



"In the event of an emergency, exits are located on both sides of the vehicle..."

# Punta Xtapa Diary

BY RACHEL JOHNSON

Mexico City. Despite inclement weather that drag our culture-resistant children to the Museo Antropologia, and show them the pelota hoops, through which opposing teams of players had to cast a heavy rubber ball. My husband tries to explain to the boys what happens if someone fouled (i.e., threw the ball not in the direction travelled by the sun). "They weren't rec'd," he says, in an attempt to bring the peculiar brutality of the first team sport in history, this Mesoamerican version of football, alive. "They were decapitated." My boys look pensive, realising that Sven and co. had got off much too lightly. Hundreds of years ago the pelota authorities, unlike FIFA and the FA, really knew how to reward players who let their sides down.

And then we drag our children to the Museo Frida Kahlo and the Museo Casa de Leon Trotsky. The first is a U-shaped any house painted a brilliant blue, set around a courtyard dotted with green palms and pre-Columbian statues. Inside,

paintings by Diego Rivera and Frida, who lived there, loved and quarrelled and married, and betrayed each other, divorced and remarried, are mounted on but-tercup-yellow walls alongside the custom-made casts Frida wore after her trolley-bus accident. It is a mate and alive and touching, particularly, of course, for those who found themselves weeping during Frida, the movie.

Trotsky's house is as grim as the Kahlo house is vibrant (for last painting, of water-melons, is entitled "Viva La Vida"). The miasma of death clings to every room. My only profound thought after visiting the depressing habitation, with its bullet-pocked bedroom walls, iron beds, treaded shoes and armoured doors, was: how on earth did Frida and Leon ever get it on? After all, she was a bisexual. One who would sweep floor-sweeping fiesta dresses and drank. He was a communist intellectual who liked to spend 10 hours a day at his desk. In a sense, the place is a reminder not so much of the failure of perpetual revolution but of the wronging supremacy of hormones.

A few weeks of this the children become defiant and demand sun and sand. As soon as we arrive in Punta Xtapa, though, I start fretting about how I'm going to get all the way back to Mexico City. It's an eight-hour drive. Highways have a reassuring special red lane — the "luz roja" — reserved for drivers "without brakes." Plus Mexican friends had told me that passing a driving test is not here a pre-condition of taking a wheel. So I immediately book Aeromexico flights, persuade my husband, with my lower lip trembling, that it's much more sensible for me to fly with the children and him to drive back to Mexico City, and proceed to sink into a deep sleep. The flight is a duration of the life-swap.

On the morning of our departure from Xtapa there is a huge earthquake — 5.9 on the Richter scale — and the bottles of tequila rattle against the mirrored glass in the bar in our all-white beach house. I text Ivo, who is back in England, as it is the first time I have ever felt the earth move. "Good thing you're not driving," he acknowledges in his text back. Even so, we are back in Mexico City we discover that the flight to London has been delayed by 28 hours, which makes me think that I would not have travelled to make any travel plans at all. I'm relieved, anyway, that I don't have any shares in the aviation industry.

The editor of the *Spectator*, Matthew D'Ancona, sent me an email in Mexico allowing me "one full-on page" of my novel, *Nothing Hell* (Penguin Figure, £12.99), in this diary. It is very nice of him (when my brother was editor and allowed me to write, he forbade me to mention my last book, *The Murray Diaries*, at all, so I had to smuggle in the plug). But there is no space left, which is probably a good thing.



## Headlines from US

- Bush says Rumsfeld told him things going well in Iraq. Rumsfeld says he got it from Bush
- Castro Improving: He's up, alert, smoking favourite Montecristo
- Dell recalls 4.1 million laptop computer batteries due to fire hazard: Warns customers not to bring them back in SUVs, which could also catch fire
- Cheney says Lieberman has helped terrorists. Warns of terrorists get-



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- ting control of Congress
  - Opinion poll says more trouble for Bush: Majority thinks he's an idiot
  - New airline caters to those who can afford luxury, security: Passengers sip champagne, dine on lobster and are assigned their own air marshal
  - Nasa can't find original tapes of moon walk: Fears they may have been left on moon
- From *irontimes.com*

# War Names

By P.W. SINGER



Wars can be named for when they started, like a particular year (1812) or holiday, such as Yom Kippur (1973). Other times, wars are named by how long they lasted, from just Six Days (1967) to as much as Thirty (1618-1648) or even One Hundred Years (1337-1453). Indeed, wars are even named to show that they were not really wars, because they were Cold (1945-1989) or Quasi (1798-1800). Sometimes, it can get downright silly. Oranges (1801), Bananas (1898-1934) and even the Ear of a fellow named Jenkins (1739-1743) got their own wars.

The names of wars can certainly change. One war started in Great Britain, but ended up just the First in a series (1914-1918). War naming can also be a source of great dispute. There are still parts of the South that contend that a war of Northern Aggression (1861-1865). But the one rule seems to be that the winners get to pick the name that sticks.

Since the United States hasn't officially declared a war in over 60 years, are a bit of practice in naming them. Perhaps that explains the recent argument over what exactly to title the conflict we are involved in now. After 9/11, President Bush called a Global War on Terrorism, which the Pentagon turned into the not-so-catchy acronym GWOT. But something was lacking. Perhaps it was that making war on a tactic rather than

a specific enemy sounded as effectual as making war on a condition for an addiction, like the wars on Poverty (1964) or Drugs (1971). Worse, the name began to be politicized. Whether you called the invasion of Iraq part of the GWOT or not revealed more about which party you voted for than the war itself.

In any case, a range of other names have been banded about as replacements. As matters have dragged out in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Pentagon has begun to replace GWOT with The

Long War, replete with a 70-page Powerpoint presentation to explain why. Of course, only America would so reveal its impatience by declaring a war "Long" after less than five years. But why be satisfied with just one Long War? Anthony Costello, one of the deans of political analysis in Washington, has just declared that we are not fighting "The" Long War but rather "Six Long Wars and Counting."

Thinkers on the political right want their own war-naming rights, which is also useful in keeping the

word "civil" out of election talk on Iraq. Some, such as Newt Gingrich, link World War to our terrorism battle, calling for the naming of World War III and argue that the US should win the scope with our own strikes on Syria and Iran. The only problem is that their neo-conservative wing already declared it World War IV, back when they were arguing for an Iraq invasion. (Most other people's Cold War was their WWII.) The libertarian/isolationist wing of the GOP doesn't like such new math and is reasserting itself by calling it all the Un-War. As for the left, that it can't even come up with its own snappy war name captures best its confusion on war in general.

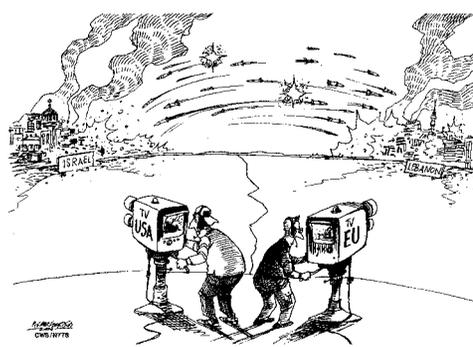
My own take is that history will probably call the war by its spark, 9/11 is the touchstone for all the other names and justifications, and we are already talking about the "9/11 Generation," which is fighting its battles and will ultimately write this war's histories.

It may be it's more simple. By all available measures, the GWOT-Un-Long-III/IV-9/11 War is not going so well. It's being fought by radical groups have doubled in the five years since 9/11 and their recruiting and popularity is through the roof. As for our side, the US is bogged down in fighting an insurgency no one planned for, our nation is at its historic low point in global respect, and now we've lost our God-given right to bring Iraq out on planes.

Recalling that to the victor goes the war-naming spoils, if we don't start turning things around, we may not have to worry about what to call it.

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# PALESTINIANS ALSO KEY TO PEACE



Everyone knows the basic tragedy of West Asia or the Middle East. Israel wants to expand into the new Jewish Greater Israel by denying the Palestinians a just viable state, including occupied East Jerusalem. Yet the Lebanese, who are seeking to get away with murder, thanks to the total support of the Bush administration for Israeli actions, however unjustified. Everyone also knows that as long as Israelis remain on their disastrous path, underwritten by US power, there will be no peace, much less a meaningful process to achieve it.

Yet Lebanon fighting has metamorphosed into wider war in which the Iraqis and Syrians are involved, in addition to the United States, and other states as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the so-called moderates. The Hezbollah leader Syed Hassan Nasrallah, who fought the mighty Israeli Army to a standstill, has become a hero to the Arab world for achieving a feat no Arab state was able to achieve: a guerrilla army that gave Israel as good as it got over a month and more, while Israelis vented their frustration by killing hundreds of Lebanese civilians and in the process laying the country of Lebanon waste. There is no doubt that the Israeli forces, by the Lebanese drama: the moderate states' fear of the Arab street charged with the Hezbollah's heroic exploits, the majority Sunni states' fear of an emerging Shia crescent to challenge their traditional power, the Iraqis' delight over the exploits of the Lebanese movement they have done much to empower following through the United Nations and the emergence of Nasrallah as the new Arab icon — the new Nasser in a different age.

How wonderful it would be if the US would compel Israel to give Palestinians a viable state with East Jerusalem as its capital and live happily ever after! To suggest such an outcome is to underline the harsh reality of the real world, because the Bush administration, bolstered by neoconservatives, aids and abets Israel in its expansion plans and has practically blessed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's programme for a unilateral semi-permanent occupation of prize West Bank land, in addition to retaining occupied East Jerusalem and maintaining the Gaza Strip as a vast prison. Israelis seem to have decided to live by the

## Talking TURKEY

S. NIHAL SINGH

As a garrison state behind high walls in the vain hope of defying history and the cries of the deprived Palestinians and their supporters, the Arab street, the United Nations resolution seeking to buttress an existing UN force with a stiffer European presence? The initial French response to the UN resolution was cautious. The old colonial power is wary of getting mired and the supposed disarming of the Hezbollah is sufficiently ambiguous to warn troop providers. The Hezbollah, after all, is the main driver of the war and is now a champion of the Arab cause.

Two consequences flow from the present impasse. Prime Minister Olmert's plans unilaterally to draw up Israel's semi-permanent borders to negotiate the emer-

gence of a genuine Palestinian state is in deep freeze, given the loud questioning over his failure to achieve his war aims in Lebanon. Second, America remains hemmed in by its predicament in Iraq and faces the difficult choice of talking to Iran and Syria if it wants to bring a way out of the Lebanese crisis.

Nobody doubts that America is in a bind. The manner in which American academics and commentators have sought to assuage the world's shock over the level of devastation caused by Israel to Lebanon's sources of life and infrastructure and the number of civilians killed by examining the meaning of the word "disproportionate" is truly amazing. For most Americans, Israel can do no wrong, and the ruling establishment knows only too well the political costs of crossing Israel, given the iron grip of American Jewish lobbying groups on Washington's West Asia policy. Hezbollah and the Arabs have many more battles to fight.

Lebanon again brings to the fore Europe's impotence in influencing the West Asia. True, the French worked with the US to put together a UN resolution after Washington had given the go-ahead. It is time to pulverise Lebanon. (The world has ceased to take Britain's Tony Blair seriously after he had achieved the status of being President Bush's "poodle.") But the first version they produced was so unambitious, tilted towards Israel, that it was ultimately passed, was less anti-Lebanese, and the United Nations balked at leading UN troops with a robust troop presence.

Apart from Europe, the Arab street has given the US a carte blanche to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as it wished by being partly to its credit. Quietly, derided in the region as a foursome sans trios (without three). The Quartet comprises Russia and the United Nations. In addition to the US and the European Union and has indignously served as a rubber stamp for American actions. Europeans have been the Palestinians' fund givers until the coming to power of Hamas in Gaza and the have presciently waning for what they did to Jews during World War II and earlier.

Two events in recent times have greatly aided growing Jewish ambitions. The demise of the Soviet Union meant that there was no countervailing power in the world. Perhaps the Jewish ambitions and the initial years of the Yeltsin era saw Russians following a subservient policy. Second, the post-9/11 establishment knew its battle with Palestinians into President Bush's "war on terror" to great advantage. The Israeli-Palestinian war will have to wait for President Bush's successor for a change in policy. The cards might be stacked against Palestinians, but they would hold the key to peace in West Asia.