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They couldn't get to the... said Lake Jackson Ass... Chief Scott Matthews. "I... a helpless situation. She... g for help and police off... trying to calm her down. Th... nothing we could do."... n of the 180 units at the W... Apartments were gutted... or 10 were heavily damage... and water... ook seven fire departme... Lake Jackson and surround... unities about five hours... h the blaze... rge Castillo, 62, was one... t people awakened by the... was asleep and then I... dy yell for help," said Cas... lives near the victims' ap... "I put on my clothes, wa... , and I heard (the mother... help."... illo said he rushed to the... tment of his adult daught... -year-old grandson, Micha... lped them escape before... vaded.

ews in Brief ice accuse ctor in murder hire scheme

STON (AP) — A Houston... an who claimed he was... harassed called the p... en tried to hire the un... officer who responded to... patient, authorities said... Armando Sanchez, 43... en charged with solicite... capital murder... investigation began las... after Sanchez reported... patient had been follow... harassing him, accord... Wednesday's editions of... ston Chronicle... Sanchez was detailing... complaints to the offic... or asked if the offic... ill the patient and... ay him for his... ice said... arranging to meet w... again, officer Glen... 7-year veteran, conta... side investigators... igitators said Sanchez... n the officer severa... discuss details of the... d killing. During one... etings, Sanchez made... 0 down payment to H... ised to pay more later.

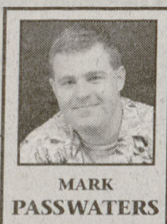
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Another way out Israeli-Syrian friendship could stabilize Middle Eastern turmoil



MARK PASSWATERS

With the horrific increase in violence between the Israelis and Palestinians in recent days, it has become apparent that the peace process has ground to a halt. In order for there to be any chance for peace, something must be done to change the entire focus of the peace process. Fortunately for Israel, there is one card it can play — but it will not be an easy one.

The creation of a lasting peace with Syria would not only lessen the tension on Israel's borders, but would also significantly weaken the bargaining position of the Palestinian Authority.

If the Palestinians are unwilling to sit down and reasonably talk peace with the Israelis, they should not be forced to.

The struggle for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians has been well documented. When the abrasive and implacable Benjamin Netanyahu was prime minister, the Israelis were as guilty of disrupting the dialogue as the Palestinians.

Now, Ehud Barak — a man far more willing to bargain for peace — is prime minister, but the process is still at a standstill. It has become apparent that Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, is either unwilling or unable to bring Palestinians toward a final resolution of this long-running dispute.

If Arafat does not have the control over his population that is required in order to make a lasting peace, Bashar Assad of Syria certainly does. Assad is the new leader of Syria, who replaced his father, Hafez Assad, earlier this year.

The creation of a lasting peace with Syria ... would also significantly weaken the bargaining position of the Palestinian Authority.

His presence makes it more likely that a peace between Israel and Syria can be reached.

Hafez Assad ruled Syria for more than three decades and lost three wars to the Israelis. While Assad made steps towards reconciling with Israel in the years before his death, the steps were small. Bashar Assad does not have the stigma of three massive defeats on his resume and will not lose face by making peace with the Israelis. With his recent emergence as Syria's head of state, he is still strongly supported by people who owe their positions to him. Bashar Assad, unlike Arafat, does not have to worry about internal dissent.

The Syrians are also struggling economically. While Syria continues to sponsor some terrorist groups, it stands to reason that such support will dry up if the Syrians and Israelis are able to make a deal.

A Syria that appears to be willing to work on a rapprochement with the Israelis will look better in the eyes of the world's largest lender, the United States. An improved economy will certainly help ease the anger of those still opposed to peace with Israel.

A deal with Syria holds advantages for Israel, too. Lebanon, which borders Israel to the north, is a Syrian puppet state. A peace agreement with Syria will almost certainly mean that one with Lebanon will be close behind. This will mean that terrorist groups like Hezbollah will be forced to find a new place from which to launch their deadly attacks.

Making a deal with Syria over land will also be much easier than making one with the Palestinians. The Israelis complain about giving up the Golan Heights, which they seized from Syria in 1967. The Israelis say that the land gives them a strategic advantage, and they are correct.

However, the Israelis have nuclear weapons, which are a stronger deterrent than a few hills. They also have the United States in their corner, which would give any possible aggressor a reason to reconsider — just ask Saddam Hussein.

The Israelis are going to be far more willing to give up the Golan to Syria than cede East Jerusalem to the Palestinians. This is a major sticking point, as both the Israelis and Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital. By giving up the Golan, the Israelis might be able to keep Jerusalem intact and under their control.

This outcome will be possible because peace with Syria will significantly weaken the bargaining position of the Palestinians. If Syria cuts a deal with Israel, the Palestinians will be running out of benefactors. As soon as the Syrians get what they want, the unity between the Syrians and Palestinians will evaporate.

Egypt, another regional power, has had little use for the Palestinians since the 1991 Gulf War. Two other possible supporters, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, echo such sentiments. With no Syrian support and increasing pressure from the United States, the Palestinians are going to find few who are willing to come to their aid.

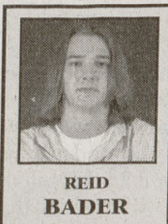
For the Israelis, making peace with Syria will not be easy. They will have to overcome decades worth of antipathy as well as other regional issues to succeed.

If the Israelis do succeed in this task, however, they will make their own borders more secure while weakening the position of their greatest remaining adversary.

Mark Passwaters is a senior electrical engineering major.

A call not worth making

Cellular phones, driving a bad combination; need local regulation



REID BADER

Driving a car requires the constant attention of the driver. Accidents happen every day, even with the driver giving total attention to the situation. When drivers let radios and other distractions interfere with their concentration, the risk of an accident increases.

One of the more dangerous distractions to motor vehicle operators is the cellular phone. Talking on a cell phone and driving at the same time can distract drivers more than changing a radio station.

Due to this increased risk, the cities of Bryan and College Station should pass ordinances that would make talking on a cell phone while driving a ticketable offense.

In 1997, the New England Journal of Medicine issued a report concerning the safety of cell phones and driving. The summary concluded that drivers who are talking on cell phones are four times as likely to be in an accident than drivers paying complete attention to the road.

Drunken driving studies have also shown that driving under the influence of alcohol increases accident risk by four times. In other words, drivers using cell phones are as great a threat to other drivers as drunken drivers are.

Arguments that talking with a passenger is just as distracting as using a cell phone while driving were also addressed in the report.

In its findings, the Journal stated, "Unlike a caller on the other end, the passenger can see when the driver needs to fo-

cus on driving and can further serve to alert the driver to hazards."

Granted, cell phones in the car offer convenience. Assistance is easily accessible if there is car trouble, police and ambulances can be quickly reached if there is an accident, and being able to call in late for meetings or get directions are all positive sides of having a cell phone in

a greater target for police.

To resolve this, students should allow passengers to call for directions or pull into a parking lot and stop.

Patricia Pena of Hilltown, Pa., knows well the affects of driving and talking on the cell phone. While in the car with her 2-year-old daughter, Morgan Lee, another car ran a stop sign and hit them broad-

side, killing Morgan Lee. The driver admitted that he ran the stop sign because he was distracted while talking on his cell phone. He was later cited with reckless driving and fined \$50.

On the Website the Penas dedicated to their daughter, they state, "Prior to the crash, we and the rest of the public lacked a meaningful awareness of the dangers of drivers using cell phones while operating a vehicle. Since the horrible death of our daughter, the use

of cellular phones by drivers has become a substantial safety problem."

Soon after the accident, Hilltown became one of the first cities in the U.S. to ban talking on a cell phone while driving. The Hilltown plan followed similar rules to a cell phone ordinance passed by Brooklyn, Ohio, in 1999. Drivers cannot be pulled over for talking on their cell phones in the car.

However, if they are in violation of another law, they can be ticketed for using their cell phone once pulled over. Exemptions are made for users who were calling 911 or other emergencies.

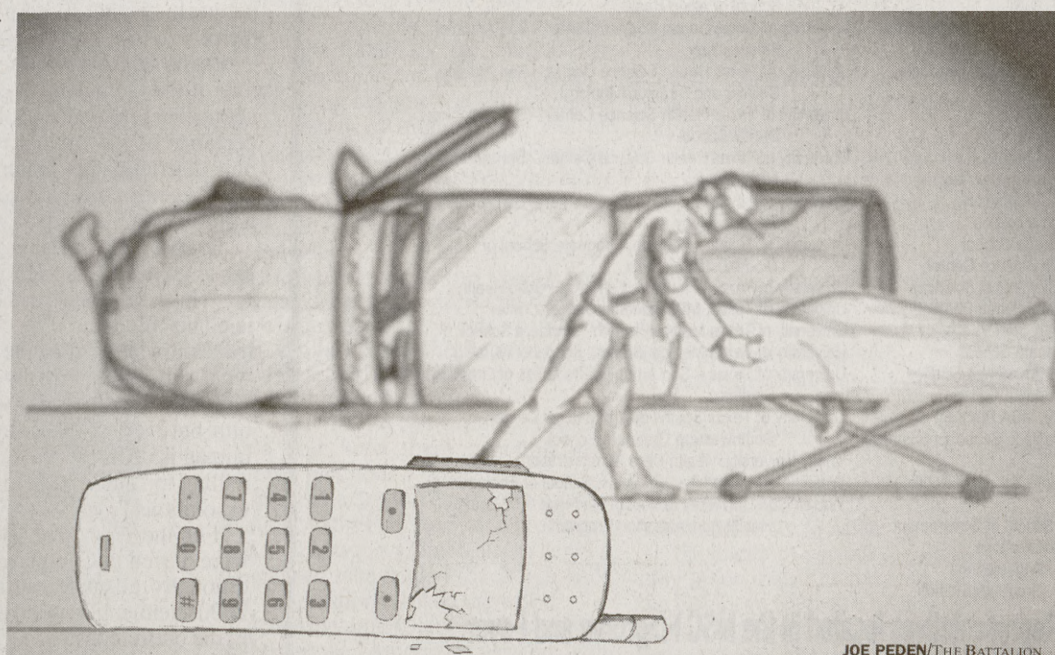
Insurance companies have also recognized the threat cell phone use in the car can pose. "Cell phones are an excellent safety device on the open road, but they're strongly linked with serious accidents in industry research," said Loretta Worters, vice president of communications for the Insurance Information Institute. "We recommend pulling over before making calls."

Carrie Stahl, a junior environmental design major and bus driver for Bus Operations at Texas A&M said, "People on cell phones have to be one of the biggest risks to all drivers. Almost every day, I see someone on their cell phone cutting someone else off in traffic or running red lights."

The problem of cell phones and driving in Bryan-College Station should be addressed immediately. The use of cell phones in cars will grow as more and more people buy cell phones.

To combat the increased risk of accidents, local officials should pass ordinances to keep distracted drivers off the road.

Reid Bader is a junior political science major.



JOE PEDEN/THE BATTALION

In the dark ages Britain's belated passage of Human Rights Act fills void

Last week, Great Britain's Human Rights Act was incorporated into British law.



BRIENNE PORTER

The right to freedom of expression, speech and privacy, which have been staples in American life, are now a written part of British law. Many rights that are now protected are similar to America's Bill of Rights, like the right to be protected against unreasonable searches and seizures. British citizens now have the same rights guaranteed by the Human Rights Act.

Before this enactment, the British were only protected under the European Convention on human rights, which Britain signed in 1953.

Under the prior enactment, cases where the defendant felt the government had violated the convention would be heard at the European Court of Hu-

man Rights in Strasbourg.

Before this act was written, British citizens had what are known as negative rights. In other words, if there was not a law prohibiting a certain action, then it was legal.

Recently, citizens have felt that the rights they thought they had were being taken away by Parliament. With the new act, many of these rights are protected by law.

Now, British citizens will not have to rely on their government alone not to infringe on these rights, which makes protecting basic human rights more enforceable.

The push for this act was made by England's ruling party, the Labor Party, as part of its platform in the '97 election. Basic human rights should not be taken for granted, but guaranteed by law.

Accordingly, the way British citizens and the government interact will change.

The new code gives the government written proof that what

it is doing is legal. While the British court system cannot declare a law unconstitutional like its American counterpart can, it can issue a "statement of incompatibility."

Before this enactment, the British were only protected under the European Convention on human rights, which Britain signed in 1953.

The statement of incompatibility will inform Parliament that the statute does not agree with the human rights code, but it will not change the statute in question. The legislators will have the power to change the statute.

With this difference, the Parliament still has more power than the court system, which has traditionally been the case.

Many opponents of this act worry that standards of British

culture will be forced to change under the new act.

According to The New York Times, conservative British newspapers have written articles claiming the act will change all aspects of British life, such as "the right of the government to ban polygamy, on the ground that it would violate some people's freedom of religion."

Because the court system is limited, citizens should not worry. The court cannot reverse a law.

It can tell Parliament it has found that the law is not compliant with the Human Rights Act, but it is up to Parliament to change the law.

British citizens should not worry that accepted governmental bans will be changed, since legislators have the final say in which statutes stand. British courts do not have the right of judicial review like American justices have.

Another worry of the conservatives is that this act will give "too much power to interest

groups like gays and women."

They think that this new act takes too much power from the government. While it may seem as though the government has lost power, in essence it has gained the power to protect those who go against the majority.

The code will give the government solid footing in cases that once were disputable.

The government now has a legal basis for protecting privacy, freedom of speech and religion.

This act has made England a more democratic nation.

According to Upendra Baxi, professor of law at the University of Warwick, "This new act is the first time that Parliament has agreed to limit its own sovereignty."

Opponents have raised numerous problems with the new code, but this act, while different in the beginning, will protect future generations from numerous problems.

Brienne Porter is a sophomore chemical engineering major.

Mail Call

Majority's rights unthreatened Copenhagen advertisement all right, influence of The Battalion overrated

In response to Marcus White's Oct. 10 column. White does a good job of rallying the religious right, but he manages to ignore the actual thrust of the establishment clause.

It is outrageous to suggest that a student's constitutional right to freedom of religion should be waived simply because a majority of students decide to do so. Whether there is any secular value to prayer, which is debatable, prayer is still a religious activity. Even nonsectarian prayer is fundamentally religious.

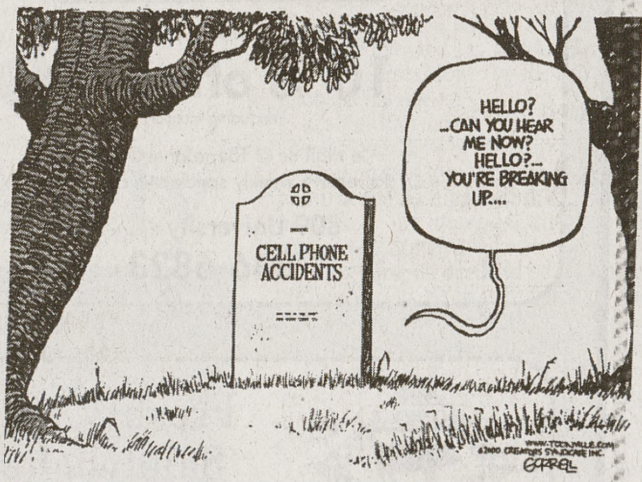
The Constitution requires that the government not support any religion or any religious activity. When the school holds prayer or provides the medium by which others may lead prayer during school or school activities, it is supporting religious activity. Whether it is the establishment of a national religion or one school district allowing a religious activity during a school activity, it is still a violation of the establishment clause.

Also, it is absurd to argue that our right to assemble is being abridged by preventing school prayer. A school event is an exercise of school assembly, and any religious assembly associated with that school event is simply not appropriate.

I suggest that White and those who agree with him acquaint themselves with the diversity of organizations that are permitted to assemble here before they claim that the right of assembly is being violated.

Jason Willis
Class of '01

Joe Price
Class of '99



The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

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