

NEWS ANALYSIS

End of Islamic State? Not yet

Don't rejoice over claims that IS is on the ropes. The dark, poisonous soil that has given birth to tens of thousands of extremists in Iraq and beyond hasn't lost its fertility.

Many years ago, back in the 1990s, when Saddam Hussein was still in control of Iraq, an official in the Ministry of Information and Culture would regularly summon this reporter (CNN's senior international correspondent Ben Wedeman) to his office for tea and a tirade. Sometimes it was about our coverage, but often he waxed angrily about the United States and Western policy toward Iraq.

"Someday, a new generation of Iraqis will come with a hatred you won't be able to imagine," he told me. "We older Iraqis still have positive memories of the West, but they will have only hate. Remember my words," he said.

The official, Udai Al-Ta'i, was an intelligent and sophisticated man, fluent in English and French, and had served in the Iraqi diplomatic service in Europe. He often spouted the regime line, but on this occasion his words seemed to come from deep inside.

This was at a time when Iraq was laboring under the UN sanctions imposed after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Then, Iraq's media minders were always eager to take us to the country's crumbling, crowded hospitals, to show us babies suffering and dying from malnutrition and disease.

The United Nations estimated that more than half a million children died as a result of the sanctions. One can debate the causes: the impact for millions of ordinary Iraqis was devastating.

The ravages of the sanction years, and the violence and upheaval that followed the US-led invasion of Iraq did indeed deeply scar a generation of Iraqis, the generation that has now come of age and has provided many willing recruits for IS.

While what we once optimistically called the Arab Spring temporarily shook the region's totalitarian brutes, the lesson they took away from the dramatic demise of "milder" dictators, like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, was that even the slimmest margin of dissent cannot be tolerated.

The exhilaration of sudden freedom and liberation is long gone, a distant and fading memory. The fruit of the Arab Spring has been chaos, war, displacement of millions, bloodshed, sectarianism and renewed oppression.

The failure of the Arab Spring and the redoubled repression that followed proved that the political order in the Arab world is beyond repair, and only the most ultra-radical of solutions, the resurrection of a dystopian caliphate that never really existed -- the future as envisioned by IS -- is the solution.

Those who seek proof of the illegitimacy of the state as it exists today in the Arab world needn't look far for validation.

Yes, IS, in Syria, Iraq and Libya, is reportedly suffering from desertion, internal bloodletting, a shortage of funds and flagging morale. IS, a symptom of the deep-rooted disease of oppression, is in the process of being destroyed.

The disease itself, however, is still there.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, and Princes William, Harry and Kate Duchess of Cambridge arrive at a ceremony to celebrate the official 90th birthday of the Queen in London, yesterday. Ten thousand guests braved rain to take part in a giant street party in front of Buckingham Palace yesterday on the occasion. PHOTO: REUTERS

Secret 9/11 report 'will absolve Saudi'

Says CIA chief

BBC ONLINE

The probable publication of classified parts of a 2002 congressional report into the 9/11 attacks will clear Saudi Arabia of any responsibility, CIA chief John Brennan has said.

Keeping 28 pages of the report secret has sparked speculation that the attack had received official Saudi support. The classified pages are also central to a dispute over whether the families of 9/11 victims should be able to sue the Saudi government.

Saudi Arabia denies any involvement. Fifteen out of the 19 hijackers in 2001 were Saudi citizens.

Former senator Bob Graham, who headed the Senate intelligence committee that compiled the classified report in 2002, has said that Saudi officials did provide assistance to the 9/11 hijackers.

But Brennan said this was



Witnesses tell of hostage terror

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Witnesses have described the moment a gunman opened fire on the dancefloor of a Florida gay nightclub before taking several people hostage.

The shooter was killed following a four hour stand-off with Orlando police at the Pulse nightclub, having killed at least 50 people.

One mother told local TV station WFTV9 her son had texted her from inside the club saying: "He's rounded us up and he is going to kill us".

A Facebook post by the club posted at the time of the shooting said: "Everyone get out of Pulse and keep running".

The gunman opened fire with an assault rifle at the LGBT club in Orlando at around 2am local time (7am UK time).

An eyewitness, Rosie Feba, told the Orlando Sentinel her girlfriend had said someone was shooting but she had assumed it was part of the music at first.

She said: "She told me someone was shooting. Everyone was getting on the floor."

"I told her I didn't think it was real, I thought it was just part of the music, until I saw fire coming out of his gun."

FLORIDA NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING



Feba and her girlfriend ran out of the club, helping a man who had been shot on the way out. The couple were shaken but unhurt.

Another witness, Rob Rick, said it happened around, 2 a.m., just before closing time.

"Everybody was drinking their last sip," he said.

He estimated more than 100 people were still inside when he heard shots, got on the ground

and crawled toward a DJ booth.

A bouncer knocked down a partition between the club area and an area in the back where only workers are allowed. People inside were able to then escape through the back of the club.

Christopher Hansen said he was in the VIP lounge when he started hearing gunshots.

"I was thinking, are you kidding me? So I just dropped down. I just said please, please, please, I want to make it out," he said. "And when I did, I saw people shot. I saw blood. You hope and pray you don't get shot."

He said he continued to hear gunfire after escaping.

The police were telling people to back away from the club and injured people were being tended to across the street, he added.

Another witness, Ricardo J Negron Almodovar, told Sky News he heard "non-stop firing" for around a minute - but it felt much longer.

Police have said there were "mass casualties" following the attack with approximately 50 people dead inside the club and at least 53 people wounded.

The FBI have said the shooting is likely to be terror related.

not the case. "So these 28 pages I believe are going to come out and I think it's good that they come out. People shouldn't take them as evidence of Saudi complicity in the attacks," Brennan said in an interview with Saudi-owned Alabiya TV.

In May, a bill to allow Americans to sue Saudi Arabia over the attacks, in which nearly 3,000 people died, was passed by the Senate and now moves to the House of Representatives.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister has warned that the move could cause his government to withdraw US investments.



No recall vote before next yr

Tension high as Maduro defies opposition move to oust him

AFP, Caracas

Venezuela's embattled President Nicolas Maduro vowed Saturday that no referendum on ending his term would be held until next year, amid mounting pressure as the country teeters on the brink of economic collapse.

Maduro's opponents are racing to call a referendum before January 10, as a successful recall vote before that deadline would trigger new elections rather than transfer power to the vice president.

If the opposition meets all requirements with their bid to oust him, "the recall referendum will be held next year. Period," the elected leftist populist said.

For months now, Maduro has faced increasing hostility, with opponents accusing him of driving oil-rich Venezuela to near economic demise and launching a marathon process to call a vote on ousting him from office.

Maduro's comments came after the National Electoral Board (CNE) announced it would take fingerprint scans from June 20 to 24 to confirm the identity of 1.3 million people who signed the opposition's referendum petition.

The South American country's state-led economy has seen its situation veer from bad to desperate, with long lines for basic items such as rice or corn meal, looting and black marketeering now everyday scenes. Seven in 10 Venezuelans want Maduro to go, according to polls.

Opposition members have said that they want the vote to be held in October or November 2016. But the president insisted that they missed their chance.

The referendum petition was submitted early last month.

China is the biggest and best 'abuser'

Says Donald Trump

PTI, Pittsburgh

Presumptive US Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has alleged that China is the "biggest and best abuser" as it was dumping its goods into the US, stealing intellectual property and imposing hefty taxes on American companies doing business in that country.

"China is the biggest and best abuser. Mexico is a smaller version of China," Trump told his cheering supporters in this steel city of Pittsburgh, which is said to be a key swing state for November general elections as he hit out at several countries including Japan, Germany, Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Trump said he believes in free trade, but it needs to be fair. "I believe in free trade. But for free trade, you need to have smart people on our side. I want to make good deals. I do not want care what you call it," he said.

"I do not want China to dump steel into our country. They are dumping. They are stealing our intellectual property," Trump alleged and warned them of consequences if he is elected as the president of the country.

"If they do not behave, we will put tax on them. They (Chinese) tax us. But we do nothing about it. This is one-way street... We got ripped off," he said.

The real estate tycoon from New York claimed he would have a good relationship with China and would enter into a deal with them that would benefit the US and create jobs in the country.



Thailand's ousted premier Yingluck Shinawatra (C) taking part in a traditional dance with Karen girls during a visit to the Wat Salaeng temple as part of her 'fighting with smiles' tour in the northern Thai province of Phrae. The Thai military has banned all political campaigning and Yingluck's trips to the north and northeast are ostensibly billed as cultural tours to celebrate reaching five million Facebook fans. PHOTO: AFP

INDIA'S NSG MEMBERSHIP BID

China urges more talks as resistance softens

REUTERS, Beijing

China yesterday said that more talks were needed to build a consensus on which countries can join the main group controlling access to sensitive nuclear technology, after a push by the United States to include India.

China is seen as leading opposition to the US move to include India in the 48-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). The NSG aims to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons by restricting the sale of items that can be used to make those arms.

India already enjoys most of the benefits of membership under a 2008 exemption to NSG rules granted to support its nuclear cooperation deal with Washington, even though India has developed atomic weapons and never signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the main global arms control pact.

But China on Thursday maintained its

Nepal's ex-PM announces rival new party

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's former Maoist prime minister Baburam Bhattarai announced a new political party yesterday in an attempt to attract legions of voters disillusioned with mainstream leaders.

Bhattarai, prime minister from August 2011 to March 2013, played a key role in bringing the Maoists into the political mainstream after the end of their decade-long insurgency in 2006. But Bhattarai quit the main Maoist party last September over the adoption of Nepal's controversial new constitution, and after years of playing second fiddle to Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, better known as Prachanda.

Man hurls explosives inside china airport; 4 injured

AFP, Shanghai

A man hurled a bottle containing home-made explosives inside the main international airport in China's commercial hub of Shanghai yesterday, injuring four people before attempting to kill himself, authorities said.

The unidentified man removed a beer bottle or bottles with explosive materials from a backpack before throwing one near a check-in counter in Terminal Two at Pudong International Airport, the Shanghai government said in a statement.

He then took out a knife and slashed at his neck, it said, adding the man is now in critical condition in hospital.

His motive was not disclosed. There have been several cases in China of disgruntled individuals setting off explosions or starting fires in revenge for perceived wrongs.

Four passengers were injured in the incident, said the statement on the Shanghai government's official microblog.

The official Xinhua news agency said they included a man from the Philippines, as well as a 67-year-old man and a 64-year-old woman -- both described as Chinese. The nationality of the fourth victim was unclear.

The four were slightly injured by glass shards and are being treated in hospital, it added.

A few flights were affected because the incident disrupted the check-in area but the airport later returned to normal operation, Xinhua said.

Online video clips showed dense grey smoke rising to the ceiling of the cavernous terminal, and paramilitary security forces rushing into the building immediately after the incident.

Photos posted online by those claiming to be witnesses showed police keeping people back from the scene and abandoned luggage littering the floor.

In a similar incident, a wheelchair-bound man from southern China detonated a homemade bomb at Beijing international airport in 2013 as a protest at alleged police brutality.

The man, Ji Zhongxing, was later sentenced to six years in jail.