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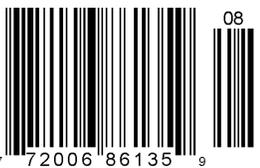


Digging Panama

AMBASSADOR ROMY VASQUEZ
ON PANAMA'S LEGENDARY PAST
AND ITS SPECTACULAR FUTURE

PLUS: CANADIANS JOIN GLOBAL RUSH
TO BUY INTO PANAMA'S AMAZING BOOM




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A panoply of opportunities

Panama has come of age. It's now a country with as much going for it as there are vessels cruising through its renowned waterway. These days, after decades of dictatorships, it's hailed as the Switzerland of Central America – a country of endless opportunity.

In her cover essay, Romy Vasquez, the irrepressible Panamanian ambassador, points out this fact and more on her country's history, culture, economic successes and promising future.

Panama is also a place retiring Canadians are starting to consider. As *Diplomat* publisher Neil Reynolds points out in a story on that subject, Panama has big expat communities – because Panama City is as modern a city as you'll find; health care is top notch; the weather's great; and the country has a relatively low cost of living. In addition, it welcomes foreign investors with more than mere open arms. If you buy a new house, you won't pay property tax for 20 years. Prove you're a pensioner and the discounts flood in – fares, restaurant meals, prescription drugs, hotel rooms. And better yet, no income made outside the country is taxed – although Canadians are taxed on the income in their home and native land.

For a subject that brings us back to Canada, Patrick Lennox, a scholar from the University of Calgary, offers his experience aboard HMCS *Iroquois*, patrolling in the Arabian Sea as part of Canada's efforts to fight terrorism. Dr. Lennox spent two weeks on board and offers his opinions on why the Canadian Navy is vital and must be adequately funded.

Up front, we have an interview with Iranian chargé d'affaires Seyid Mahdi Mohebi. *Diplomat* associate publisher Donna Jacobs sat down with him several times and asked tough questions. While what appears is a reflection of how few subjects his regime will let him discuss, we do learn that despite a diplomatic impasse between Iran and Canada, there were, at



JENNIFER CAMPBELL

some point this spring, plans afoot for a Canadian delegation of MPs to visit Iran.

Be sure to check out page seven where we run a fascinating excerpt from Tarek Fatah's book, *Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State*. Mr. Fatah talks about how the U.S. "tapped into this vast reservoir of brainwashed jihadis" when it fought its war against communism in the Muslim world. He also tells the story of a 17-year-old girl who was shot and refused medical attention because martyrdom felt good. And, he tells how he found a booklet at a Toronto book festival which encouraged Muslims toward jihad stating "jihad is as much a primary duty as are daily prayers and fasting. One who avoids it is a sinner."

Books columnist George Abraham also looks at terrorism. His book selections speak to where it comes from, what terrorists mean by victory and how ordinary people turn to it as a goal in life.

Wine columnist Stephen Beckta writes about pairing wines with foods that have more traditionally been enjoyed with beer (think curries and burritos). Culture editor Margo Roston gets a look inside the home of Israeli Ambassador Alan Baker and his wife, Dalia, just before they head back to Israel after a four-year posting. In Canadiana, Laura Neilson Bonikowsky shares the story of Joshua Slocum, a Nova Scotia-born adventurer and master mariner who, in 1898, was the first to sail alone around the world. In our section on entertaining, columnist Margaret Dickenson shares her tips on creatively garnishing your plates.

Greek Ambassador Nikolaos Matsis shares his travel tips for his homeland. His favourite spots are Mount Athos and Rhodes, although Athens makes an appearance on his list.

Jennifer Campbell is *Diplomat's* editor.

UP FRONT

Photographer Ben Welland spent hours with Panamanian Ambassador Romy Vasquez to get the shot on our cover. When he took her to the Rideau Canal, he was surprised to learn she'd never been, given the importance of the Panama Canal. And, he was impressed by her diplomatic skills. "She's really good at selling her country," he said. "I'm into birding and she talked about the toucans on her balcony last time she was there. Now I want to go."



CONTRIBUTORS

Romy Vasquez, author of "Panama was born globalized"



Romy Vasquez has more than 20 years experience working with Panama's foreign service and considerable business experience. She managed a high-end leather accessories business in Mexico City from 1995 to 2004, before becoming Panama's ambassador to Canada. Since arriving here, Ms. Vasquez has enjoyed numerous successes including attracting two engineering firms to Panama, initiating free trade discussions with Canada, and signing an air agreement. Ms. Vasquez has a bachelor of science from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The polyglot (she speaks Spanish, English, French, Portuguese and Italian) also has a master's in business administration from the Instituto Tecnológico Autonomo de México in México City.

Patrick Lennox, author of "Relentless in Chase"



Patrick Lennox is J.L. Granatstein Post-doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary. He holds a doctorate in political science from the University of Toronto, and although he received no formal training for his first extended voyage at sea, the crew of *Iroquois* provided all the necessary guidance and instruction with patience and professionalism. He will rejoin them in August in the Arabian Sea to continue his research on the Canadian Navy's contribution to the global war on terror. The Security and Defence Forum in conjunction with the Canadian Navy gave him the opportunity to become embedded with *Iroquois* this spring. "Relentless in Chase" is *Iroquois'* motto.

'Islamist jihad has evolved into a death cult'

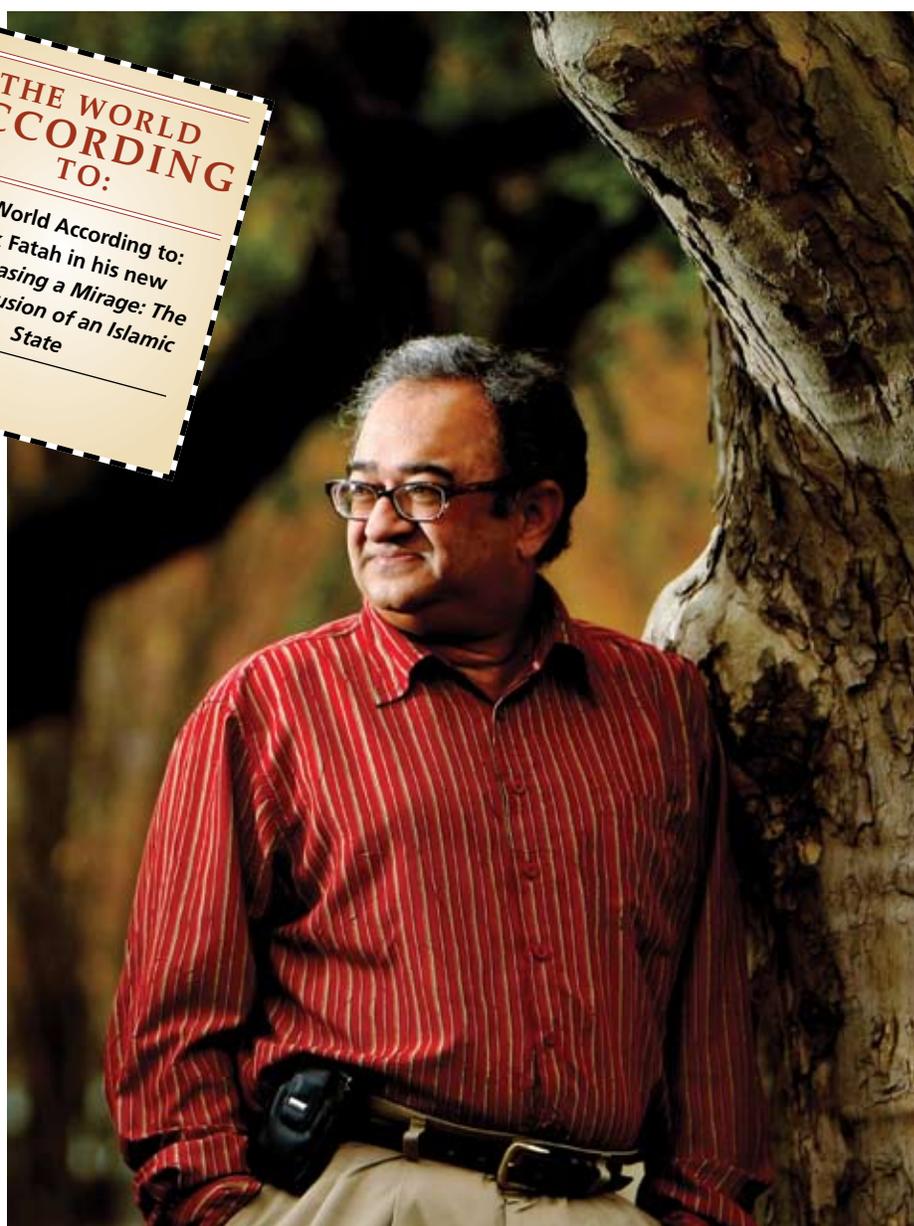
Journalist Tarek Fatah is host of the weekly TV show *The Muslim Chronicle* and a frequent contributor to the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*. A lifelong critic of Islamic extremism, the Pakistan-born writer has earned the ire of Islamists. After 9/11, in opposition to extremism, he founded the Muslim Canadian Congress, an organization dedicated to separation of religion and state and to gender equality for Muslims.

For his work and perseverance as a writer and broadcaster – despite intimidation and numerous death threats – the National Press Club of Canada awarded Mr. Fatah the 2007 Press Freedom Award. He lives with his wife and daughters in Toronto's Cabbagetown.

By Tarek Fatah

I believe the agenda of the Islamists is not to spread the message of peace and justice on Earth with people submitting to the Creator. For these people who treat Islam as a brand name, not a religion, it seems their motivation is one of revenge, or an outburst on seeing themselves as unable to compete in or contribute to a globalized world. For others it is a continuation of a response to the Crusades. It appears the defeat of Richard the Lion-Hearted was not enough. They would like to see both Muslim and non-Muslim collectively submit to their fascist ideology of hate and supremacy where instead of life, death is to be celebrated.

The doctrine of armed jihad against the non-Muslim "enemy" would take on a more robust and political form in the early 20th-century interpretations among such Islamist scholars: Hassan al Banna, Abul Ala Maudoodi and Syed Qutb. These men have laid the foundation of a new form of jihad, patterned on the tradition of the underground communist parties of Europe and at times resembling the anarchists of the 19th century. Today, it has evolved into a form of a death cult, where the highest level of Islamic worship is to die and leave this world to its "satanic existence." This blending of the death cult and jihad has translated into the martyrdom sought by so many brainwashed young Muslim men



Tarek Fatah, Pakistani-born author and critic of Islamic extremists, received the 2007 Press Freedom Award for his work.

and women.

While many Islamists in the West are careful about what they say to the media, Islamists from the Muslim world are not so guarded. Justice Muhammad Taqi Usmani is a sharia judge in Pakistan's Supreme Court and one of the world's most respected Islamic scholars from the Deobandi Sunni school. This is the sect of Islam that dominates the Taliban and has a presence in most Indo-Pakistani mosques in Britain and Canada. Though not directly linked to the Saudi Wahhabi strain of Islam, the Deobandi school has historical links with the Saudis. The learned judge, who advises many multinational companies on halal investments, has some

eye-opening thoughts on jihad. Usmani is a regular visitor to Britain, where in 2007 he declared in a *London Times* interview that Muslims should wage military jihad "to establish the supremacy of Islam" worldwide.

He told the newspaper that Muslims should live peacefully in countries such as Britain, where they have the freedom to practise Islam, but only until they gain enough power to engage in battle. He told the prestigious *Times*: "The question is whether aggressive battle is by itself commendable or not. If it is, why should the Muslims stop simply because territorial expansion in these days is regarded as bad? And if it is not commendable, but

deplorable, why did Islam not stop it in the past?"

He then proceeded to answer his own question: "Even in those days . . . aggressive jihads were waged . . . because it was truly commendable for establishing the grandeur of the religion of Allah."

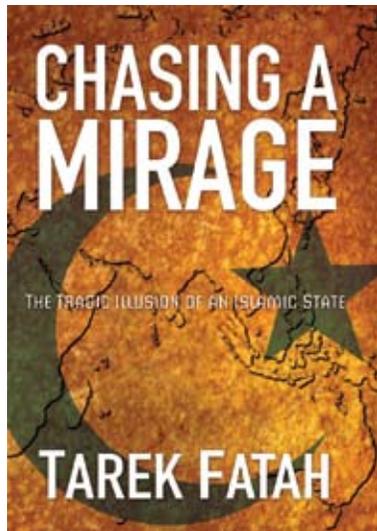
The United States did not hesitate to tap into this vast reservoir of brainwashed jihadis. In fact, the United States would finance the jihadis, using them to fight its global war on communism. For decades the United States had clandestinely helped jihadi groups quash pro-communist and nationalist Muslims inside the Muslim world. By the end of the 1970s, this covert practice was more visible, and the United States had become a covert supporter of international jihad.

Perhaps the clearest example of US endorsement of jihad came in the January 1980 photo-op showing President [Jimmy] Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, standing at the historic Khyber Pass that marks the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pointing a rifle at Kabul, Brzezinski declared: "We know of their deep belief in God and we are confident that their struggle will succeed. Your fight will prevail because your cause is right and God is on your side."

Standing alongside Brzezinski were Pakistani military officials, CIA operatives, and the much-loved mujahideen (Muslim guerrilla fighters) of the time. Brzezinski urged the warriors to go forth and commit jihad. As the turbaned men who would later metamorphose into the now-hated Taliban cheered, Brzezinski, resplendent in a traditional Afghan woollen cap, basked in their adoration. The Americans had finally found the dupes who were willing to die serving US imperial interests.

Thus began the ten-year CIA-sponsored jihad against the Soviets, which one CIA officer said was "a war that was fought with our gold, but with their blood." It was a US-sponsored jihad; even the textbooks for the jihadi madrassahs came from the United States. In these books, the alphabet consisted of jeem for "jihad," kaaf for "Kalashnikov," and tay for "tope" (cannon). It's this sponsorship of jihadi doctrine that has come back to haunt the United States. The same jihadi doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood that made the Taliban and Al-Qaeda allies of the United States during the Cold War has now become the genie that cannot be put back into the bottle.

Few non-Muslims can understand the psychology of the person who wishes



IN CASE THE READER IS LEFT WITH ANY DOUBT ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE WORD "JIHAD," ABUL ALI MAUDOODI CLARIFIES: "IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE DIVINE LAW, THIS WORD [JIHAD] IS USED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE WAR THAT IS WAGED SOLELY IN THE NAME OF GOD AGAINST THOSE WHO PERPETRATE OPPRESSION AS ENEMIES OF ISLAM. THIS SUPREME SACRIFICE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL MUSLIMS."

death more than life. Jihadis have not been the first to die for their cause, but their passion for death far exceeds that of the kamikaze pilots or the Tamil Tiger suicide bombers.

An example of this death cult was reported in the *The Sunday Times* coverage of the Pakistani military action that ended the Islamabad Red Mosque siege in the summer of 2007. On July 15, a few days after the fighting had died down, the newspaper interviewed a fifteen-year-old girl who had witnessed the fighting. Asma Hayat said that she was handing out water to children affected by tear gas near the main gate of the mosque when her friend

Nasmeen, seventeen, was shot in the side. When she went to help her, Nasmeen pushed her away, saying: "It feels good, it's martyrdom."

It makes one wonder what would make a seventeen-year-old girl, wounded in battle, deny help simply because "it feels good to be martyred." This bizarre behaviour has no precedent in the Quran or the Prophet's teaching. It is the result of the unchallenged death cult being taught to young Muslim girls and boys in private Islamic schools throughout the world—teachings which, in the words of Hassan al-Banna, claim that "jihad is obligatory on every Muslim." And that martyrdom in the name of Allah is better than life on Earth.

Islamists are no longer restricting their activities to the mosques or Islamic centres. In October 2007 they even set up a stand at Toronto's annual "Word on the Street" book festival, which was staged on the leafy lawns of Queen's Park, home of Ontario's legislative building. At this event, another US-based Islamist organization, the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), distributed a free booklet titled *Towards Understanding Islam*, written by Abul Ala Maudoodi, the founder of the radical Jamaat-e-Islami, and the intellectual guru of Islamists and jihadis around the world.

In the booklet, Maudoodi exhorts ordinary Muslims to launch jihad, as in armed struggle, against non-Muslims. "Jihad is part of this overall defence of Islam," he writes. In case the reader is left with any doubt about the meaning of the word "jihad," Maudoodi clarifies: "In the language of the Divine Law, this word [jihad] is used specifically for the war that is waged solely in the name of God against those who perpetrate oppression as enemies of Islam. This supreme sacrifice is the responsibility of all Muslims."

Maudoodi goes on to label Muslims who refuse the call to armed jihad as apostates: "Jihad is as much a primary duty as are daily prayers or fasting. One who avoids it is a sinner. His every claim to being a Muslim is doubtful. He is plainly a hypocrite who fails in the test of sincerity and all his acts of worship are a sham, a worthless, hollow show of deception."

Two thoughts troubled me as I read the above passage. First, why was a Canadian Muslim organization distributing this call to arms against Canada at a book festival? Second, I wondered, if such hateful and inflammatory literature was being distributed openly in downtown Toronto, what

was being said in the confines of private gatherings and the new mini-mosques that have sprouted across all major metropolises in the West? It is clear that jihadi extremists are taking advantage of Canada's liberal democracy to spread their fascist ideology, while the liberal-left custodians of fair play and equity are being taken to the cleaners. Taunting peaceful Muslims to commit jihad against Canada should certainly deserve a challenge, but few are willing to speak up.

The problem is compounded when many of the Western writers and academics with a sound knowledge of Islamic politics treat the subject matter with kid gloves, instead of stating the facts about the dangers of spreading the doctrine of jihad among Muslim youth followers of Qutb and Maudoodi.

Take the example of John Esposito, a professor of religion and international affairs at Georgetown University. In discussing jihad, it seems he goes out of his way to not offend the Islamists, appearing to gloss over the threats they pose, if not apologizing for them. In mid-2007, in a piece for *The Washington Post* titled "Want to Understand Islam? Start Here," he wrote:

Muslims also argue over what some refer to as Islam's sixth pillar, jihad. In the Koran, Islam's sacred text, jihad means "to strive or struggle" to realize God's will, to lead a virtuous life, to create a just society and to defend Islam and the Muslim community. But historically, Muslim rulers, backed by religious scholars, used the term to legitimize holy wars to expand their empires. Contemporary extremists—most notably Osama bin Laden—also appeal to Islam to bless their attacks. My book *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* tackles this theme.

John Esposito knows very well that the problem is not simply Osama bin Laden, but that it lies in the doctrine of jihad as espoused by such 20th-century Islamists as Hassan al-Banna and Abul Ala Maudoodi, who have a large following among American Muslim organizations and their leaders. He could have asked Muslims to distance themselves from these two purveyors of Islamic extremism, but instead chose to gloss over the subject, trivializing the real danger this ideology poses to secular civic society. Instead of promoting his book, Esposito could have used the space



FROM INDIA TO INDONESIA
AND MOROCCO TO MALAYSIA,
THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD
IDEOLOGY OF JIHAD AND
ISLAMIC SUPREMACY IS BEING
CHALLENGED BY FELLOW
MUSLIMS. HOWEVER, IN
CANADA, THE UNITED STATES,
AND THE WEST, IT SEEMS THE
MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND
ITS PAKISTANI WING, THE
JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI OF ABUL ALA
MAUDOODI, DOMINATE THE
MUSLIM NARRATIVE.

to explicitly denounce the application of jihad as a political tool. He did not.

Not only did the late Hassan al-Banna make it seem obligatory for all Muslims to conduct jihad, but he was quite clear that "jihad" meant armed conflict. He mocked the concept of the lesser and greater jihad, suggesting that this theory is a conspiracy so that "Muslims should become negligent." Syed Qutb, another Egyptian stalwart of the Islamist movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, wrote in his classic book *Milestones*:

Can anyone say that [if] Abu Bakr, Umar or Othman had been satisfied that the Roman and Persian powers were not going to attack the Arabian peninsula, they would not have strived to spread the message of Islam throughout the world? . . . It

would be naive to assume that a call is raised to free the whole of humankind throughout earth, and it is confined to preaching and exposition.

Qutb is blunt about his expectations of Muslims living in the West. He writes:

A Muslim has no country except that part of the earth where Shariah of God is established and human relationships are based on the foundation of relationship with God; a Muslim has no nationality except his belief, which makes him a member of the Muslim community in Dar-ul-Islam; a Muslim has no relatives except those who share the belief in God. . . . A Muslim has no relationship with his mother, father, brother, wife and other family members except through their relationship with the Creator, and then they are also joined through blood.

He goes on to urge Muslims living in non-Muslim countries to work towards domination of their religion: "Indeed, there is no Islam in a land where Islam is not dominant."

From India to Indonesia and Morocco to Malaysia, the Muslim Brotherhood ideology of jihad and Islamic supremacy is being challenged by fellow Muslims. However, in Canada, the United States, and the West, it seems the Muslim Brotherhood and its Pakistani wing, the Jamaat-e-Islami of Abul Ala Maudoodi, dominate the Muslim narrative.

The few voices that do stand up to the open exhibition of jihadi ideology in Canada and the United States face serious obstacles. For example, two Muslim experts who were hired by the US TV network PBS to advise it on a series on Islam ensured that Canadian filmmaker Martyn Burke's documentary *Islam vs. Islamists* was excluded. It was later widely reported that the two knew the very Islamist groups that were the subject of the documentary investigation. It took months of lobbying by the producer, including a viewing for members of the US Congress, to compel PBS to lift what amounted to a covert ban.

Excerpted from *Chasing a Mirage* by Tarek Fatah. Copyright 2008. Excerpted with permission of the publisher John Wiley & Sons, Inc. This book is available at all bookstores, online booksellers and from the Wiley web site at www.wiley.ca, or call 1-800-567-4797.

Japan presents 'Cool Earth 50' initiative to G8



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I feel fortunate indeed to be serving in Ottawa during this very special year. In 2008, Canada and Japan mark the 80th anniversary of formal diplomatic relations between our two nations. Events this year in both countries will celebrate a partnership that has at its roots a rock-solid, mutually beneficial economic foundation and is constantly evolving on the basis of shared beliefs in freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and international multilateralism.

From a more global perspective, this year is also special because Japan enjoys the privilege of holding the G8 presidency. As such, we have been honoured to play host to our closest friends and allies, including Canada, at a series of high-level gatherings throughout the first half of the year. No fewer than nine major meetings of senior G8 ministers have taken place throughout Japan leading up to the July 7-9 Leaders' Summit to be held in Toyako, on the northern island of Hokkaido.

This year's summit will have four principal themes.

The first is the environment and climate change. At the 2007 Heiligendamm Summit in Germany, leaders agreed to "seriously consider" Japan's "Cool Earth 50" initiative – the pursuit of a minimum 50 per cent decrease in then-current global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Building on the momentum created by this commitment, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced the details of his "Cool Earth Promotion Program" at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in January. As host of this year's Summit,

Japan will strongly promote this program.

Japan will encourage its G8 partners to support discussions within the United Nations aimed at creating an emission-reduction framework for the post-Kyoto era that will commence after 2012.

Toward that end, it will strongly advocate a sector-based approach toward emissions control – in short, a bottom-up approach to set feasible and equitable emission targets based on best technology and practices applied to each industrial sector. The potential utility of this kind of approach was acknowledged by G8 environment ministers during their meeting May 24-26 in Kobe.

Japan will stress the need for interna-

Japan recognizes that a 50 per cent reduction in emissions will require new, innovative environmental technologies. At the summit, this country will invite its G8 partners to join in co-operative efforts to establish roadmaps leading to this crucial technological development.

The second theme for this year's summit is related to development and Africa. This year represents the mid-point of the timeframe set out at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 to achieve eight Millennium Development Goals in the world's least developed countries. The summit will provide an opportunity to review the status of this commitment, specifically as it relates to Africa. Further, Prime Minister Fukuda has already expressed his intention to emphasize, from a perspective of human security, the fulfillment of those goals as they relate to the provision of health care, the management of water resources, and the universal availability of educational opportunities.

The leaders will also be in a position to



This year's G8 Leaders' Summit takes place in Toyako, on the northern island of Hokkaido. Lake Toya is pictured here.

tional co-operation in providing developing countries with the financial and technological support necessary for sustainable development. It will encourage its G8 partners to establish and support targeted multilateral funds created for this purpose.

build upon progress made at the fourth Tokyo International Conference on African Development held May 28-30 in Yokohama. At that meeting, Japan, together with its co-hosts the UN, UNDP and World Bank, discussed with African leaders how the knowledge and resources of

the international community could be mobilized to boost economic growth, enhance human security and address environmental and climate-change issues.

The world economy represents a third summit theme. A degree of uncertainty currently hangs over the international economy, uncertainty that is exacerbated by rising energy prices and the sub-prime issue. The leaders will address these concerns and discuss other subjects such as sustainable growth, investment, trade, the protection of intellectual property rights, emerging economies and natural resources. The leaders will also address food shortages: The Food Crisis Summit hosted by the FAO in June, along with WTO discussions, showed the need for immediate and longer-term solutions to this problem.

Finally, the leaders will discuss political matters of mutual interest and concern. One topic will undoubtedly involve the strengthening of the international non-proliferation regime. Serious concerns with potential nuclear ramifications on the Korean peninsula and in Iran underscore the need to maintain extreme vigilance over the production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems.

Co-operative efforts to maintain and advance the international fight against terrorism will also figure prominently at the summit. As always, the annual gathering will also afford leaders an opportunity to discuss significant regional matters and other urgent issues of the day.

In addition to providing an opportunity for multilateral exchange at the highest level, the Toyako Summit will also let G8 leaders meet individually to discuss matters of mutual and bilateral interest. I am sure that Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda and Prime Minister Stephen Harper will discuss the potential to expand and deepen the Japan-Canada partnership and friendship. Perhaps they will even have the opportunity to share a moment to reflect on this year's very special 80th anniversary.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Each issue of Diplomat provides space for a head of mission to Canada to provide an official government view on issues and events in his or her country. Diplomatic Agenda items are unfiltered by journalists. They receive standard editing for style, length and ease of reading but the ideas stand unaltered.

Tsuneeo Nishida is Japan's ambassador to Canada.

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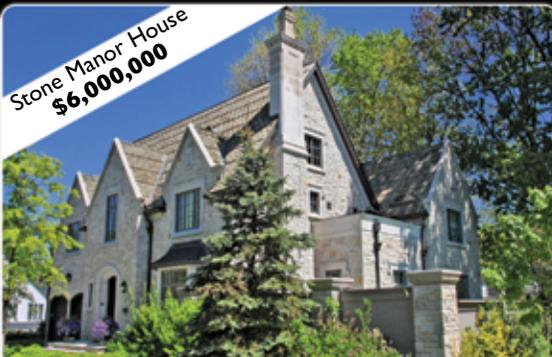
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This ambassador sizzles – and sautéés

When it comes to giving back to the community of Ottawa, Mexican Ambassador Emilio Rafael Jose Goicoechea rolls up his sleeves – and dons an apron. For the most part, his embassy makes donations to the community in the form of dinners at the official residence. The dinners are usually auctioned off as fundraisers and can yield upwards of \$10,000 for the specified charity. But Mr. Goicoechea doesn't just play host at these events – he also cooks.

The residence has an official chef, as many missions do, but on these charity-related occasions, he serves as sous-chef. The ambassador, who acts as guest chef, prepares the dishes and shows his chef how to make them. Then, the chef produces enough for the guests.

"I work alongside the chef," Mr. Goicoechea said. "It's not my kitchen so I'm like an invited chef. I tell him what to prepare and I do the first plate, along with the presentation."

The deal he offers to the charities is that if the bid for a dinner for 10 people exceeds \$5,000, he'll do the cooking. So far in Ottawa, the ambassador has cooked for a few dinners including Music to Dine For (a National Arts Centre fundraiser for educational programming), Big Brothers, Big Sisters and Opera Lyra. He also plans to cook for the Ottawa Humane Society since the bid hit \$6,000. He's told that Laureen Harper, wife of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, will likely attend.

"So I'll spend a full day cooking for that one," he says.

Mr. Goicoechea has always enjoyed cooking. His base, he says, is French and he prefers to do nouvelle cuisine.

"I use Mexican ingredients with a French base. It's tradition with a twist," he said, and added that he's borrowed inspiration from the recipes of his mother and his grandmother.

The Mexican embassy is as active as it can be in charity and community work, he said. But like all missions, it has a budget to consider.

"But we try to manage and try to participate in the institutions that we believe we should support. We receive probably 50 or more requests per year and it's hard to please everyone so we try to select



Mexican Ambassador Emilio Goicoechea, right, takes his charity events seriously. If the embassy auctions off a dinner and it raises more than \$5,000, the ambassador himself will cook the meal.



The table is set for a charity dinner.

the best 10 to 15 during the year and for those, we provide a dinner."

The ambassador said the embassy has a study group to examine the charities that come to them seeking support and then picks the best or most suitable for the embassy's goals in Canada.

Another of his interests – and this one is more community outreach – is in open-

ing his residence to Canadians. Ideally, he'd like to share his home by offering guided tours any time but his officials are concerned about security. Still, he planned to start the program with a bang by opening the home up to Canadians on Canada Day.

"We'll open the residence and invite people for free," he said.

Iran cites Canadian ‘signs and signals’ that it wants normal diplomatic relations



Seyid Mahdi Mohebi is the chargé d'affaires of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ottawa embassy. Canada and Iran have traveled a rocky diplomatic road since the Islamic Revolution of 1978. That road hit an impasse in 2003. Iranian-born Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was arrested in June 2003 while taking pictures of a protest by families of dissidents being held at Tehran's Evin Prison. Comatose after severe torture, she died and was quickly buried by Iranian authorities who initially denied she had been murdered. Today, Iran's official Rockcliffe Park residence in Ottawa, with its turquoise mosaic fountain and its fabulous Oriental rugs, sits empty. Iran's last ambassador, Mohammad Ali Mousavi, left in 2004. Canada has not approved the two men Iran has proposed as his replacement. In retaliation, last December, Iran expelled John Mundy, Canada's ambassador in Tehran. Recently, Iran began a new investigation into Ms. Kazemi's murder. Mr. Mohebi has, in the past, stated his regret over her death as a "bitter reality" which is "for us unacceptable." He recently agreed to an interview – putting any discussion of terrorism, Iran's nuclear facilities or Israel off limits. He sat down in the sunroom of the official residence with *Diplomat's* associate publisher Donna Jacobs.

DIPLOMAT: How would you describe Canada's relationship now with Iran?

SEYID MAHDI MOHEBI: It's important for us to maintain relations – economic, cultural, political – between Iran and Canada, and to upgrade this relationship because, No. 1, we have so many Iranian nationals here. We definitely have to put that fact at the top of our agenda.

DM: How many Iranians are there in Canada?

SMM: Approximately 350,000. We are trying to keep the relationship with Canada balanced. We are trying to do it bilaterally, fair for both countries.

DM: Please give us a specific example of what you mean by balance.

SMM: To strengthen relations, we need bilateral understanding, mutual understanding. When the relationship is not strong enough, one side will unfortunately take all the ben-

efits, take all the advantages. The other side will receive nothing.

DM: Who's getting all the benefits now? Who's getting none?

SMM: If a relationship is based on \$1 billion a year in exchange of goods, it must be in balance. If I get \$200 million and you get \$800 million, we don't have a balance. [According to 2007 Canadian government figures (www.international.gc.ca), Canadian exports to Iran totaled \$268.3 million while Canadian imports from Iran totaled \$44.7 million.]

DM: Do you have specific examples?

SMM: We cannot specifically point. We cannot criticize. We cannot judge. We cannot say that this is good, this is bad. There is no relation at the moment.

DM: You are limited to certain topics in dealing with the Canadian government. What are these limits?

SMM: Until we've reached a certain level [in our relationship with Canada], we cannot judge it. We cannot [now] have any discussion. We cannot start pointing out things. This is not a positive [sign], not promising for a diplomatic relationship.

DM: What are the subjects that Canada will allow you to discuss? The CBC has identified three – human rights, Iran's nuclear energy, Zahra Kazemi. You can discuss these subjects? [Canada had also listed a fourth allowable topic – Iran's role in the Middle East region.]

SMM: We have passed beyond these topics.

DM: You can talk to the Canadian government about these subjects?

SMM: Yes. If we wish and they wish, yes.

DM: What does this mean? Does it mean that Canada will not talk to you about any other subjects?

SMM: It is really up to Canada. We are ready to talk on any bilateral basis at any time. Canada has discussed these topics inside our bilateral arrangement. It's important to remember that these three topics are Canada's priority.

DM: When was the last time you had discussions with Canada about these permitted subjects?

SMM: Never. These topics are their topics.

DM: I don't understand. Some of these topics relate to things that happened in 2003. It's five years later. What's the impasse?

SMM: This is a question you will have to address to Foreign Affairs.

DM: You say that you have gone beyond these topics – yet you still haven't talked with Canada. What do you mean by that?

SMM: We have noticed signs and signals from Foreign Affairs which indicate that Foreign Affairs is ready to talk to us beyond these three topics. They show us their readiness.

DM: Does this have something to do with a possible visit to Iran by a contingent of Canadian Members of Parliament?

SMM: It's all related.

DM: Could this visit happen soon?

SMM: The Canadian government has announced its readiness. We acknowledge that. And it could be soon.

DM: How many MPs will be going? Will all the parties be represented?

SMM: We don't know yet but they told us that they will inform us how many [MPs] and which parties. We are waiting for confirmation.

DM: Is this your idea or Canada's idea?

SMM: Canada's idea.

DM: Whom do the MPs want to speak with in Iran? With Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad?

SMM: We don't know. We haven't received the MPs proposed agenda. We are definitely sure that they will have discussions with MPs. The Iranian embassy [in Ottawa] and the Iranian government have announced their readiness to help them with this trip.

DM: When will this happen?

SMM: Discussions began six months ago. Our last communication with them was at the beginning of May. It's still in the process but we have no agenda or names of MPs or dates.

[Editor's Note: MPs apparently planned to visit Iran with no media coverage. Tehran had other ideas. Headlined "A trip by a Canadian parliamentary group to Iran for the purpose of re-opening Iran-Canada relations," www.fararu.com ran an Apr. 6 story, excerpted below.

["A Canadian parliamentary group from the three parties, Liberal, Conservative and Bloc Quebecois is planning to make a trip to Iran this month. According to the *Fararu* reporter from Ottawa, this group is accompanied by Mr. Derek Lee from the Liberal party. An official from the Canadian Foreign affairs told our reporter that this trip was intended to reorganize the relationship between the two countries of Canada and Iran. The Canadian Parliamentary committee is planned to meet some of the Iran's members of Parliament as well as other political figures in Iran."

[On April 12, the state-controlled *Tehran Times* ran a story headlined "Canadian MPs to visit Iran." It quoted Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Chairman Aleaddin Borujerdi as saying the trip was "unofficial and non-parliamentary."

[Since then, *Diplomat* has learned that the trip has been cancelled. Derek Lee, MP for Scarborough-Rouge River, the unofficial head of the unofficial delegation on the unofficial trip, did not return *Diplomat's* phone calls or e-mails; DFAIT has refused comment.]

DM: Regarding the three permitted subjects, what does the Canadian government want from you, from Iran?

SMM: They haven't confirmed that with us. We don't know. You can ask the government of Canada what they want.

DM: How do you know that you will be permitted to speak only about these three subjects if you haven't yet held discussions?

SMM: It's been announced the newspapers, in the media.

DM: But not directly to you?

SMM: Not directly. As soon as the diplomatic relationship between Canada and Iran comes back to normal, we can sit down and discuss. [But] it is impossible to talk only about three topics. It's a package. There are other subjects. The thing is that these topics have been talked over and over, through the media, many times. If we [all] want to sit down and talk, we should sit down and talk about all the issues.

DM: What can you offer to Canada as an inducement to normal diplomatic discussions?

SMM: We have suggested that diplomats should sit down and talk – look closely into details, focus on details. We want that. We suggested that.

DM: What do you want from Canada? A full diplomatic relationship?

SMM: Iran is looking for a normal, decent relation with all the countries in the world. But we have to remember that Iran is looking, as well, to make Iran better, to obtain benefits. And that's the main goal.

Canada is a big industrial country. It has power. It has influence. It has roles in the world. Together, we can have a relationship. That's what we seek.

DM: That's very general. Can you be more specific?

SMM: Iran is powerful country and it has an important role in the region and in the world. As does Canada. Together, that's an absolutely excellent combination – Iran and Canada. Together, they can make for the betterment of the whole world.

DM: In the last six months, Canada has opposed Iran directly in resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly. [Yearly Canada has successfully sponsored a resolution condemning Iran's "ongoing systematic violations of human rights."] Canada votes for the ongoing trade embargo in strategic materials on Iran because of its nuclear program. In the UN context, Canada is actively working against Iran. Is this an embarrassment? A point of pressure?

SMM: As you are aware, after Zahra Kazemi, the human rights issue towards Iran has been a subject [important] to Canada. So we've had four resolutions that Canada has suggested to the UN which passed. The last one was Dec. 18, 2007. On the other hand, we are looking at Canada from the perspective of human rights towards the minorities in Canada – for example, the Aboriginals. We can advance the same discussion with Canada that Canada advanced in the UN. We can have the same argument. But we're trying not to go down that path. We don't want to have this discussion of 'you did that, we did that.'

DM: Please describe your response to Canada's active role against Iran at the UN.

SMM: Iran has had 30 years since the revolution. From the very beginning, and through all these 30 years, from European countries or other parts of the world, we have been under attack. We have had enemies, lived under pressure. We had that. We know that. It's a little example of how the nation of Iran has made progress during these 30 years. Iran has turned into a great country. Just compare for a moment what Iran was before to what it is now – in any arena, whether military, education, women's issues, industry. All of

these have been changed during these 30 years regardless of enemies, regardless of pressure and sanctions. For a little example, 55 percent of Iran's university educators are women. This, despite all the pressure we are trying to endure. So I think, despite all of these things, we are going to go forward. We are not going to stop our determination, our persistence. It's pulling us to go. Nothing can stop it.

DM: And where are you going? What is your goal?

SMM: Prosperity of the country. Iran prospers, and the region prospers, because it is Muslim. The same culture. The same people. It's like North America – the same people, the same prosperity. Your goal is the prosperity of North America. Our goal is prosperity of the Middle East. Why not?

DM: Why does Iran not tell Canada what happened to Zahra Kazemi? Why does Iran not simply admit it: We lied.

SMM: We have talked so much about Zahra Kazemi, who was an Iranian national. We have gone through that. It's a little off the topic now. What's new is, of course, the fact that the judiciary of Iran, the Supreme Court of Iran, has opened this [case] to another investigation that will go back to the very beginning. We are waiting for the result. The investigation will take time but the case is open.

DM: What is Iran willing to do to make things right in the Kazemi case?

SMM: It is time-consuming to talk about it. It is almost a book to talk about it. Our judiciary system is just like any other country's. It's a system that works independently. It has rules. Of course, like any other country, the media put so much emphasis on the case, that is damaging the process. We must trust the system, the judge.

DM: Canada does not have an ambassador in Iran now. [Iran asked John Mundy, the ambassador appointed to Tehran, in December, 2007, to leave] You expelled Mr. Mundy. Why?

SMM: As you may know, two ambassadors [from Iran] have been introduced to Canada. Iran's foreign affairs department gave the names of these ambassadors to Canadian Foreign Affairs after the departure from Canada of His Excellency, Dr. Mohammad Ali Mousavi, ambassador of Iran. These two ambassadors were rejected by DFAIT. After they had been rejected, Iran asked Mr. Mundy to leave. Of course, this was reciprocity. If Iran had accepted Mr.

Mundy as Canada's ambassador to Iran, reciprocity would not have taken place.

Iran felt very dishonoured that the ambassadors to Canada, appointed by Iran, have been rejected twice – two people – and that Mr. Mundy was received okay. This does not feel right from either the political or the diplomatic point of view. [The two men, Ahmad Azizi and Alireza Nobary were reported in the media to be turned down for suspected or known links to radicals who, in 1979, took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran and held its staff hostage for 444 days.

DM: But Iran didn't accuse Mr. Mundy of spying or any wrong-doing?

SMM: No.

DM: Did Canada refuse the two ambassadors from Iran on the basis of their relationship with Iranian intelligence?

SMM: Media reports say they were connected to a radical group's hostage-taking. We don't accept that. If Foreign Affairs asked us [about the men], we will answer them. Both of these men were career employees of Iran's foreign affairs department. They were previously ambassadors to Russia and other countries and had established reputations. The Canadian government never explained its decisions. They didn't say why.

DM: The next person who may come is Bahram Ghasemi [who has served as Iran's ambassador in Spain, Italy and Ireland]. Will he replace you?

SMM: Who said I'm leaving?

DM: Are you staying or going?

SMM: [In English.] I'm staying. [Laughter.]

DM: Are you content with your role as charge d'affaires?

SMM: Yes, it is good now. It is enough. I have no desire for myself except God's glory and human salvation.

[Editor's Note: Mr. Mohebi, 52, lives with his wife, Mahim, in Ottawa. They have two daughters, Saeideh, 26 and Sajedeh, 22. He graduated with a degree in political science from the University of Tehran. Before the revolution, during his high school years, he wanted to be an engineer. After the revolution, the influence of Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini drew him into Iran's public service. He has served as Iran's deputy ambassador to the Vatican (1995-1996) where Pope John Paul II impressed him as a great man. "I loved him," Mr. Mohebi says

of the celebrated pope. "He was a beautiful man." Mr. Mohebi is less impressed by Pope Benedict: "This pope and that one," he says, "too much different." Before coming to Ottawa, Mr. Mohebi was deputy, successively, of the West Europe Department and the Library of Political and International Studies in Iran's Foreign Affairs Department.]

DM: In some ways, Iran is probably the most controversial country in the entire world right now and probably the most watched. There's the nuclear program. There's Lebanon, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah. There's Israel.

SMM: And your question is....?

DM: What does Iran want?

SMM: In our opinion, the only important things Iran is looking for are stability, peace and tranquility in the region for the people of Iran and for the neighboring countries. At the same time, we're trying to bring prosperity to the region. Nothing but these. We are not looking for controversy. Iran is a big country with a lot of influence. Iran is willing to use this influence to the best positive potential, to bring it to the best use for our people, for the success of our people. And the only way we are guided is by the spirituality of our Prophet and other prophets. We are led by this spirituality – and nothing but it.

DM: I want to ask you what it is like to be an ambassador when – not be insulting – you are in some ways a black sheep in international affairs. What is it like to work under these circumstances?

SMM: Bah bah, black sheep, eh? Have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full. I know that from my children. [Everyone laughs.] I believe that if you do what God is willing you to do, then the pressure will be eased on you. If He accepts that what we do is based on certain principles, the pressure won't be a problem. And I hope that God will help me through it.

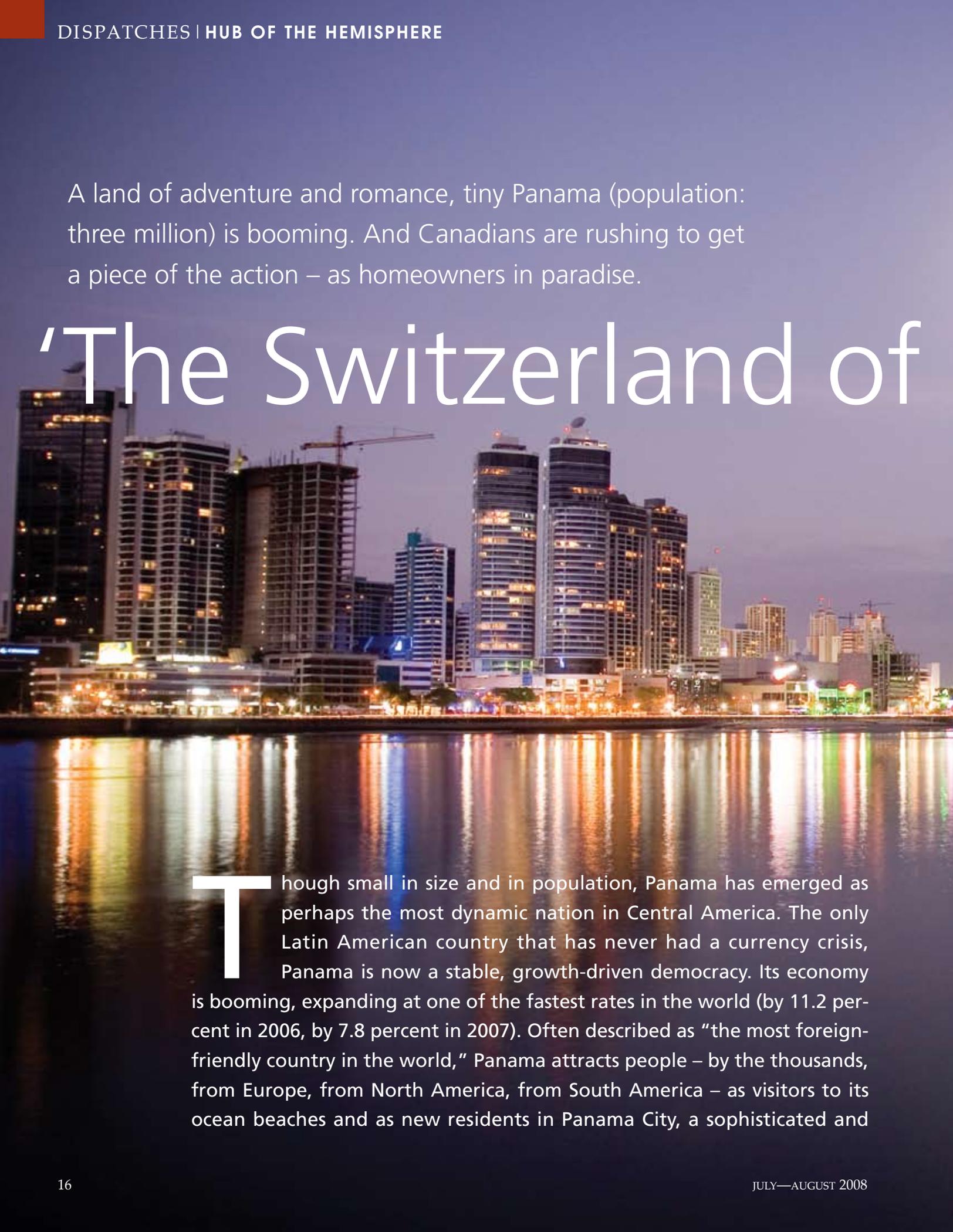
DM: So you do feel the pressure? [Mr. Mohebi gives a nod.]

DM: Do people avoid you? Do they ask you aggressive questions? Does Iran worry them?

SMM: From a personal point of view, everybody is under pressure from work. But from the job point of view, we are under tremendous pressure from European countries, from all around the world. But still we are just looking up and we are hoping that He will help us through. That God will help us. If God is willing.

A land of adventure and romance, tiny Panama (population: three million) is booming. And Canadians are rushing to get a piece of the action – as homeowners in paradise.

'The Switzerland of



Though small in size and in population, Panama has emerged as perhaps the most dynamic nation in Central America. The only Latin American country that has never had a currency crisis, Panama is now a stable, growth-driven democracy. Its economy is booming, expanding at one of the fastest rates in the world (by 11.2 percent in 2006, by 7.8 percent in 2007). Often described as “the most foreign-friendly country in the world,” Panama attracts people – by the thousands, from Europe, from North America, from South America – as visitors to its ocean beaches and as new residents in Panama City, a sophisticated and

Central America'

cosmopolitan town with a truly great skyline. No wonder. *The Christian Science Monitor* calls Panama “the Switzerland of Central America.”

Panama’s prospects look world-class good. The doubling of the Panama Canal, a US \$5 billion project, is underway. *The Miami Herald* reported in March that Panama registered 15,490 companies in the previous eight months, more than 60 a day. And the construction boom isn’t limited to Panama City. People are moving into the mountains, too, for homes in a tropical paradise – including people from Canada now rushing to buy homes that will be tax-free for the next 20 years.



Panamanian Ambassador Romy Vasquez says investors are betting on her country because it's a way to reach the world.

'Panama was born globalized'

Romy Vasquez, Panama's ambassador to Canada, takes us on a tour of the country – from its legendary past and into a vision of its future. "Panama is much more than a canal," she says. "It is a country that belongs to a hemisphere where people meet at one of the world's most special crossroads."

Before Panama was Panama, it was New Grenada, a part of the country now called Colombia. The Republic of Panama, as a country unto itself, wasn't created until 1903. Yet in the beginning, as now, Panama was a unique place with a destiny inextricably shaped by the narrow isthmus that separates the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. The Isthmus of Panama is the narrowest part of the North American continent, making it, from earliest times, a place that has uniquely excited the imaginations of adventurous men – men of trade and science, men of politics and conquest.

As a consequence of its strategic location, Panama has become a hub for international trade and commerce. The Panama Railroad, an American company with rights to transit across the isthmus, was operating after 1855, a sign of civilization for many expeditions, running north to south, starting at Colon on Limon Bay and finishing at Panama City on the Bay of Panama. Labourers were brought in by boat from many parts of the world: Ireland, China, the West Indies, Germany

and the United States.

Having a monopoly on Panamanian transit, the railroad produced important information for the largest and most important project of the Americas at that time, the construction of the Panama Canal. Panama was infamously known as a pesthole, a death trap; however, the cost in human lives was never accurately known since the company kept systematic records only of its white workers.

Nonetheless, there is plenty of evidence of the problems. In 1852, cholera swept across the isthmus with the arrival of a steamer boat from New Orleans and the world panicked – as it would today under comparable conditions. Physicians arrived from many countries to study the causes of the epidemics and some became deeply entrenched in the history of the country. Yet the Panama Railroad and its clients remained in operation, collecting important information about the mountains' elevation above sea level and the tides of the oceans, information essential to the eventual construction of the Panama Canal.

Within the Central American region, the vision of a canal for transportation and trade was considered between 1870 and 1900, and there were four potential locations: Panama, Nicaragua, Darien and Te-

huantepec. There was intense competition between Panama and the other contenders for the Californian gold trade. The actual overland crossing was shorter and faster at Panama but Nicaragua was closer to the United States and was considered, over all, less costly.

Two of the most celebrated events of the century were occurring simultaneously – the opening of the Suez Canal and the completion of the Union Pacific Railroad. The world was becoming smaller; the two sides were greeting one another.

In his extraordinary book, *The Path Between the Seas*, David McCullough writes: "The feeling was that the revealed powers of science ... had brought mankind to a threshold. Men talked confidently of future systems of transport that would bring all peoples into contact with one another, spread knowledge, break down national divisions, and make a unified whole of humanity."

Globalization created a decisive role for the Panama Canal, *la raison d'être du Panama*. Today, the role is the same as it was when first imagined – to open up global possibilities for trade. Did the Republic of Panama decide to become the site of a great masterpiece of human engineering?

Or did this canal, with a mind of its own, pick Panama as its flag and *pro mundi beneficio* as Panama's emblem has read since its creation?

More than a question, this is a deliberation that comes to mind when you realize that Panama was born globalized, that Panama was blessed with a location that has made it "the centre of the world," a great logistic platform that serves more than 120 maritime routes of 80 countries around the world. Was this the motivation in the mind of French developer Ferdinand de Lesseps when he decided to conquer the New World, after his success with the construction of the Suez Canal?

The story of de Lesseps deserves a book of its own. It is useful to know that he was more of a diplomat than a man of science. Indeed, he never pursued engineering studies. He nevertheless became the *entrepreneur extraordinaire*, with all the requisite traits for the role: nerve, persistence, dynamism, energy, a talent for public relations, a capacity for deception and imagination.

An international congress was organized in Paris under de Lesseps's leadership, in May 1879, with stakeholders from all countries involved, including those from Central American nations, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States, and the decision was taken to pursue the construction of a canal in Panama. The sale of stock in the company turned out to be one of the most astonishing events in financial history. De Lesseps arrived in Panama at the end of 1879 and by the summer of 1881, there were 200 French and European technicians and clerical help on the isthmus, and some 800 labourers at work, building barracks and hospitals, and assembling and testing newly arrived equipment.

Panama welcomed Ferdinand de Lesseps's *joie de vivre* and he certainly left the impression that he was having a great time; after some months going over the ground, he declared that the work was going to be easier than at Suez. He wrote to Charles, his son, "Now that I have gone over the various localities in the isthmus with our engineers, I cannot understand why they hesitated so long in declaring that it would be practicable to build a maritime canal between two oceans at sea level, for the distance is as short as between Paris and Fontainebleau."

Indeed, the distance was shorter – yet this was the only advantage over Suez. Everything else was substantially more complicated. At Suez, the digging was through sand, in a hot but dry climate. In Panama,



U.S. construction on the Panama Canal began in 1904 and the canal was formally opened in 1914.

eight months of the year were hot but with a humidity of 98 per cent, in the middle of the jungle with a rainfall measured in feet, not in inches as in Suez, and where there was sometimes not enough water to sustain the labour force.

Regrettably, yellow fever returned to the Isthmus of Panama and some of the engineers and workers died. Then malaria, the most common of the tropical diseases, attacked the population and seemed never to go away. The disease became part of the landscape for years. This motivated many men of science to come and engage in research to find the cure to these illnesses, to exchange information throughout academic institutions, yet another form of international trade, though this time for education and for science.

In these impossible conditions, the French company went bankrupt. The official end came on Feb. 4, 1889. By January 1902, the French company offered its total inventory, including the railroad they had bought from the American company for an estimated value of US\$40 million, to the United States. President Theodore Roos-

evelt wanted to accept the French offer, regardless of the fact that the U.S. House of Representatives had already decided to proceed with a canal in Nicaragua.

And so the Republic of Panama was born and the construction of the Panama Canal restarted under the administration of the United States government. It was completed in 1914.

Many generations of people have contributed to the canal's success – from original construction, to the signing of the U.S.-Panama treaties that turned the canal over to Panamanian control on Dec. 31, 1999.

The signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaty on Sept. 7, 1977, made Panama's sovereignty over the Panama Canal and its territory official. It marked a breaking point in the history of Panama's relationship with the U.S. As a result, at the turn of the new century, the U.S. transferred 370,000 acres of land, including buildings such as military facilities, warehouses, schools, and private residences to Panama.

Panama's historic struggle to recover the canal thus ended with the past century, and a new Panamanian era started with a vision to become the largest per-capita destination of direct foreign investment in the region. It seemed as if we were dormant, as if a piece of land was borrowed for too long and we had to catch up in the race. But over and above all estimates, Panamanians have succeeded, because we were not sleeping, we were in training. By the 1990s, Panama had fully transformed itself. A wholly new country, a democracy, had emerged.

Since the transfer, the ACP (Panama Canal Authority) has profitably managed the Panama Canal for seven years, providing more profit than the U.S. administration during its 85 years of management. This achievement has been recognized by international financial rating agencies. The Panamanian administration adopted new pricing and managerial structures, both more consistent with Panama's national interests. This new system allowed changes to the old tolls model that had been established two years prior to the inauguration of the waterway, back in 1914. The previous U.S. formula operated on a not-for-profit, cost-recovery basis. As a strictly Panamanian enterprise, the canal needed a system capable of generating benefits for its shareholders: all Panamanians.

All through its history, the canal has continually adapted and adjusted its structure to meet commercial requirements

and international maritime transport technologies. This is a non-stop dynamic process that forces all the sectors of the economy to be updated and it challenges our society to become aware of the need for improvements. From this perception, technicians and consultants from all over the world are arriving in Panama, just like the expeditions of the 1870s, to offer their expertise and to become part of the best project of the Americas, the expansion of the Panama Canal.

Panamanians voted in a national referendum for the expansion of the Panama Canal in October 2006. The total capital cost is estimated at US\$ 5.2 billion and it consists of the construction of two sets of locks with three chambers and nine lateral water basins. It includes dredging the canal entrances both in the Atlantic and the Pacific; widening and deepening the internal navigational channels; and providing the entire infrastructure that is required to bring the project to full operation by 2014. The current operation of the Panama Canal will not be discontinued while the expansion progresses. This is a great opportunity for contractors and professionals from all over the world. It will drive the national economy and improve the quality of life for all Panamanians.

Panama's vision, its economic potential, is not limited to our own borders. It would be a waste of the opportunities that geography brings to us. Panama is a rather small economy in size, population, and total surface. Its location and geographical characteristics dictate that Panama fulfil a more international mission.

The country's proximity to the Caribbean markets, its alliance with the Central American nations (SICA) and our traditional ties with the Andean Community of Nations (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile) all offer great economic possibilities for Panama and for Canada, too. Indeed, Panama offers Canada a wonderful waterway of possibilities for trade.

Panama has entered a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Chile. It has established closer ties with Brazil and Brazilian corporations are bringing venture capital in Panama to finance important infrastructure work in the country.

Panama has completed discussions with the U.S. on an FTA, for the United States is Panama's largest trading partner. We are now waiting for the Congressional approval. This is an important step toward approaching NAFTA as an integrated market. The three NAFTA countries provide about two-thirds of the cargo that moves



Panamanians voted in a 2006 referendum for the expansion of the Panama Canal, a project that will cost US\$5.2 billion.

**SINCE THE TRANSFER, THE ACP
(PANAMA CANAL AUTHORITY)
HAS PROFITABLY MANAGED
THE PANAMA CANAL FOR
SEVEN YEARS, PROVIDING
MORE PROFIT THAN THE U.S.
ADMINISTRATION DURING ITS
85 YEARS OF MANAGEMENT.
THIS ACHIEVEMENT HAS BEEN
RECOGNIZED BY INTERNATIONAL
FINANCIAL RATING AGENCIES.**

through the Panama Canal.

The Panamanian port system is privately operated. It has grown from a minor container operation with about 400,000 TEUs (a unit of volume measurement) per year into a world-class operation moving some 3.5 million TEUs per year. It is the largest container system in Latin America and moves cargo from about 145 different ports of origin.

The Colon Free Zone – a large entity at the Atlantic gateway to the canal that re-exports merchandise to Latin America

and the Caribbean – has been an important distribution centre, the largest among those in the continent. Expansion of its operations and adding a more logistical scope is crucial if the trade zone is to remain competitive in the years to come.

On the Pacific Coast, the conversion of the former U.S. Howard Air Force Base into a semi-industrial logistical facility is currently underway. The contract, awarded to a British real estate developer, provides a master plan for commercial and residential development. Currently Dell Computers as well as STI, the Singapore aircraft maintenance group, have established operations centres at Howard, today called Panama Pacific Special Economic Area. Under the recent special regulations for the establishment and operation of multinational corporation headquarters, companies like Caterpillar, Procter and Gamble and Hewlett Packard are establishing regional training and headquarter offices at this site as well.

The modern railroad operated by Kansas Southern Rail is part of the intermodal system operating in Panama, and it moves cargo and passengers between the terminal cities of Panama and Colon.

Air transportation plays a major role in today's trade and logistical operations. Not only do we operate Tocumen International Airport but we also have the Albrook Airport for domestic flights. In the future, the Howard base will play a major role in the Panama-Pacific Special Economic Area, as it has a first-class airport.

Research and development, along with technological innovation, play an important role in Panama's vision. The City of Knowledge (an educational complex built on a 300-acre campus overlooking the Pacific) invites academics and researchers to join with government personnel and business people to study and work together. In a different venue, the regional representatives of the United Nations have moved operations to the City of Knowledge – as well as other international organizations.

Panama is the crossroads for submarine cable. This connectivity has proven its importance in providing back-up in extreme situations such as the terrorist attack that occurred Sept. 11, 2001. The submarine cable system provided support to impaired satellite communications.

The presence of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama began with the construction of the Panama Canal in the early 1900s, when (for the purpose of controlling insect diseases) biologists decided to establish a permanent reserve

on an island. Since 1923, we have hosted the earliest biological reserve in the Americas. Today, it is known as Barro Colorado Island (BCI) and it is the most intensively studied areas in the tropics, home to a recorded 1,316 plant species, 381 bird species, and 102 mammal species on a 1,500-hectare island with 59 kilometres of protected trails. The name Panama, since the times of the Spanish *conquista*, means abundance of fish and butterflies – a wonderful metaphor for the abundance of international flags that cross the Panama Canal.

The Bridge of Life, Canadian Frank Ghery's museum of biodiversity, will operate beside the Pacific Ocean, visible at great distance by visitors arriving via cruise ships. This will be a new icon for Panama, a beautiful park showcasing the diversity of natural life in Panama. The Bridge of Life will be the hub of an interchange of nature, culture and economy, as well as a centre for learning and discovery.

When integrated into a single view, what we see in Panama is total connectivity by air, land or sea, supporting international trade and commerce from all over the world.

We can describe Panama's fortune in three words: Location, location, and location in a special place where geography itself is one of the country's most important natural resources.

From Canada's perspective, this combination of attributes attracts the would-be retiree who wishes to acquire a property in a country with low political risk, with economic growth and with a healthy urban lifestyle. There are a wide variety of residential options, which include mountain, beach, and city communities.

Most importantly, Panama represents an ideal market-access platform from which Canadian firms can manage regional investments and contemplate opportunities for investment, development and growth. Within CARICOM nations, the market access reaches about 14 million; the Andean nations, 100 million; the Mercosur nations, 212 million – just to mention the Americas. This is the platform that Panama uniquely offers to Canadian businesses.

Panama, though, is much more than the canal. It is a country that belongs to a hemisphere that has to maintain the twin pillars of security and prosperity, where trade remains vital and vibrant, where

people meet at one of the world's most special crossroads.

We can profit from Canada's experience in information technology, from its social responsibility programs, from the mining sector, energy sector and hydro and water management projects. The expansion of the Panama Canal opens the opportunity for English learning, so necessary in Panama for technical careers and for tourism activities.

Panama has been a bridge between North and South for hundreds of species, and myriads of people. Back in 1826, Simon Bolivar stated: "If the world had to choose its capital, the Isthmus of Panama would be selected for this august destiny, situated as it is at the centre of the globe."

Independent for almost 105 years, Panama has become an international meeting place – carrying on the ways of previous generations when trade fairs lured merchants and traders. Today, many investors and financial managers are betting on Panama because from Panama, they can reach the world.

Romy Vasquez is Panama's Ambassador to Canada.

ROMY VASQUEZ' GUIDE FOR TRAVELLERS

Panama attracts people from all over the world – in such numbers that demand for hotel rooms by business people exceeds the supply. Now foreign companies and foreign investors are buying residences simply to have accommodations available when they need them. It's quite unbelievable, really. In the span of only a few years (since Sept. 11, 2001) Panama City has become *the* city in which to do business, in which to invest, in which to find the best in R&R.

Oddly, it was *Survivor*, the television series, that opened Panama's jungles and exotic places to public attention – helping Panamanians to recognise the economic importance of Panama's natural resources.

Panama's greatest resource

is, of course, its people. From the Ngobes Bugle in the West to the Embera and Wounan in the East, we find a wide array of handcrafts including baskets, jaguar fruit, jewellery, sculptures that represent our flora and fauna, the world-famous molas by Junas, straw hats and creative paintings from the Atlantic coast.

Canadian visitors, perhaps outdoor people by nature, are especially attracted to eco-tourism and to adventure travel in Panama. The National Park of Darien, which borders Panama and Colombia, was declared a world biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 1981. (It is also an anthropologic reserve in which the Embera and Wounan cultures reside.) The UNESCO website refers to the park as the place that unites two continents:

"Forming a bridge between the two continents of the New World, Darien National Park



contains an exceptional variety of habitats – sandy beaches, rocky coasts, mangroves, swamps and lowland and upland tropical forests containing remarkable wildlife."

Panama is more than a country that unites continents. It has become a second residence for many retired people. Whether attracted to the cosmopolitan skyline of Panama City or to the ocean or to the rainforest, people are finding that Panama provides them with high-quality, private (affordable) healthcare,

high-quality restaurants, international banking services – in short, it's a service economy that provides a fast-track transition to a tropical paradise.

Preferred destinations include Boquete Valley which has a springtime-like climate at an elevation of 3,500 feet. It's unspoiled nature and famous for its coffee plantations and golf courses.

Another popular spot is the Pearl Islands on the Pacific, which has become a haven for scuba lovers looking for sea turtles, whales and dolphins. It is also now a common destination for sport-fishing marlin, tuna and wahoo.

Bocas del Toro, on the Atlantic, has become the jet-set place for international travellers and for young surfers.

Last but not least, our Peninsula de Azuero, where the colonial past and its traditions survive, offers visitors festivals and carnival celebrations.

Retiring soon, Señor?

Panama has become a retirement haven for Canadians – among its many other advantages, it's earthquake- and hurricane-free. And Panama's taxes make them feel very welcome

By Neil Reynolds

Leon and Sue Dykler live and work in Ottawa. They have been happily married, as Mr. Dykler puts it, for 32 years. They have two children, grown up and on their own. They're not ready for retirement (Mr. Dykler is 55) but they are ready to get ready for it – which explains why they have purchased land in Panama.

The Dyklers checked out a number of countries in Central America and South America before picking Panama.

"We liked them all," Mr. Dykler says. "But Panama kept coming up as one of the best. And then Sue found out that Panama is one of the few countries without earthquakes, without hurricanes." They selected a plot in Santa Clara, an hour's drive from Panama City – and 10 minutes from the white sand beaches of the Pacific Ocean.

A financial consultant, Mr. Dykler kept track of Panama's winning attributes:

- Panama offers large, established expatriate communities, making it comfortable for newcomers. Santa Clara was one of the first. Mr. Dykler says he and his wife chose from several such communities, ranging from warmer ocean-front to cooler mountain locations.
- Panama City is a modern metropolis, complete with skyscrapers, modern infrastructure and modern amenities and all the latest communications technologies. Products normally available in Canada and the U.S. are available in Panama City.
- Panama provides a relatively low cost-of-living. Panama uses the U.S. dollar as its currency and is one of the few Central American countries (or South American, for that matter) never to have experienced a currency crisis.
- Excellent health-care services are available at reasonable cost. Panama has a universal health-care system for Panamanians but foreigners can buy private insurance coverage at such institutions as Hospital Punta Pacifica, Panama City's biggest hospital, which operates as an affiliate



Isla Pelicano is one of the 365 islands that make up Panama. Such charming spots are part of what's attracting Canadians in droves.

of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

- And the weather is divine – especially for people such as Leon and Sue Dykler, who do not enjoy long, cold Canadian winters.

"Panama is a beautiful country," Mr. Dykler says. "It has beaches, mountains and rain forests. It has an amazing variety of vegetation and birds."

"Panamanians are extremely friendly people who always seem willing to help. They have always been exposed to people from other countries and cultures."

And Panama makes it as easy as possible for foreigners to run businesses in the

time they spend in the country. "Panama offers one of the best retirement packages in the world," he says. "It offers different kinds of visas for people who want to retire, others kinds for people who want to invest or start businesses. The opportunities are enormous – in agriculture, tourism, environmental services. Large numbers of people are moving to Panama from North America and from Europe – and creating more opportunities all the time."

Hannan Singh is a third-generation Panamanian whose grandfather – a merchant – migrated from India in the 1920s. He lives in Panama City (population: 1.5

million, or one-half of the country's population) and sells real estate with Panama Investment Management Group. He knows Toronto well – because most of his Canadian clients live in Toronto. He was in Toronto last month, meeting with clients.

"Panama City is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world," Mr. Singh says. "It's a melting pot. It's a little of New York and a little of Miami. Toronto is a diverse city, too. If you're comfortable in Toronto, you'll be comfortable in Panama City.

"The Panama City skyline beats the Miami skyline," he says, "and is close to New York's skyline. The cuisine is comparable. You pass a Lebanese restaurant that's next door to an Argentinean steak house that's next door to a Chinese restaurant that's across the street from a trendy Asian fusion restaurant that's owned by a New Yorker."

Panama City is a 2.5-hour direct flight, slightly more or slightly less, to eight American cities – Miami, Orlando, Houston, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Newark, New York and Washington. For the moment, Canadians must fly to one of these cities, then take a separate flight to Panama City. But they will not have to do so much longer. Canada and Panama have negotiated a deal that permits direct flights from Canada to Panama City, which Mr. Singh describes as "the hub of the hemisphere." (Canada and Panama, incidentally, are now in the process of negotiating a free-trade agreement.) Panama connects to Europe through direct flights from Madrid and Amsterdam.

Mr. Singh says Canadians are now arriving in Panama "by the boat load" – either as tourists, as part-time residents or as investors. Europeans are arriving in greater numbers all the time and, with the rise in the value of the euro, Mr. Singh expects these numbers will increase dramatically in the coming year. But South Americans are arriving in greater numbers, too. People and money are fleeing nearby Venezuela especially in a classic flight-to-safety from the hard-left regime of President Hugo Chavez.

"Retired Canadians are coming as full-time residents and as part-time residents," Mr. Singh says. "Some come for the beaches, some come for Panama City. The Canadian snowbirds often live in Panama for six months and then rent out their homes for the other six."

For a one-bedroom condo in Panama City, you can expect to pay from US\$100,000 to \$300,000 – though, at the top end of this scale, you would be living



AN IMPORTANT FURTHER INCENTIVE IS PANAMA'S INCOME TAX REGIME. PANAMA DOES NOT TAX ANY INCOME THAT IS GENERATED OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. THUS, FOR EXAMPLE, CANADIANS WHO BUY PROPERTY IN PANAMA CAN PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES TO CLIENTS BACK IN CANADA WITHOUT INCURRING ANY PANAMANIAN TAX LIABILITY. (ON THE OTHER HAND, CANADA TAXES CANADIANS ON THEIR WORLD-WIDE INCOME.)

in the heart of the city with a full ocean view. Drive an hour, or an hour and a half, and you can expect to pay from \$125,000 to \$200,000 for the same one-bedroom condo. For a three-bedroom home in a secure, gated community, you can expect to pay from \$120,000 to \$250,000.

Or you can select a gated community in what Mr. Singh describes as "the coffee highlands." When the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) selected the world's 10 top places for retirement living, it picked one of these Panamanian mountain communities as No. 4 – a small town named Boquete in the province of Chiriqui.

As with real estate everywhere, prices are determined by location, location, location. You can buy a private home in a gated community on an island – there

are many small islands close to Panama City – for \$250,000. Or you can buy a one-acre lot on a more remote and completely privately-owned island for \$700,000. In this case, you either use your yacht to get to your property or you take a 15-minute commuter flight from Panama City. This exclusive island has its own Jack Nicklaus golf course.

Panama goes out of its way to make itself friendly to foreign investors – whether retired or not. Buy a new house in Panama, for example, and you will pay no property taxes for 20 years. Prove that you are a pensioner (with minimum retirement income of US\$600 a month for a couple) and you qualify for:

- a 25 per cent reduction in airfares out of Panama;
- a 25 per cent discount on all restaurant meals;
- a 15 per cent discount on all prescription drugs;
- a 50 per cent discount on entertainment (movies, concerts, sporting events);
- a 50 per cent discount on all hotel stays (Monday through Thursday); a 30 per cent discount Friday through Sunday;
- a 20 per cent discount on all professional services;
- a 30 per cent discount on all bus and boat fares;
- and a 50 per cent discount on the closing costs for home loans.

You also get a one-time tax exemption on the importation of household goods (up to \$10,000) and a tax exemption every two years on the importation (or local purchase) of a car.

An important further incentive is Panama's income tax regime. Panama does not tax any income that is generated outside the country. Thus, for example, Canadians who buy property in Panama can provide professional services to clients back in Canada without incurring any Panamanian tax liability. (On the other hand, Canada taxes Canadians on their world-wide income.)

For tourists, aside from ocean beaches, the Panama Canal itself remains a huge attraction – followed by Casco Viejo, the old Spanish colonial quarter of Panama City, famed for its art deco architecture, its cobblestone streets and its historic churches. It has been designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

Neil Reynolds is *Diplomat's* publisher.

Relentless in Chase

HMCS Iroquois, Calgary and Protecteur warm up for war on terror

By Patrick Lennox



DND, GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Fresh from a brief foray into the War on Drugs in the Caribbean, the *HMCS Iroquois* destroyer is one of three Canadian ships heading for a six-month deployment in the dangerous waters of the Arabian Sea. The frigate *Calgary* and the supply ship *Protecteur* will join the multi-nation Combined Task Force 150 that stops and boards ships to counter trafficking in drugs, alcohol, arms and people.

As I waited at the Scotian Gate of the Halifax Dockyard for the Military Police to grant me access to board *HMCS Iroquois*, families streamed by to watch loved ones deploy for six months to fight the Global War on Terror. The separation anxiety already evident upon their faces was much in tune with the ominous sound of the Stadacona Band of Maritime Forces Atlantic playing “Eternal Father” from the flight deck of *HMCS Athabaskan*.

Lt.-Cmdr. Matt Bowen appeared within a few minutes, bearded, flat-topped, and bespectacled to escort me through the gate, along the jetty, and over the brow into the ship. He showed me my cabin and led me back out on the quarter deck to watch Vice-Admiral Drew Robertson and Gen. Rick Hillier send us off in style. Rousing speeches from those two men,

a prayer from Padre Liam Thomas, and the national anthem completed a moving ceremony befitting the magnitude of what *Iroquois* and its crew were setting out to accomplish on behalf of the Canadian land and people they would leave behind. Before they departed, Gen. Hillier made sure to remind them that “Canada is the greatest country in the world,” and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms is the envy of those who suffer under the oppressive forces of dictatorship, crime, poverty, and chaos.

The 36-year-old destroyer *Iroquois* – with myself, six years its junior, as the only civilian member of ship’s company – was ultimately bound for the Arabian Sea to take command of a dimension of the Global war on Terror (GWOT), known as Combined Task Force 150, which seeks to put a dent in some of the oppressive forces

mentioned by Gen. Hillier. Commodore Bob Davidson and his flagstaff took command and control of this multinational task force in early June 2008.

But before sailing across the pond, *Iroquois* (the flagship destroyer of the task force) had to meet up with its West Coast colleagues *Calgary* (a frigate) and *Protecteur* (a supply ship) on the Atlantic side of the Panama Canal and make a quick contribution to the War on Drugs in the Caribbean basin. Sailing in concert, these three ships formed what is known as a task group.

Once *Calgary* and *Protecteur* were through the canal, the three Canadian ships spent a couple of days and nights trying actively to contribute to Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South’s efforts to combat the flow of narcotics into North America from places like Mexico, Panama, Columbia and Honduras.

This attempt to become actively involved in JIATF's efforts caught the Americans a bit off-guard. Usually, allied ships sailing through the Caribbean call in their presence in the region to JIATF's headquarters in Key West, Florida, as a matter of courtesy in case they are needed in a pinch to become involved in tracking or providing surveillance of a case of drug trafficking.

Commodore Davidson, however, was hoping to make more of an impact in the region, and accordingly wanted to be linked into JIATF's intelligence network and given the opportunity – should one have arisen – to get actively into the counter illicit trafficking game.

But there were both technical and political difficulties with this, as it turned out. Technically, it was a challenge to establish the necessary encrypted communications between JIATF and the Canadian Task Group; and politically the Americans were hesitant to give the Canadian ships orders, fearing they might cross some of the sensitive bounds of sovereignty in the process. This was the explanation I extracted from the U.S. Navy exchange officer who rejoined *Iroquois* after the first leg of its deployment in San Juan, Puerto Rico from his posting at JIATF headquarters in Key West, Florida.

Regardless of any glitches (technical or otherwise) that may have hindered the task group's integration into the American-led War on Drugs, the presence of Canadian warships off these coasts nevertheless contributed to JIATF's cause by acting as a deterrent to drug runners, and by helping with the construction of a common maritime operational picture through the use of the ships' range of surveillance capabilities.

And while the Canadian ships may not have provided any further actionable intelligence on any of the outstanding cases being pursued by JIATF, their presence in the region was certainly noted by both the Americans and others. At 10 p.m. April 26, 75 kilometres off the coast of Colombia, *Iroquois* was buzzed by a helicopter with all of its lamps blacked out. I happened to be on the bridge at the time, and was thus a witness not only to the aggressive behaviour of the stranger, but also to the swirl of activity that feverishly animated *Iroquois* for a few thrilling moments.

The helicopter was hailed by radio three times from the operations room of our ship while it was flying approximately 150 metres above us. After the third hailing it descended to approximately 20



Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier speaks with soldiers' families and friends during the departure ceremony at HMC Dockyard in Halifax. In his address to the crew, Gen. Hillier, who retired July 1, called Canada "the greatest country in the world" and a herald for freedom where people are oppressed by chaos, dictatorship and poverty.



Sea King helicopter pilots make their way to the ship's hangar during a combat exercise. Helicopters are a "force multiplier" essential to Canada's maritime capability

metres above the ocean, and flew straight at *Iroquois*' bow. It shone a light at the bridge before vanishing into the night. The rumour going around the ship the next morning was that the Columbian Military had ventured out to take a closer look at us, but that was never confirmed one way or the other. Who it was that buzzed us at dusk that evening will remain a mystery.

The purpose of OP Caribbe, as it is known, was to continue Canada's contribution to the War against Drugs in the Caribbean, picking up—if only momentarily—where HMCS *Fredericton* left off last summer, to demonstrate the country's continued capability in this area to the

United States, and to reaffirm the fact that Canada takes the Caribbean seriously as an area of strategic interest. An added benefit of conducting this operation was that it allowed the Canadian crews to warm up for what will be a very long and very hot contribution to the GWOT.

For example, the men and women who were selected to be on the team that will approach and board suspicious vessels in the Arabian Sea have been training hard under the direction of Combat Chief Dave Steeves. Chief Steeves is built like a bull terrier, and he is conditioning the boarding party to tolerate major physical exertions in hot weather by leading them



(Left to right) On board the *Iroquois*, Master Seaman Sherman Lillington, Commander Patrick Deschenes, writer Patrick Lennox and Lt. Jim Chase take a moment during a fuel resupply from *HMCS Protecteur* off the Panamanian coast.



A naval boarding party practices drills in preparation for intercepts on the Arabian Sea.

through a complex combination of aerobics, boxercise, yoga and plyometrics on *Iroquois'* flight deck each morning.

It is not easy staying in shape at sea—given the limited deck space and close quarters—so Chief Steeves has combined, into a single hour-long workout a series of exercises that use one's own body weight as the primary means of resistance. Once the crew becomes "leaned out" by these exercises and "comfortable and let their guards down," Chief Steeves can "hardly wait" to "hit them with crippling circuit training."

Having joined these brave people under the heat of the Caribbean sun for the

first two weeks of these workouts, I am confident that Chief Steeves will prepare them well for the conditions they will find in theatre. Lt. Jon Lee, a cerebral and fit 28-year-old Halifax surfer and engineer, who is one of the leaders of the boarding party, confirmed this in a recent email. According to Lt. Lee, the team is "really gelling and it's a thing of beauty." The morning workouts with the charismatic and comedic Chief Steeves have no doubt played a key role in building this chemistry.

The team of Sea King pilots, navigators and mechanics—the Air Det, as they are known—have been training hard, as well; conducting a grueling schedule of nightly

surveillance flights, with an eye towards both drug runners in the Caribbean, and building up for a more varied array of targets in the Arabian Sea. The 45-year-old Sea Kings have a bit of an image problem in Canada, but after having flown in one for a couple of hours at nearly 200km/hr 18 metres above the Sargasso Sea, it is clear that the Air Det of *Iroquois* will get the most out of its old bird in the coming deployment.

Indeed, the officer on exchange with *Iroquois* from the U.S. Navy expressed his amazement with how much his Canadian crewmates could accomplish with so little in terms of military hardware. After spending time on a Canadian warship, Officer Matt Noland was adamant that he'd never complain about lack of U.S. government funding again.

The Captain of *Iroquois*, Brendan Ryan, likely had much to do with Officer Noland's high impressions of the Canadian Navy. Capt. Ryan, a towering and wiry man, qualified for the Boston Marathon this year with 18 minutes to spare, so he's no stranger to a rigorous training regime. While at sea, he could be spotted at ungodly hours of the morning taking laps around the flight deck, likely imagining how he'd have attacked Heartbreak Hill had he not missed the race this year due to his deployment. In port in San Juan he teased me for heading out on a Friday morning run at 9 a.m. He'd hammered out 10 kilometres four hours earlier.

His work ethic rubs off on his crew. He has used every opportunity since leaving Halifax to make sure they are continually learning and practicing their various trades and skills. He regards the transit across the Atlantic as the penultimate phase in the training program for his crew. "It is like preparing for a marathon, you want to peak at the right time," he said to me as he sketched out his grand plan for making sure the crew is at the very top of its game once it comes into the area of operations.

Once underway, Canada's command of CTF 150 will make a major contribution to the maritime dimension of the GWOT by continuing a presence in the Arabian Sea. Within this area, which stretches across some of the most dangerous maritime regions on the planet, the Task Force will work to deter, detect and ultimately interdict trafficking in drugs, alcohol, arms and people.

CTF 150 was established near the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, or the GWOT. The Task Force typically

combines the efforts of 12 to 15 ships from the U.S., UK, Canada, France, Germany and Pakistan. Other states such as Australia, Portugal, and Spain have periodically become involved in the Maritime Security Operations that form the essence of the task force's efforts. Command of CTF 150 rotates every four to six months. In June, Commodore Davidson took command from his counterpart, French Rear Adm. Jean L. Kerignard.

The potential profit from the illegal enterprises that CTF 150 seeks to disrupt has at least some connection to the financing of terrorist organizations and their plots. "One less drug deal in the region is one less IED (improvised explosive device) in Afghanistan," is the way this connection was explained to me by the flagstaff's logistics officer, Lt. Cmdr. Todd Brayman. Lt. Cmdr. Brayman, a career sailor with a daring sense of humour and an astounding capacity to work epic hours in his cabin figuring out logistical dilemmas from how to get needed parts to foreign ports to how to get ships through the Panama Canal without forking out a half-million dollars in shipping tolls, may be overstating the strength of this connection to some extent.

Lt. Cmdr. Brayman's argument is, however, buttressed by the fact that in the six months leading up to his deployment, CTF 150 (with the help of HMCS *Charlottetown*) seized more than \$300 million worth of illicit materials in the Arabian Sea. Broken down, this vast potential source of funding for terrorist organizations amounted to more than 15 tons of narcotics and more than 10,000 bottles of alcohol. Even if only a percentage of this money goes into funding IEDs and suicide bomb plots, cutting off the maritime distribution networks for the illegal trade in arms, drugs, alcohol and persons in the region is a vital dimension of the broader global struggle against oppressive forces, of which Islamic extremism is certainly one.

Although the maritime dimension of the GWOT receives far less media attention than the boots on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is arguably of equal (if not greater significance) to the daily lives of Canadians. The vast majority of international commerce (somewhere in the vicinity of 90 per cent) flows through the seaways. Acts of terrorism in vital strategic regions, such as the ones Canadian ships will be patrolling throughout their deployment, could undermine the flow of global commerce in potentially serious ways. As a trading nation with three vast coastlines, the role of the Canadian Navy in main-

taining maritime security not only close to home, but in distant seas, should not go – as it too often does – unnoticed.

The Canadian commanded task force could also become engaged in fighting pirates. In particular, the escalating rate of piracy off the coast of Somalia could become a focal point for the mission. When the news was announced at the April 22 briefing by the flagstaff's intelligence officer, Lt. Rory Dolan, that a Security Council resolution was in the pipeline to create a mandate for going after Somali pirates, Commodore Davidson responded with controlled enthusiasm.

The two things that keep the Commodore up at night are the possibility of putting any of the ships under his command into an unduly dangerous situation, and not giving Canadians their money's worth by making a major contribution to security in the Arabian Sea during the next six months. So he will constantly be trying to strike the correct balance between these two often opposing imperatives. In the case of tracking and apprehending Somali pirates, this may prove an exceptional challenge.

Beyond fighting crime and creating stability, there is a desire on the part of Commodore Davidson to aid countries in the region in further developing their capacities to guard their own coastal waters. This sort of work – conducting instructional workshops for coast guards in the area struggling to cope with the challenging realities of the evolving strategic environment – helps to further Canada's international relationships with countries like Kenya, for example, and can lead to the creation of an enhanced image of Canada in regions where its diplomatic voice might otherwise go unnoticed.

The Commodore, who is put together physically like a cruiserweight from the 1950s and intellectually like a cross between George F. Kennan and Gary Kasperov, feels strongly that there should be a member of DFAIT, CIDA and Industry Canada ready to meet him in every port he visits. The reasons for this are evident almost as soon as one sets foot on a Canadian warship.

The only force on *Iroquois* more powerful than its impressive array of engines, guns, radars and communications technologies, is the collection of people assembled to make these instruments function.

This ship could easily double as a top-tier university, with seminars offered around the clock in geopolitics, logistics, engineering, international law, aeronautics, public relations, physics, oceanog-

raphy, criminology, computer science, mathematics, military and strategic studies, and even the culinary arts.

Even in their aged condition, Canadian warships are an immensely powerful representation of Canada abroad, and could be used to further diplomatic, cultural and economic relations between our country and those visited by the Navy.

Commodore Davidson's role is accordingly a multifarious one: he's the ambassador of this floating embassy; director of this floating development agency; CEO of this floating demonstration of Canadian industrial capacity; but most importantly, he is point man for this sizable projection of sea power, which is designed to increase Canadian security at home through the creation of stability abroad.

Canadians and their government need to start strategizing for the long term about how to make sustainable and meaningful contributions to the GWOT, should it turn out to be a multi-generational war – as many believe it will. There was hope amongst those who follow these issues that the Canada First Defence Strategy, unveiled in May by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Halifax, would provide some clear thinking and direction about how Canada would navigate the choppy and uncertain waters ahead in the realm of 21st-century security.

While it refrained from making projections about the strategic environment of tomorrow and Canada's role within it, the Canada First Defence Strategy did declare that the uncertain future called out for a combat-capable, flexible, multi-role military.

The Canadian Navy, as a vital dimension of this military, is certainly combat-capable, flexible, and well suited to the performance of a variety of different roles from defence to diplomacy to development. But without the delivery of the funding promised by the Harper government, it will not be for long.

Having completed just two weeks of a deployment scheduled to last half of a year, *Iroquois*, *Calgary* and *Protecteur* slipped the jetty in San Juan, Puerto Rico without me in tow in early May. By the time this article is published they will be in theatre in the Arabian Sea.

Patrick Lennox is J.L. Granatstein Post-doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary. He will rejoin the crew of *Iroquois* in mid-August. "Relentless in Chase" is *Iroquois'* motto.

Terrorism as an historical means to a brutal end: From one perspective, it's a form of self-defence

by George Abraham

Seven years after 9/11, in early June, five suspected al-Qaeda ringleaders were brought before a special court at the United States base in Guantanamo Bay, a Cuban/non-Cuban locale which has come to symbolize one of the darker sides of the War on Terrorism.

The best known among them, Khaled Sheikh Mohamed, was unrepentant, using words that have been recited before courts in more than 100 nations. "Yes, I did what I am accused of doing, and look forward to death at your hands. I offer no apologies, and given a chance, will repeat exactly what I did in the cause of Islam."

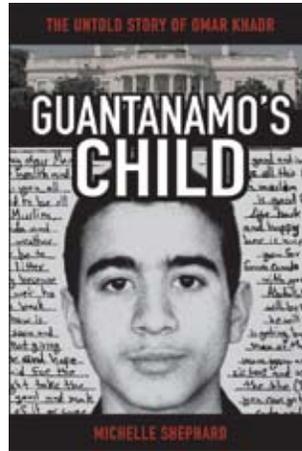
These are mind-numbing words, but for those the world sees as "terrorists" the reward of martyrdom and "72 perfumed virgins waiting in heaven" – a description used by Canadian Ahmed Said Khadr to persuade his children to join his cause – the end justifies the means. Just as we see ourselves as victims of terrorism, terrorists see themselves as victims of oppression and occupation by implacable foes led by the U.S. Seen in this light, the American invasion of Iraq can be regarded as feeding terrorism rather than suppressing it.

Our book selections explore the theme of terrorism – its provenance, what victory for terrorists would mean, what victory by its opponents would mean, and most importantly, why ordinary people, often well-educated, convert to such a blood-thirsty vocation.

Michelle Shephard, *Guantanamo's Child*, Wiley, 2008, 270 pages

This book by a reporter for the *Toronto Star* is a must-read on many levels. It purports to tell the story of a 15-year-old who was captured by American soldiers in Afghanistan in July 2002. The author offers a rather sympathetic account of this boy, Omar Khadr, as she weaves a tapestry of family connections and travels. Ultimately they emerge as Canada's "al-Qaeda family." Despite her considerable effort, the family's patriarch remains a mystery to Ms. Shephard, who attempts to trace his evolution from a not-too-religious Muslim to a radical who encouraged one of his sons to become a suicide bomber.

As Ahmed Said Khadr journeyed through his radicalization, he crossed

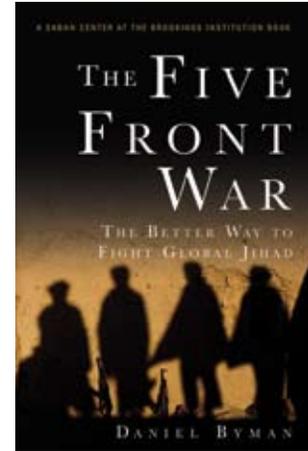


paths with a virtual who's who of terrorism in Afghanistan. In tracing Mr. Khadr's life there, the author reveals insights into al-Qaeda's early days. Reporting on the group's first training camp set up by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s, for instance, the author writes, "Recruits at al Farouk had to sign an oath of loyalty to bin Laden and, in return, they received a salary, a round-trip ticket home each year and even a month's vacation." Sounds almost like paid employment.

Ms. Shephard's opening chapter chronicles the battle that led to Omar's capture, but here again it is difficult to say with any certainty whether the boy was responsible for American deaths, the reason for his detention at Guantanamo. But, there's no mistaking the author's conclusion that the boy was "indoctrinated into his father's war." Her reading is no different from the one recently offered by the Canadian government that after six years in a forbidding island jail, Omar remains "salvageable" and a "good kid."

Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad*, Wiley, 2008, 304 pages

The director of the Security Studies Program at Georgetown University offers few new ideas, beyond the oft-repeated argument that terrorism cannot be defeated by military means alone. The other four fronts, in his words, are the war of ideas, intelligence, homeland defence and democratic reform. This may be useful advice for Canadian policymakers working



on the Afghanistan file, but Mr. Byman's more important contribution may be his chapter on "What is Victory?"

In the American context, he defines victory as:

- keeping terror casualties to less than 100 each year;
- reducing fear of terror;
- counterterrorism at an acceptable cost in dollars, lives and other policy priorities.

While these metrics remain moving targets, they do suggest to readers that the U.S. and its allies in this campaign against terrorism remain far removed from victory.

William R. Polk, *Violent Politics: A History of Insurgency, Terrorism and Guerrilla War from the American Revolution to Iraq*, Harper Collins, 2007, 273 pages

As the title suggests, this book by a veteran academic and senior director of the W.P. Carey Foundation debunks the myth that 9/11 marked some sort of zenith in violence. Mr. Polk calls terrorism the "politics of last resort" and shows it has been practised over millennia, typically against intruding foreigners. Using a grenade as a leitmotif at the beginning of each chapter and on the cover, this former adviser to U.S. governments sees a common sentiment among the terrorists of the world. "No matter how they differ in form, duration, and intensity, a single thread runs through them all: opposition to foreigners. This propensity to protect the home community arises because all human beings

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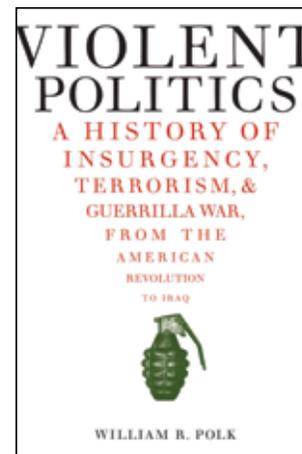


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are territorial.”

The author takes issue with the idea that “nation building” is a realistic expectation. Of the 200 military expeditions the U.S. has launched since its founding, 16 were intended either for nation building or the more modern phrase, “regime change.” Only two were definite successes – Germany and Japan – while two others – Grenada and Panama – were iffy. The rest failed utterly.

These conclusions provoke questions about Canada’s own engagement in Afghanistan. Will we be perceived as an occupying force over time, and can Canadians realistically expect our troops and aid dollars to rebuild a broken nation? All three books make clear that the U.S. remains the main target – the “far enemy” in the words of al-Qaeda – but other nations do not get a free pass if they line up with the Americans.

As with all questions relating to the subject of terrorism, there are no easy answers and sometimes no answers at all.

George Abraham is *Diplomat's* contributing editor.

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RELATED READING

1. Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*, Penguin Press, 2008, 672 pages
2. Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, HarperCollins, 2008, 675 pages
3. Philip Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent: The Wars for the Twenty-first Century*, Knopf, 2008, 688 pages

Can you send the sommelier by with my curry?

When we were growing up, we didn't have wine-drinking guidelines (white with fish, red with red meat) for foods like Pad Thai, Indian Butter Chicken or California Roll Sushi that are now fairly common in our Canadian culture. That's probably because such foods are only, in the past decade or so, reaching mainstream status. (The way I see it, if President's Choice makes a version, it's mainstream.) So, without the classic wine- and food-pairing rules – think Claret with lamb, and Sancerre with oysters – what is one to do? What makes this even more difficult is that for many of these so-called “ethnic” foods, the individual culture does not have a wine-growing or even a wine-drinking culture to go along with it. There is a stronger tradition of drinking a Dos Equis with one's burrito or a Tsingtao beer with your General Tao's chicken than a fine Burgundy with either. So at this point, it might feel like we are making up rules as we go along.

Beer, ironically, might be the place to start when thinking about matching wine with food from these types of cuisines. Most beer in the world tends to be lighter in style, lower in alcohol, higher in acidity, possessing some carbonation and is refreshing to the palate. It's also chilled. All these things are good when dealing with foods that tend to be predominately sweet, sour or spicy in flavour. You want a wine that cleans your palate and has you going back for another bite. Wines that share these beer-like qualities include: Champagne or sparkling wine, Riesling, Austrian Gruner Veltliner, Loire Valley whites such as Sancerre or Vouvray, New World Sauvignon Blanc (from Niagara, California or New Zealand for instance), or a Spanish Albarino, just to name a few. They all tend to have fresh acidity and very little or no oak-ageing, which can conflict with many exotic flavours and spices.

The restaurant that I was most impressed with regarding wine and food pairing of exotic foods is the Slanted Door, a Vietnamese restaurant in San Francisco. Their perspective on pairing Vietnamese foods with wine can be applied to many “ethnic” types of foods. This is a passage from their wine list: “You have to throw traditional Mediterranean wine-pairing ideas out the window. Ingredients such as nuoc mam (fish sauce), peanut sauce, and caramel sauces require a different ap-



STEPHEN BECKTA

proach. Rieslings, with their high acidity, balanced sweetness and low alcohol, are a perfect match. Drier whites are fine, but only with dishes that aren't spicy or sweet. Red wines, if soft, will taste reasonably (good) with many dishes. Remember that all reds will taste harder than they really are with spicy food. Save your big reds for barbeque or southern Mediterranean food. Wines that are high in alcohol and tannin are pretty unpleasant with most Vietnamese dishes.” Ironically, the Slated Door, a Vietnamese restaurant, sells more Austrian wine than any other restaurant in the United States.

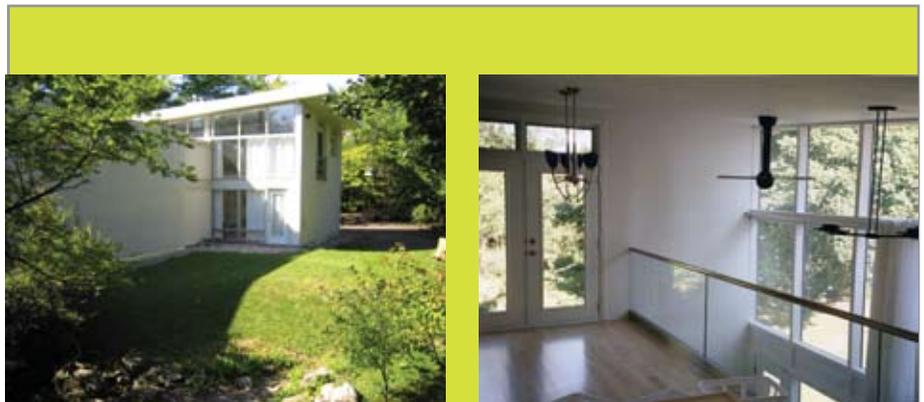
When dealing with particularly spicy or sweet dishes, the rule of thumb is to compare (sweet flavours) or contrast (spicy flavours) with off-dry wines such as a Gewurztraminer or a richer Pinot Gris that has lower acidity. They either provide some relief from the heat of the spice in a

dish or are at least not austere alongside sweet plates the way a drier, crisper wine will be.

So, what is a Cabernet lover to do when confronted with these less traveled roads of culinary pairings? If you really need to drink that big, meaty red, try something like a soft and juicy California Zinfandel or smooth as silk version of Australian Shiraz. While not the perfect dance partner, they will not be offensive to many of the dishes we are speaking about. Better yet, try taking that extra step out of Cabernet-land and check out a great New World Pinot Noir from California or Oregon that will offer a little more acidity but a little less weight and a ton of flavour. But then you could always just grab another cold one from the fridge with your new knowledge and pride that you are cultured and sophisticated in your worldly food and beverage pairings.

Cheers!

Stephen Beckta is owner and sommelier of Beckta dining & wine.



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A decidedly non-desert oasis

Israelis bidding shalom to home on McKay Lake

By Margo Roston



ALL PHOTOS: DYANNE WILSON

Israeli Ambassador Alan Baker and his wife, Dalia, will miss the great view of McKay Lake from their Rockcliffe residence when they return to Israel this fall.

Israeli Ambassador Alan Baker and his wife, Dalia, will be leaving Ottawa in early September, after four years in the capital. As much as they look forward to retiring at home in Israel, they'll miss the leisurely weekends and spectacular scenery at their Rockcliffe residence.

The ambassador and his wife, along with son, Assaf, enjoy lolling on their patio on the shores of McKay Lake, rowing their little boat in the sunshine or swimming. So does their chocolate-coloured Labrador Nili, who will have to make a

trip to the Sea of Galilee if she hopes to go swimming at home.

"Because there's a water shortage in Israel, there's not enough water to fill a pool for her," says Mr. Baker.

The residence is on a narrow, steep lot overlooking the lake and a small dock. Designed in 1934 by American architect John Ames for Col. Henry Willis-O'Connor on the east side of the charming little lake, the design was inspired by Montreal's 18th-century Chateau de Ramezay, now an historic monument.

Originally named Byng House in tribute to Governor General Lord Byng whom Col. Willis-O'Connor served as principal aide-de-camp, the house was built on three levels to compensate for the shape of the lot. According to Martha Edward's book *Rockcliffe Park, A History of the Village*, sand to build up the beach area was transported across the ice in winter from the nearby sandpits by horse and sleigh.

Israel's first ambassador to Canada, Michael Comay, was appointed in 1953, and since the young country could ill af-



The Canadian Jewish Congress purchased this home, known as the Byng House, in 1954.



The home is full of interesting accents.



The main reception room on the lower level is accessed by this elegant staircase.



Mr. and Mrs. Baker relax at home with their pooch, Nili.

ford a new residence, the Canadian Jewish Congress bought Byng House in 1954 and presented it to the government of Israel. Its name was changed to Kinneret, after Lake Kinneret in the Galilee.

With no money for furnishings, the then ambassador's wife went to Toronto to scour Salvation Army outlets for furniture, writes their daughter Jill Stern in a recent article in *The Ottawa Jewish Bulletin*.

Times have changed and one of the first items on the Bakers' agenda when they arrived was to change the look of the house,

from antique to contemporary.

Gone are many of the donated and older pieces that filled the main reception room on the lower level, which is accessed by an elegant circular staircase. In their place are sofas and chairs designed and manufactured on a kibbutz.

"We believe the house should reflect Israel, so we asked (the government) to send an interior decorator," Mr. Baker says. Cream, orange, red and blue are the main colours used to represent the fall foliage the couple saw when they first ar-

rived at their Canadian post. The walls are hung with dynamic prints and paintings by Israeli artists, and taking a prominent position is the couple's collection of menorahs – eight-branched candelabra – and other pieces of Judaica.

The large dining room with its original decorative doors leads out to an expansive patio overlooking the lake, and along with the reception room, it can easily accommodate more than 100 guests. At such functions, the Bakers serve a combination of Israeli specialties and favourites reflecting



The Bakers will miss McKay Lake where they row their little boat and swim in the summer.

Mrs. Baker's Bulgarian background.

"When we came, we were told we didn't need to bring anything of our own to the house, but we did bring 50 cases of Israeli wine with us," says the ambassador. "People thought of wine from Israel as sacramental, so we always serve good Israeli wine," he says.

The main floor provides informal family living space, with the ambassador's den filled with personal pictures from former assignments. A large and comfortable sitting room is a hangout for the family. The day we visited, Ottawa artist and teacher Morton Baslaw, a family friend, was settled in front of the window, taking in the view, easel and paint brush in hand. In a corner cabinet is Mrs. Baker's collection of carved wooden duck decoys, gifts from friends over the years.

But the couple's favourite place is a wicker-filled sunroom, an addition to the original house.

Here's where Mrs. Baker likes to sit and paint.

"The lake is a special place, like a country cottage," she says. It's a place she and her husband will always remember fondly.

Margo Roston is *Diplomat's* culture editor.



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Joshua Slocum's Excellent Adventure

Laura Neilson Bonikowsky

Nova Scotian Joshua Slocum, adventurer and master mariner, sailed from Boston on April 24, 1895. He returned June 27, 1898, the first to sail alone around the world. He recounted his voyage in *Sailing Alone Around the World* (1900).

"Charmed...from the first" by "the wonderful sea," Slocum had sailed on many ships, commanding several. In 1892, at loose ends, he pondered his options. Commands were few; shipyard work required a steep association fee. An old acquaintance solved his dilemma by offering a boat, a nearly derelict sloop. The *Spray*, people said, had been built "in the year 1." As Slocum refitted her, there were "many inspectors to back [him] with advice." He ignored their pithy observations, having found a new love in the decrepit craft.

Finally, Slocum put to sea, intending to sail to Gibraltar, across the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, down the Red Sea and east around the world. At Gibraltar, British naval officers persuaded him to change course because of pirates on the Mediterranean. Reasoning that one could circumnavigate the globe in two directions, Slocum turned about, and was soon accosted by pirates. A rogue wave swamped the pirates' boat and Slocum fled.

Off the coast of Uruguay, having hugged the shore too closely, the *Spray* ran aground. Slocum "laid out" the anchor in his frail lifeboat, but it proved too great a load. After several attempts, the dory, filled to the gunwale with water, began sinking. Slocum managed to throw the anchor clear and grasp the gunwale as the boat overturned, for he "suddenly remembered that [he] could not swim." He barely made the beach, exhausted and half-drowned. The coast guard arrived and in a happy turn of events, locals traded him butter, milk and eggs for ship's biscuits.

Throughout his journey, Slocum traded for supplies. One such exchange with "a good Austrian of large experience" yielded him a bag of carpet tacks that proved to have "more value than gold."

As Slocum rounded the tip of South America, the *Spray* ran straight into a gale

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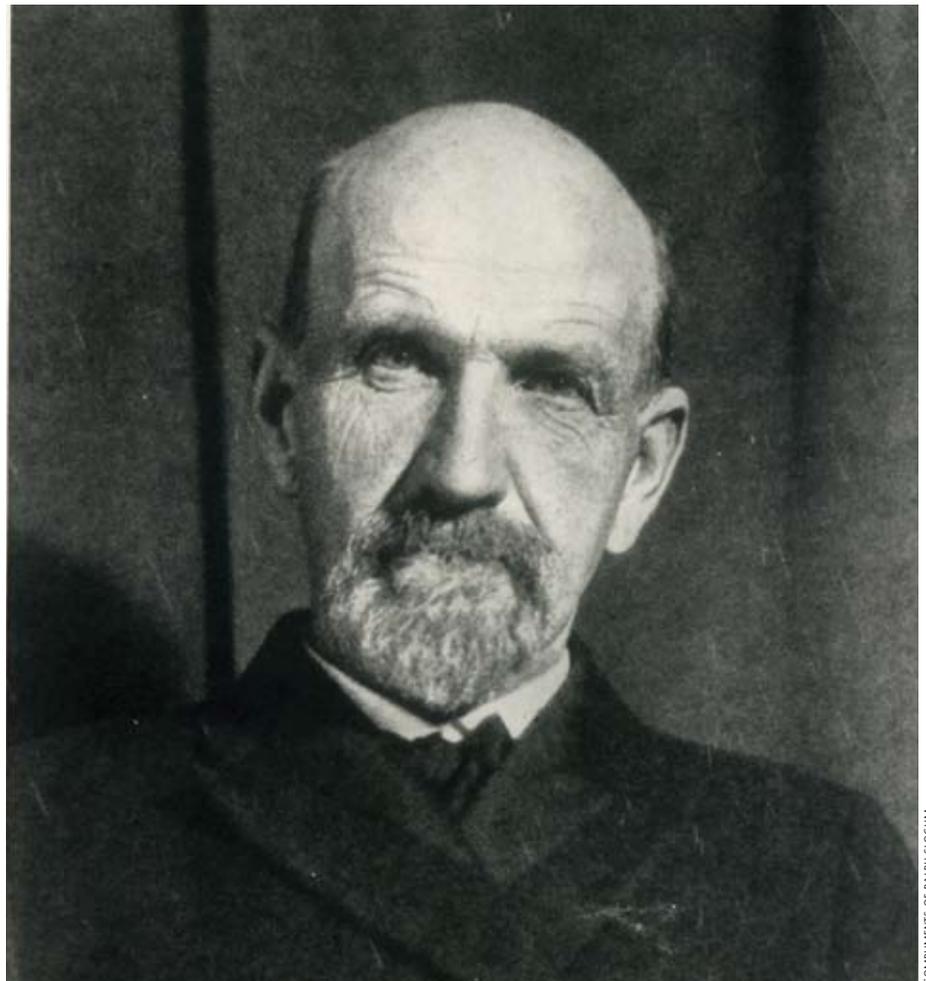
that sent her sailing backwards. Through mountainous seas, the ship was blown along the southern coast of Tierra del Fuego. Slocum had no choice but to continue eastward, retrace his course, and cross the Strait of Magellan again.

On his second approach, he met Fuegian renegades calling out "yammer-schooner," an invitation to "converse." Forewarned, especially about their leader Black Pedro, Slocum knew better than to allow them to draw near. He drove them off by firing across the bows of their canoes. For several days they approached the sloop again and again. Finally, ex-

hausted, Slocum spread the tacks across the deck, "commercial end" up, knowing that "one cannot step on a tack without saying something about it." When the Fuegians attempted to board around midnight, there was indeed "a deal of free language over it."

Through powerful gales and encounters with all manner of mariners, coastal people and dignitaries, the little boat and her indomitable skipper "reeled off the miles....during an absence of three years and two months." Slocum's memoir is chockablock with amusing anecdotes and wry commentary. His telling of it is a delight to mariners and landlubbers alike.

Laura Neilson Bonikowsky is the Associate editor of *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.



Joshua Slocum, adventure and master mariner.

COMPLIMENTS OF RALPH SLOCUM

Don't forget the garnish

When I'm developing a new recipe, there is always one final step in the process – and I think it separates me from my fellow cookbook authors. In my culinary philosophy, presentation plays a critical role. A new recipe simply isn't complete until I've plated it and decided on the final garnish or decorative touches. This final addition should not only compliment and contribute to the overall flavour, it should also act as a silent voice, enticing family and guests to savour what is before them. It's no surprise that well-garnished food tastes better. Who doesn't eat with their eyes? If you present a stunning dish, you raise guests' expectations before they taste a single morsel. With clever presentations and garnishes, even otherwise quite ordinary creations reach new culinary levels. Excellent cuisine, meanwhile, becomes extraordinary.

To ensure guaranteed results, I always take a few minutes to ponder and to include a dash of decorative pizzazz, either on the food or plate or both.

Sprigs of fresh herbs are the favourite faithful soldiers in the long tradition of garnishes. But have you tried tying them into *petit* bouquets to be gracefully laid over food or chopping them into dust to be sprinkled on the rims of plates or bistro bowls?

Enoki mushrooms, shoots of all kinds, longish stemmed edible flowers (violas, for example) all lend themselves to being arranged into attractive bouquets and tied with a fresh chive stem. And when it comes to a variety of versatile edible dusts, also think of crushed black peppercorns, cocoa powder, instant coffee crystals and icing sugar.

Without a doubt, drizzles have become the new darling of garnishes for the past 10 years with no sign of forfeiting their status as a culinary garnishing technique adored by everyone and accessible to anyone. If you don't have a platoon (or at least a few) of those handy plastic squeeze bottles, use a small plastic bag. Just fit the bag in the mouth of a small empty jar of suitable size, wrap the top of the open plastic bag over the rim and down the sides of the jar and add the drizzling material (e.g., sauce, flavoured mayonnaise, purée, etc.) Remove the filled bag from



MARGARET
DICKENSON

the jar, close the top of the bag with an elastic band and cut only a smidgen off one of the bottom corners. Voilà, you have a perfect piping bag.

In my refrigerator, I have plenty of small containers with homemade plastic piping bags (cut corner "up") bulging with caramel sauce, sieved blackberry jam, and soya wasabi mayonnaise. They're all ready for action. Larger commercial squeeze bottles hold my more frequently used drizzles such as a variety of flavoured mayonnaises, Balsamic Red Wine Drizzle, Honey Mustard Herb Vinaigrette and Mustard Mint Sauce. (Remember to label them.) Drizzling is a simple and effective way of adding class

to a plate. Swirls, dots, zig-zags or more complex maneuvers, all generate a note of appreciation from the diners.

However, decorative details can add more than pizzazz. My garnishes and final touches are also there to give extra flavour, texture, colour and character to a recipe/plate. My threads of fried vermicelli bean noodles, chocolate curl sticks and sugar stenciled art fascinate guests.

There is no mystery to many of my favourite decorative ideas which include the strategic use of colourful salad leaves, edible flowers, the criss-cross arrangement of two fresh chive stems or a couple of tender-crisp spears of cooked asparagus.

Frosting rims of glasses, frosting fruits with edible skins (e.g. grapes, currants), even rose petals or fresh violets, is another simple decorative technique. Brush



Sweet and sour salmon in zucchini cups are jazzed up with fried vermicelli noodle straw.

LARRY DICKENSON

the desired surface (or area) with lightly beaten egg white, sprinkle (as deemed appropriate) with salt, sugar, dried gelatin dessert powder and allow to dry (uncovered) in a cool dry place. Painting or writing with melted chocolate or a sauce of some kind, is also fun. If it doesn't work, wipe off your "attempt" and try again.

Guests recognize a special effort and the attention given to detail. Garnishes and those final decorative touches can be another indication of the warm hospitality being extended by the hosts.

Please be inspired to try my tempting fried vermicelli noodle straw, shown in the picture at left, dressing up sweet and sour salmon in zucchini cups. Good luck.

Margaret Dickenson is author of the international award-winning cookbook *Margaret's Table – Easy Cooking & Inspiring Entertaining* and is creator and host of *Margaret's Entertaining Minutes* on Rogers TV. See www.margaretstable.com for more.

Fried vermicelli noodle straw

Makes about 5 cups (1.25 litres)

Fried vermicelli noodles offer the playful experience of crunching on inflated strings of air. It is a decorative trick/garnish that can add creativity and fun to many recipes from hors d'oeuvres to dessert.

1 oz (30 g) vermicelli bean* noodles, uncooked

Oil for deep frying

Salt (optional)

1. Using a deep-fryer, heat oil to 350 °F or 180 °C. Place noodles in small quantities (4 or 5 batches)** in frying basket. Carefully lower basket into hot oil and fry noodles for a matter of seconds, turning once with a fork.

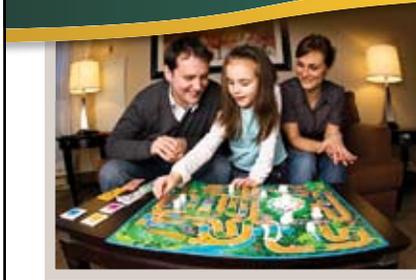
2. Drain noodle "straw" well (over oil) before transferring to a paper towel-lined tray; salt if desired.

3. If you're not using fried noodle straw immediately, place in a paper-towel lined plastic container, cover loosely with a paper towel and store in a cool, dry place for up to several weeks.

*Bean vermicelli noodles produce a "puffy" white straw. If a golden coloured, fine and more delicate straw is preferred, use rice vermicelli noodles. (Note: The volume will be slightly less.)

** Be cautious as the noodles will immediately inflate into a voluminous mass (particularly the bean vermicelli).

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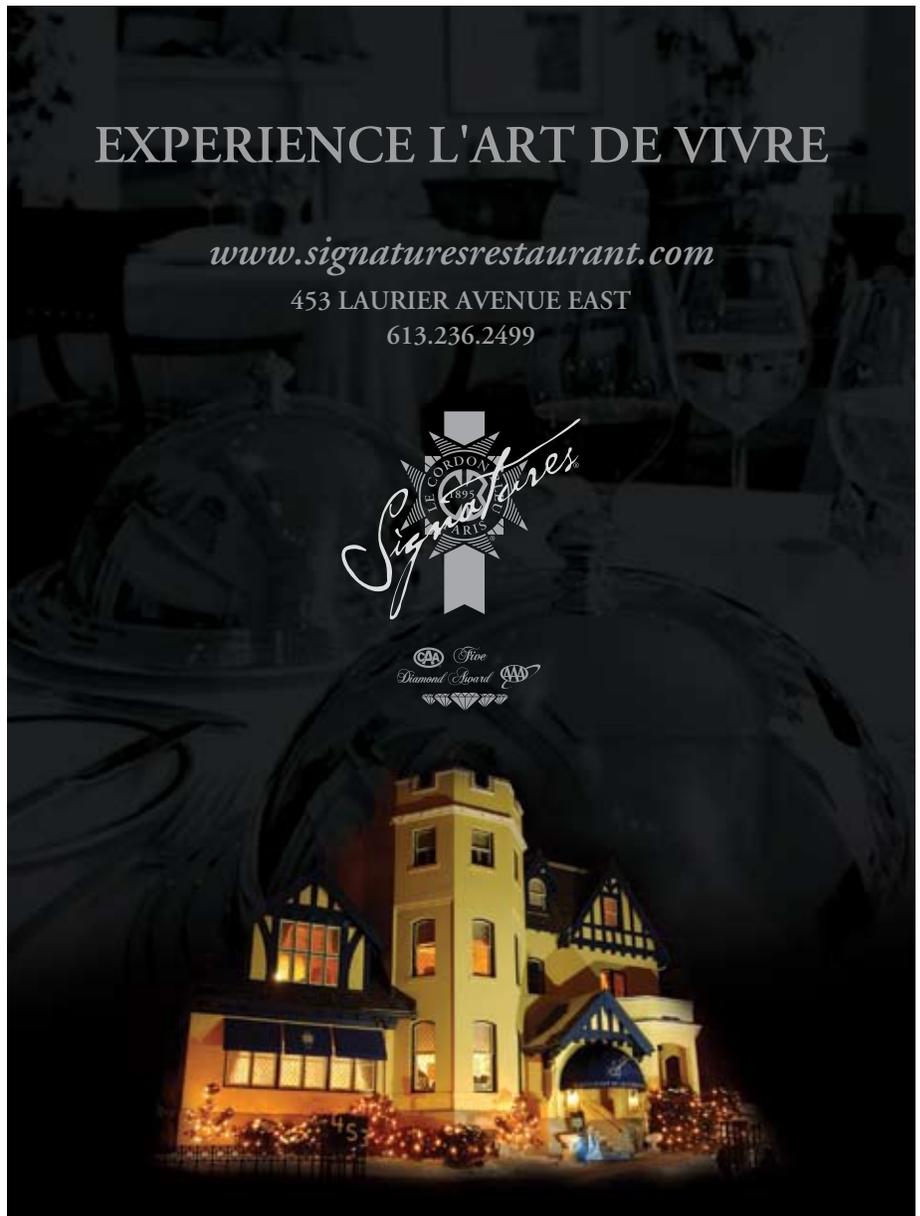
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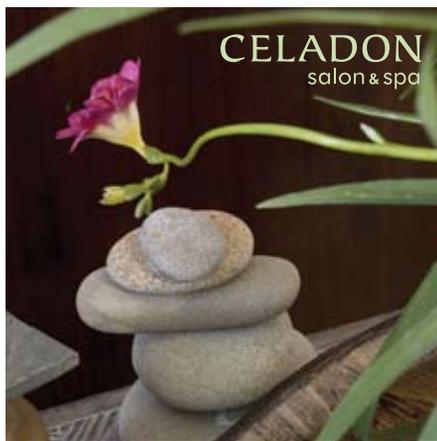
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New Heads of Mission

Lijun Lan
Ambassador of China



For Mr. Lijun, the posting in Canada marks a return. The career diplomat served as consul at the consulate general in Vancouver from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Lijun joined the foreign service in 1976. A year later, he was posted to Trinidad and Tobago as an attaché and then served as third secretary at headquarters on the North American and Oceanic affairs file. As first secretary, he worked in the department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs and was then posted, between 1992 and 1996, as consul at the consulate general in Los Angeles. He then returned to the department of North American and Oceanic affairs as deputy director-general before being reposted, as consul general, to Los Angeles between 2002 and 2006. For the following two years, he worked as a minister in the Washington embassy and for the past four years, he's been China's ambassador to Indonesia.

Mr. Lijun is married and has a daughter.

Rafael Alfaro
Ambassador of El Salvador



Though he's only 47, Mr. Alfaro has already had an illustrious career. At the age of 32, he was appointed deputy foreign minister of El Salvador by president Alfredo Cristiani. He later became deputy minister of transport.

Mr. Alfaro has served as ambassador to Ecuador, Venezuela, Israel, Guyana and

Trinidad and Tobago. He has also served as alternative representative to the United Nations in New York and minister-counsellor at the embassy in Washington. At the same time, he was chargé d'affaires of the permanent mission to the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

Mr. Alfaro was a member of the "support group" of government commission that negotiated the peace accords which ended more than 15 years of internal conflict.

He has a master's in public administration and bachelor degrees in political science and fine arts.

Francois Delattre
Ambassador of France



Before being posted as ambassador in Ottawa, Mr. Delattre was the French embassy's consul general in New York. This marked his second posting to the United States; the first was in Washington from 1998 to 2002, where he worked as head of the press and information service. Prior to that, Mr. Delattre was responsible for security and defence issues on the foreign policy team of President Jacques Chirac (from 1995 to 1998.)

A career diplomat, Mr. Delattre joined the ministry of foreign affairs in 1989. He has served in Bonn, and with the foreign ministry's department of strategic affairs and disarmament. He also served as an advisor to the foreign minister from 1993 to 1995.

Mr. Delattre has a degree in international law and is a graduate of the Institute of Political Studies in Paris and the National School of Administration (ENA). He is married to Sophie L'Hélias-Delattre, and they have two children.

Camille Rosemarie Robinson-Regis
High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago

Ms. Robinson-Regis comes to diplomacy from politics. Most recently, she served as minister of planning and development (from 2003 until November 2007). She was



also governor of both the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank and served as a member of parliament. She was re-elected in four general elections as a member of the People's National Movement.

Ms. Robinson-Regis was appointed a People's National Movement Senator in 1991 and served concurrently as minister of consumer affairs until 1995. She was minister of legal affairs for a year beginning in 2002 and was minister of state with the prime minister's office and the ministry of planning and development.

A lawyer by profession, she completed her law degree in Barbados. She is married to Fritz Hudson Regis and has three daughters.

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THIS PAGE 1. The Tulip Ball took place May 10 under a spectacular mirror tent brought to Ottawa from Belgium. U.S. Ambassador David Wilkins and his wife Susan took in the ball. • **2.** Also spotted under the mirror tent were (left) Ana Melba Rosairo de Nunez, wife of Dominican Republic Ambassador Luis Eladio Arias Nunez, and Rudy Lamoureux. (Photos: Dyanne Wilson) • **3.** A Norwegian National Day event was held at the field house at New Edinburgh Park and featured a traditional flag-waving parade led by children and a brass band. Shown are Norwegian artist May Evelyn Hansen and her daughter Maia Gill. (Photo: Bob Diotte) • **4.** The Embassy of Israel held a Holocaust Remembrance Day event on Parliament Hill May 1. Ambassador Alan Baker addressed the guests. • **5.** The Canadian Federation of University Women's diplomatic hospitality group hosted a visit to The Herb Garden in Almonte May 23. From left: Darlene Page, member of the diplomatic hospitality group, Ulfah Hanif Hardono, wife of Indonesian Ambassador Djoko Hardono and Louise Brzustowski, former president of the diplomatic hospitality group. (Photo: Ulle Baum)



THIS PAGE 1. David Tawei Lee, representative of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada, hosted a reception May 27 at the Rideau Club to mark the success of the recent elections in Taiwan. From left: MP Larry Miller, Mr. Lee, MP Jim Abbott, chairman of the Canada-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group, and MP Rob Anders (Photo: George Wu) • **2.** U.S. Ambassador David Wilkins hosted a reception at his residence May 5 to mark the 50th anniversary of NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command). Mr. Wilkins is shown with Defence Minister Peter MacKay (left). • **3.** The Netherlands was, as always, front and centre at this year's Tulip Festival. Sporting traditional dress is Marloes Nienhuis, daughter of Wendy Sewell, who works at the embassy, with Margaretha Louise Terlouw, wife of Netherlands Ambassador Karel de Beer. • **4.** Mr. de Beer addresses the crowd on the occasion of the 70th birthday of Queen Beatrix at the Cartier Square Drill Hall April 30. **5.** A choir performed at the Queen's birthday celebration. (Photos: Netherlands embassy)

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The island of Rhodes offers a cosmopolitan atmosphere but there are also neolithic sites, classical Greek architectural monuments and Byzantine churches.

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Beyond the classic sites, Greece offers monastic adventures and a cosmopolitan time warp

By Nikolaos Matsis

The late British historian Steven Runciman once wrote that the beauty of Greece lies mainly in contrast. The contrast between stark promontories and blue sea-gulfs, between barren mountain sides and fertile valleys and white-washed houses in sun-drenched rocky islands.

From the mystic mountains of Macedonia and Epirus to the golden beaches of the Cyclades and the Dodecanese islands; from the rustic foods of Crete to the eternal beauty of world-renowned monuments such as the Acropolis, Greece offers all visitors unique destinations and cultural experiences and a very special *joie de vivre*.

A good place to start is, of course, Athens, capital of modern Greece and springboard to a multitude of interesting destinations that can be reached by air, sea, road and rail. Universally acclaimed as the birthplace of democracy, Athens is today a bustling metropolis of about four million people who are still passionate, as in ancient times, about debating humanity's

most touchy subjects such as politics, ethics and philosophy, as well as more trendy subjects such as fashion and sports.

Hundreds of cafés, restaurants, tavernas and bars, open-air most of the year, are interspersed all over the city, and are bursting with life. At the same time, visiting the Greek capital is like stepping into history. The Unification of Archeological Sites walkway is one of the best things that happened to Athens in recent decades together with the highly successful 2004 Olympic Games. About four kilometers long, it connects the city's most important historical sites and is lined with chapels, neo-Classical homes and cafés. For 12 euros one can visit the Acropolis, the Ancient Agora, the Theatre of Dionysos, the Kerameikos Cemetery, the Temple of the Olympian Zeus and the Roman Agora, while later this year the New Acropolis Museum will open at the foot of the ancient hill.

Built in the 5th century B.C., the Acropolis temples – the Parthenon, Temple of Athena Nike and Erechtheum – are

considered as the greatest architectural accomplishments of classical Greece.

Every traveler has his or her favourite places. My favourite places are two and they are in sharp contrast to each other: The serene Holy Mountain, or Mount Athos in the northern Greek province of Macedonia and the cosmopolitan and bristling with life beautiful island of Rhodes in the southeastern Dodecanese Islands.

The Holy Mountain

Mount Athos or Agion Oros, as it is locally known, is the oldest surviving monastic community in the world. It dates back to more than 1,000 years, to Byzantine times.

It is a unique monastic republic, and, although a part of Greece, it is governed by its own administration. It occupies the Athos peninsula in Halkidiki.

Because of its isolation, Mount Athos has remained one of the most unspoiled parts of Greece. The landscape is stunning and wild, with small green valleys and gorges, well-wooded peaks interspersed



Mount Athos is the oldest surviving monastic community in the world.

with precipitous ravines and inaccessible coastline. Here and there in this wilderness are the fortified walls of the monasteries, with small vegetable plots around them, encircled by a silver-green sea of olive groves. There are still caves that house hermits who spend their days in solitude and contemplation. It is a land where myth is entwined with history and miracles mingle with reality. Savage mountain scenery reflecting on the dark blue sea create that essential framework of peace in a solitary world, chosen by hermits for its monastic state.

The beauty of Mount Athos is in its timelessness. It is as if the monastic part of the Byzantine world has been preserved in this quiet corner, full of mysticism and divine presence. It is not only a living museum, but principally a place for prayer and contemplation. The monastic ideals and way of life have been preserved in their purest form.

Today, there are 20 monasteries of which 17 are Greek, one Russian, one Serbian and one Bulgarian. There are also 12 sketes (smaller monasteries) and a number of even smaller units called kellia, kalyves, kathismata or hesychasteria. One of the sketes is Romanian.

Visitors can only stay for four days maximum and they must obtain a permit before entering the monastic community. The monasteries uphold a long tradition of hospitality for those who seek solace, relief

from the troubles of the outside world or those who are on a pilgrimage. Food and bed are provided entirely free, although the accommodations are modest and visitors are expected to conduct themselves according to certain standards. Provided you are a man (sorry ladies but women are not allowed) and have secured the necessary papers, you are in for the experience of a lifetime.

A most memorable experience for me was the ringing of the church bells at the Dionysiou Monastery. The monks use both their hands and feet to pull the ropes attached to the bells and their movement makes them ring. They start with simple movements making slow wide-spaced sounds and then build to a staccato rhythm, producing a heavenly symphony of bells, a crescendo which slowly again fades away.

Church bell sounds are popular not only among believers, but among people who follow healing and relaxation practices. They have a positive and healthy influence on the environment and on the physical and moral condition of the individual.

In the Orthodox Church, there is a long and complex history of bell-ringing, with particular bells being rung in particular ways to signify different parts of the divine services. Before mass communication, they were the only way to gather people together, so they evolved secular functions, too.

Mount Athos is simply one of the most beautiful places on earth, more like a fantasy than reality.

For spiritual seekers, Athos has the appearance of heaven on earth. It is a fantastic place to visit if you are spiritual in nature, respectful of tradition and adventurous.

Rhodes

Exactly the opposite from the serene and contemplative experience of Mount Athos is a visit to the island of Rhodes, or Rodos as it is called in Greek. What I like about this island, besides its beautiful landscapes, is its cosmopolitan atmosphere and its many cultural monuments which encompass many different civilizations. There are neolithic sites, classical Greek architectural monuments, Byzantine churches, imposing medieval fortifications and graceful mosques of the Ottoman occupation era.

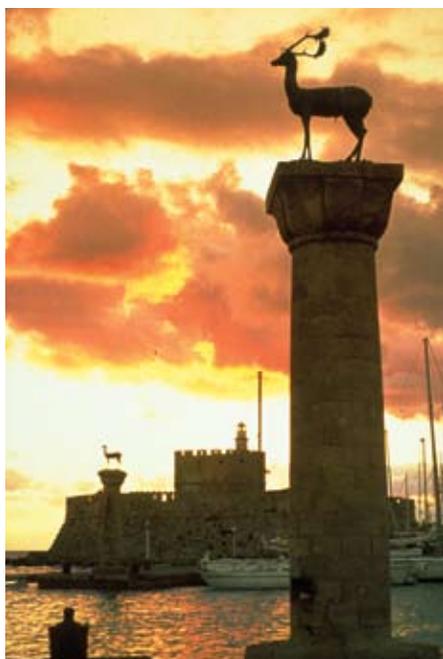
The visitor has the impression of living in a fairy tale when entering the walls of the old city, built by the Knights of Saint John after they were evicted from Jerusalem in the beginning of the 14th century A.D.

The capital, also called Rodos, occupies the northernmost tip of the island. It is actually three cities in one: the modern, the ancient and the medieval. The modern town has a cosmopolitan character, many late 20th century buildings and hotels.

The ancient town, founded in 408 B.C. occupied the hill above the medieval city and is still visible by the ruins of ancient temples, stadiums and gymnasiums.

The old town is still surrounded by the high walls erected by the Knights. It bustles with life from area bazaars, cafés, restaurants, bars, shops of all kinds and music that seems to come from every corner. At the same time, museums, galleries and all sorts of monuments reflecting the 3,000-year history of the island as well as many cultural events are at the disposal of the culturally-minded.

Outside the old town the island is dotted with splendid sunny beaches alongside clear blue waters, and many picturesque villages and interesting places



The harbour at Rhodes, the principal city of the Greek island by the same name.

such as the Valley of the Butterflies, and Kameiros, site of the ancient Dorian city, not to mention Kallithea, with its thermal baths.

But above all, one should not miss Lindos, on the southern tip of the island. The contrast between the brilliant white houses and winding lanes of the more recent village and the ancient Acropolis towering above is one of the most stunning views in Greece.

Greece has many destinations that cater to every taste and budget. Above all, it offers all visitors a special *joie de vivre* and a way to rediscover themselves.

Nikolaos Matsis is Greece's Ambassador to Canada



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