

March 21

Reports Uri Blau in *Haaretz.com*:

"Dead babies, mothers weeping on their children's graves, a gun aimed at a child and bombed-out mosques – these are a few examples of the images Israel Defense Forces soldiers design these days to print on shirts they order to mark the end of training, or of field duty. The slogans accompanying the drawings are not exactly anemic either: A T-shirt for infantry snipers bears the inscription 'Better use Durex,' [a brand of condoms] next to a picture of a dead Palestinian baby, with his weeping mother and a teddy bear beside him. A sharpshooter's T-shirt from the Givati Brigade's Shaked battalion shows a pregnant Palestinian woman with a bull's-eye superimposed on her belly, with the slogan, in English, '1 shot, 2 kills.' A 'graduation' shirt for those who have completed another snipers course depicts a Palestinian baby, who grows into a combative boy and then an armed adult, with the inscription, 'No matter how it begins, we'll put an end to it.'"

There are also plenty of shirts with blatant sexual messages. For example, the Lavi battalion produced a shirt featuring a drawing of a soldier next to a young woman with bruises, and the slogan, 'Bet you got raped!' A few of the images underscore actions whose existence the army officially denies – such as... shooting a bullet into an enemy victim's head from close range, to ensure he is dead ...for example, shirts declaring, 'We won't chill 'til we confirm the kill'... or harming religious sites, or female or child non-combatants."

Is it an idealistic or absurd rationalization to imagine that some of these soldiers – via the messages for which they have, presumably, signed on to serve as billboards – are attempting, in however distorted a way, to shock their fellow citizens into an awareness of the soul death toward which their country's military policy leads?

March 22

Front and center, the *Times* online lead story:

A Religious War in Israel's Army

After the harshness in Gaza, a clash over who will control battle ethics.



Menahem Kahana/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

AT ODDS Some secular liberals say religious nationalists set a tone that encouraged abuses during recent fighting in Gaza.

While closer to home, Debt Man Running. Running presses. An armysworth of 'em.

And what do the Debt Men pray for before they turn out the light? Perhaps three billion Martians with zero balances on limitless credit cards arriving all at once, and mad with desire to consume all the crap that Earthlings used to.

March 23

ISS DODGES MORE DEBRIS: On Sunday, March 22nd, space shuttle Discovery used its steering jets to move the International Space Station (ISS) out of the way of a

speeding 4-inch piece of space junk, a metal fragment from a spent Chinese rocket engine. Without the maneuver, the object would have made a close approach to the ISS during today's spacewalk. This is the second time this month that the ISS has taken evasive action to avoid orbital debris.

SPACE STATION FLARES: Everyone knows the ISS is bright. But *this* bright? On March 21st when the space station flew over the Netherlands, its luminosity surged to super-Venus levels. "I estimated it to be at least visual magnitude -5," reports Marco Langbroek of Leiden. "Leo Barhorst observing 35 km northeast of me estimated at least -6." These numbers mean the ISS was four times brighter than Venus and more than 60 times brighter than Sirius, the brightest star in the sky.

Dutch astronomer Quintus Oostendorp observed the flare through his backyard telescope. This snapshot shows what happened:



No, it is not an explosion. The bright flash is sunlight glinting off the station's enormous solar arrays. On March 20th, astronauts unfurled a new pair of arrays on the space station's starboard side, adding 8000 sq. feet of light-catching surface area to the station's profile. The extra area increases both the chances and the luminosity of ISS flares. "It was a spectacular sight!" says Oostendorp.

Closer to earth, in fact growing out of it physically, the ubersvelt 60-story residential tower One Madison Park whose topmost condocupants will soon look out floor-to-ceiling fenestrations to find a gigantic clock staring them in the face.

Metropolitan Life.

But soft: “One Madison Park’s engineer, the Cantor Seinuk Group, anchored the building without placing concrete columns around the perimeter. As John Cetra, a principal of Cetra/Ruddy, explained it, three enormous tubs of water on the roof function like an anvil. [!?] One holds 20,000 gallons; the other two hold 22,500 gallons each. When the wind blows in one direction, water moves the opposite way in the tubs, braking the building’s tendency to quiver.

‘The weight is the water,’ Mr. Cetra said. ‘We didn’t have to lug up steel plates or pour excessive concrete to anchor the building.’”

And that meant more soaring glass.”

Quoth *The Times* in an article titled “Beanstalk Buildings.”

And 65,000 gallons of water, apart from any other properties, sure makes a wicked cool fire-control system. I mean, just in case.

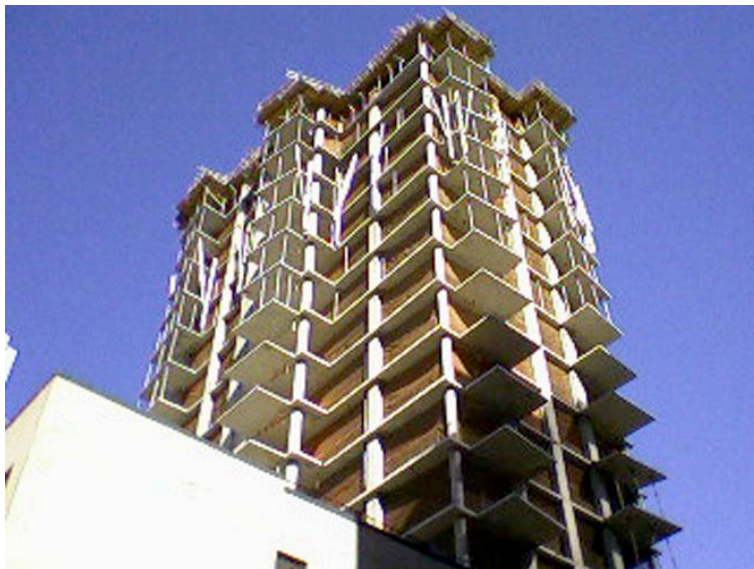
And the elements play on.



Impossible to see in this bleached-out cellphone pic, but the apparently white wall at the base of the taller red brick building actually bears the remnants of several

vivid paint colors testifying to the tastes of vanished inhabitants of vanished apartments. Hard to see too that there's a gap, the width of a midtown lot, between the wall and the gray tenement to the right. The white, but not white, wall is what remains of a four story building on which a crane jib landed right around this time last year killing seven people.

Around the corner, beneath some scaffolding and in front of the plywood hoardings that fence off the site – the ground floor was once a locally renowned pub named Fubars (thankfully closed at the time) – one finds an improvised, flower-bedecked shrine to those who died, replete with a sign listing their names, and bearing the assertion that they are not forgotten.



One block north, at 52nd Street, just east of Second, nineteen floorsworth of what was to be a 46-story condo, and from whose face – in the gap between the two rows of terraces on the right – the crane sheared away. Resembling pediments, the wooden forms built to receive the next floor's concrete pourings remain, whether expectant or resigned to decay, hard to tell from any photo. This may be the largest single pigeon coop in Turtle Bay, and perhaps even in the whole of this great city. For now.

March 24

Awaited for weeks, Alaska's Mount Redoubt blows its top. During the last eruption, back in '89, ash particles from Redoubt's plume wafted rapidly into the path

of a KLM passenger jet 150 miles away. Almost instantaneously all four engines flamed out and the jet dropped more than two miles before the plane regained power and was able to land safely.

March 25

Ninety-eighth anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire.

March 26

U.S. to Detail Plan to Rein in Finance World

Of course you read **Derail**.

Woe, Nellie!

Bread and circuits.

Cities Deal With a Surge in Shanty Towns

Note to self: found a bank called **CitiSurge**.



As the Red River bucks its banks, near Fargo.

Pakistani and Afghan Taliban Unify in Face of U.S. Influx



European Pressphoto Agency

Pakistanis attended a funeral for a victim of a United States missile attack just outside the North Waziristan region.

Hmmm. United Colors of Taliban?

Influx?!



Photo: AP

President Barack Obama arrives at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in February to speak about combat troop levels in Iraq.

Quoth Inter Press Service, dateline Washington:

Despite President Barack Obama's statement at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina Feb. 27 that he had "chosen a timeline that will remove our combat brigades over the next 18 months," a number of Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs), which have been the basic U.S. Army combat unit in Iraq for six years, will remain in Iraq after that date under a new non-combat label.

A spokesman for Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates, Lt. Col. Patrick S. Ryder, told IPS Tuesday that "several advisory and assistance brigades" would be part of a U.S. command in Iraq that will be "re-designated" as a "transition force headquarters" after August 2010.

But the "advisory and assistance brigades" to remain in Iraq after that date will in fact be the same as BCTs, except for the addition of a few dozen officers who would carry out the advice and assistance missions, according to military officials involved in the planning process.

Gates has hinted that the withdrawal of combat brigades will be accomplished through an administrative sleight of hand rather than by actually withdrawing all the combat brigade teams....

And the tens of millions of folks who voted for this guy because they thought he'd end these wars, where'd they get their basic training at, Camp Jeune?

Protected by levees built by the Army Corps of Ingénues?