

from our viewpoint...

Tough year Iraq getting worse

A year ago, the headlines were all about how the American and British forces were marching into Iraq and the cheering people we saw tearing down statues of Saddam Hussein.

Today, the headlines are about the violence our troops are facing as Iraq struggles to become a new independent nation. The “regular” combat portion of the Iraq War was over quickly in comparison to the long months of working to help create a new Iraqi government which continue today.

When the war began, there were high hopes for success, and worries about what our troops could face once the major fighting was over. In the past several months, more Americans have been killed in Iraq than during the combat phase.

The Iraqi situation is sinking into a morass, and as President George Bush said, we are committed to staying in Iraq long after the scheduled turnover of power to the new government on June 30.

Worries about a repeat of Vietnam were uppermost in our minds as we watched our troops drive into Baghdad. Yes, there are differences between the two conflicts, but there are similarities which our country seems destined to repeat over and over.

Anytime we take American troops into another country, we have to deal with unintended consequences. American troops means millions of American dollars, and countries where the average income is below our poverty level suddenly see an influx of wealth beyond their dreams.

Vietnam was our longest conflict, and the protests at home were larger and at times more violent than at any time in American history. We had protesters in previous wars as well, and before Pearl Harbor there were efforts to keep American out of the Second World War.

We tried to help the South Vietnamese develop an independent government in the early 1960s, and for a while it seemed to be working, but then an internal upheaval American troops found themselves in the middle of turned that into an unwinnable situation. We spent billions of dollars and 50,000 lives trying to find a way to defeat the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese.

After more than 10 years, we tried to slip out of the noose, but the south was not strong enough to survive.

When the war in Europe was over, our foreign policy focused on containing Communism, and that mean Soviet Russia. One of the ways we tried to contain them was to deny access them to southern sea ports. We got involved with the Shah of Iran to stop the Soviet expansion to the south. We pumped millions of dollars into Iran and built up their forces to keep the Russian Bear at bay.

Our strategy changed about 25 years later, and we turned on the Shah because of the way he was treating his people to stay in power. We withdrew much of our support, and forced him to allow the return of his main enemy, Ayatollah Khomeini. With the Shah out of the way, we were surprised when our people in the embassy were held hostage.

Is it any wonder when we watch the events in Iraq that we reach for the aspirin? And then President Bush’s people are going to Iran for help to quell the problems in Iraq?

Which mirror are we looking into this week? Our troops need our support, but the American people need to be aware of our checkered history of involvement. — *Tom Betz*

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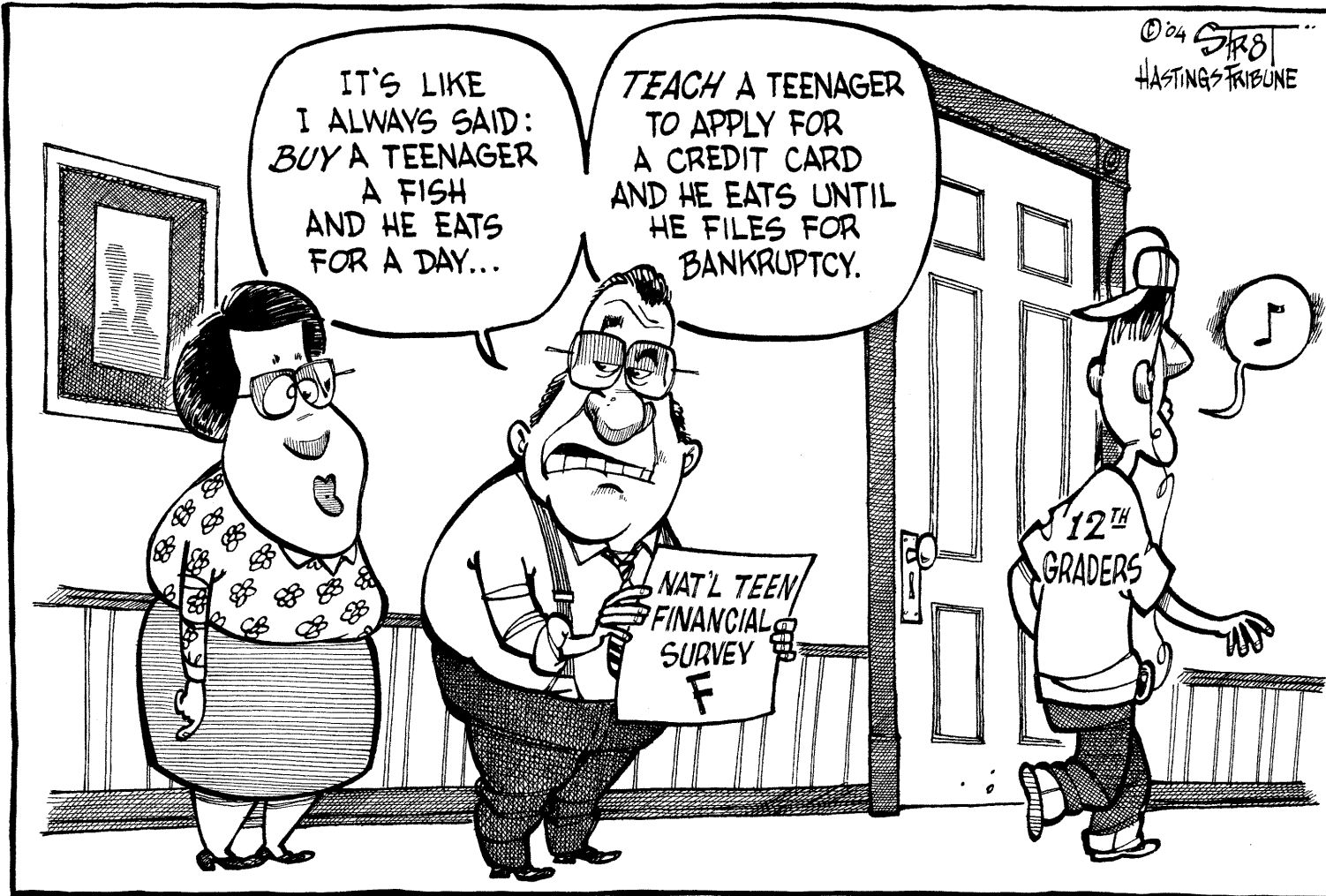
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Solemn moments at Arlington Cemetery

Arlington National Cemetery — the name conjures up images of row upon row of white markers, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the eternal flame over John F. Kennedy’s grave.

Well, that’s what we saw, and a little bit more.

My mother tells me we visited Arlington National Cemetery on a two-week trip to Washington and Baltimore when I was in high school. I remember the trip, but I don’t remember the cemetery.

This time, we were on a mission. Members of the National Newspaper Association who gathered in Washington had a wreath to lay at the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Four of our members were escorted to the tomb, and they handed over the wreath, which was placed on a stand in front of the burial site. We watched the changing of the guard and left quietly as the sentry continued his march.

We were told that the tomb is guarded 24 hours a day. Last fall, when a hurricane came up the Potomac and hit Washington with 120 mph winds, the guard just kept walking. On Sept. 11, 2001, when a plane crashed into the Pentagon, the guard on duty, who could see the crash, turned to the tourists lined up behind the barricades and calmly told them to leave quietly because the cemetery was closed. Then he went back to



cynthia haynes

• open season

Marching without having any idea what was going on.

Down the hill, we stood in front of the graves of John and Jackie Kennedy and two of their children who died in infancy. The stones, which lie flat on the ground, came from land owned by the Kennedys, we were told.

When John Kennedy Jr. died in a plane crash, there was much discussion of burying him with his father and mother. However, our guide told us, John Jr. was not eligible to be buried in Arlington, being an adult who had never served in the military. There was also his wife to consider. Eventually, their ashes were buried at sea.

Just a little ways from the president lies his brother, also felled by an assassin’s bullet. Robert Kennedy lies alone under a white wooden cross, the only wooden marker in the cemetery.

There are about 20 burials a day in Arlington. When we were there, we saw a horse-drawn cais-

Conversation reveals diplomacy history

A conversation with Habib ben Yahya is like a college seminar in the history of Mideast diplomacy.

In half a century of service to his country, Ben Yahya has lived through nearly the entire history of the present conflict. He has seen his nation go from French colony to a prosperous and egalitarian, mostly middle class example for the rest of Africa.

On couches and overstuffed chairs in the reception room at the Foreign Ministry, American editors listen to his recollections. It is one of those rooms where you see pictures of heads of state shaking hands, all gilt and marble and expensive rugs.

And he remembers clearly the initial United Nations Security Council resolution calling for the world to recognize two independent states in the former British protectorate known as Palestine.

Recognition of both Israel and a Palestinian state has always been Tunisian policy, he noted, though there has been a price to pay.

“In 1965,” he said, “(former President) Habib Bourguiba visited Cairo to see (Egyptian President Gamal) Nasser.... He advised Arab countries to accept the partition plan of 1947-48 and recognize Israel.

“Our embassy in Cairo, sir, was burned down. Our embassy in Lebanon was burned down. We were ready to quit the Arab League.”

In the years since, Mr. ben Yahya has been a diplomat and bureaucrat, served as ambassador to the United States, been defense minister and, finally, foreign minister.

In recent years, he’s helped negotiate an opening with neighboring Libya, which has accepted responsibility for its terrorist past and



steve haynes

• along the sappa

given up its nuclear weapons program.

He sees Tunisia as a historic and future friend of the U.S.

“Our relations are very solid,” he says. “They go back two centuries, to 1797.

“The U.S. was the first country to recognize Tunisian independent (in 1956). The U.S. has backed Tunisian independence.”

While his country has not endorsed the American invasion of Iraq, its stance has been moderate.

“Let me tell you,” the minister says, “nobody in Tunisia shed any tears for Saddam Hussein.”

He said Tunisian President Zine ben Ali sent his prime minister to plead with Saddam to leave Kuwait before the Gulf War. Last year, Mr. ben Yahya was the last outside diplomat to see the dictator, urging him to abide by U.N. Security Council resolutions.

“Tunisia’s concern is the fate of the Iraqi people,” he said. “We would like to see Iraq as a united country. The balkanization of Iraq would be disastrous to the entire region.”

He wishes America would take a more constant role in world affairs.

“American history is to be in isolation, then completely involved,” he says. “The world is more complicated now than before the dissolution of the Soviet Union....

“We know your country and the values in which you believe. We don’t question your

son bearing a casket to a grave on one side of the road and a troop of Scottish pipers at a funeral on the other.

Arlington did not have a great beginning. It was the home of Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary, who was the step-granddaughter of George Washington.

During the Civil War, they needed a place to bury the dead, so the government decided to bury as many as they could in the front yard of “The Great Traitor.” The officers, they buried in Mrs. Lee’s flower garden.

After the war, the government kept burying people on the estate — usually soldiers who had no one to bury them. In the early days, Arlington was a pauper’s graveyard. Our guide told us it wasn’t until the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was built that the graveyard became a national shrine.

There are three soldiers buried in the tomb — one each from World War I, World War II and the Korean Conflict. A fourth soldier from the Vietnam War was disinterred in 1998 and identified. His remains were returned to his family and are now buried in St. Louis. The fourth crypt in the Tomb will remain empty, most likely, because with DNA testing there will never be another unknown soldier.

motives — you are trying to help — but you need a global approach.”

The minister bristles at the mention of the official American line, which is that Tunisia needs to quicken the pace of its movement toward true democracy. Since independence, the country has been ruled by a single party, and two presidents, Bourguiba and ben Ali. There is opposition, but the president won his last election by 90 percent.

He said he had told Secretary of State Colin Powell that America has had more time to evolve.

“You have had 200 years,” he said. “We are talking about only 15 years of democratization. Be patient with us.”

The government has been busy with economic reforms and the drive to modernize Tunisia, he said. Democracy will come.

Still, he says, relations with the U.S. are smooth.

“There isn’t any problem between the U.S. and Tunisia,” he says, referring to the then-pending visit to Washington by President ben Ali. “We will be talking about the problems of others.”

While terrorism has not been much of a problem in Tunisia, where government buildings are open and lightly guarded, a group aligned with al Qaida did attack one of the world’s oldest synagogues in Jerba, an island south of Tunis.

Tunisians took that as an insult, the minister said.

“It is a symbol of our tolerance,” he said. “That tolerance is an ingredient we need all over the world. We are talking about a more humane approach to the reuniting of all the sons of Abraham.”

garfield

