist

Battle is joined

It is the new frontier for military and intelligence activity: cyberspace. For years military experts and computer scientists have speculated about the possibility of a nation's infrastructure being attacked using computers, rather than bombs. There have been dark warnings of the danger of a "digital Pearl Harbour"—an unexpected strike in which digital attackers shut down America's electrical grid or air-traffic control systems, or hack into nuclear-power stations and cause them to overheat. In recent years such concerns have been heightened by the first real examples of large-scale cyber-attacks—on Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008.

The Independent

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown: Our unspoken debt to foreign soldiers

People often try and trip up ardent Republicans like myself by asking the killer question: "So who would you have as a President then, huh? Who? Red Ken or someone like Putin or Idi Amin maybe?" To which I have the perfect answer today: our ab fab Joanna Lumley, cultivated and ageless, her accent more polished than royal silver, loyal ally of the Gurkha soldiers betrayed repeatedly by the nation they have served. Year after year she campaigns with elegance, keeping in check the fury and frustration she must feel (God alone knows how).

The Times

'24' is fictional. So is the idea that torture works

As the torture debate rages in the US, the only defenders of extreme interrogation methods are those who have been involved in authorising them, and they rely exclusively on the Bauer defence: pain and fear are effective tools for extracting information, and therefore necessary.