

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE
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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

THE THREAT OF IRAN

The threat of Iran to the region and the world is real. In this *Perspective*, I seek to summarize this threat and focus on the possibility of meaningful negotiations.

- First, a summary of the genuine threat of Iran's nuclear program. The recently discovered nuclear facility deep in the mountains near Qum demonstrates how serious the nuclear threat really is. There is no question that this facility is designed for uranium enrichment. Uranium enrichment—the process of turning raw uranium into reactor or bomb fuel—is only one part of building a nuclear weapon, though it is the most difficult step. The two remaining steps are designing and building a warhead, and then building a reliable delivery system, like a ballistic missile. Israeli intelligence officials say they believe that Iran restarted weapons design work in 2005 on the orders of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader. German intelligence officials agree and say that Iran never really stopped its weapons development program. Israeli and German officials say that Americans are being overly cautious, because they were stung in their assessment of Iraqi WMD's before the invasion in 2003. America has volunteered that its intelligence reveals that there are over a dozen sites involved in Iran's nuclear program. Furthermore, last Monday (28 September) Iran's Revolutionary Guard test-fired missiles with sufficient range to strike Israel, parts of Europe and American bases in the Persian Gulf. The tests of the medium range, liquid-fueled Shahab-3 and the solid-fueled Sejil-2 missiles raise the suspicion that Iran is seeking to hone its delivery system for nuclear weapons. The day before, Iran also tested-fired three short range missiles with a range of 90 to 125 miles as a part of a military exercise named the Great Prophet IV. The Revolutionary Guards, who run Iran's missile program, just purchased over 50% of Iran's Telecommunication Company in a \$7.5 billion deal. Recently, the Revolutionary Guard was awarded over 750 construction, oil and gas contracts and it has its own port facilities. Its political influence has also increased, with many of its members elected to Parliament in 2003 or appointed as cabinet members in 2004. The Revolutionary Guard was the force Ahmadinejad used to terrorize the protesters of his obviously rigged election as president. The Revolutionary Guard is now the elite force of Iran, with the military, financial and political power consolidated solidly behind Ahmadinejad and Khamenei.
- Second, can the US realistically hope to negotiate anything of substance with Iran? History must cause us to be very pessimistic about this prospect. Indeed, Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, in an address last October argued that "every administration since 1979 has reached out to the Iranians in one way or another and all have failed." Michael Ledeen, in an essay in the *Wall Street Journal*, summarizes these contacts. After the fall of the shah in February 1979, the Carter administration attempted to establish good relations with the revolutionary regime. The

talks ended with the seizure of the American Embassy in November of that year. The Reagan administration sided with Iran in its war with Iraq, providing weapons and military intelligence to Iran. This effort ended when the Iran-Contra scandal broke in late 1986. The Clinton administration lifted sanctions that had been imposed by Carter and Reagan. During those years, cultural exchange events occurred and the US publicly apologized for past sins. But in March 1999, Supreme Leader Khamenei proclaimed that the US was the enemy of Iran. George W. Bush negotiated extensively with Iran in public meetings and very secret private negotiations. Despite an apparent agreement, which was to be publicly announced in September 2006, the agreement fell apart at the last minute. All of these negotiations have been accompanied by sanctions. But neither has produced any change in Iranian behavior. Unfortunately, sanctions have normally been imposed by the US alone. Over the last 30 years, our allies have pressed for further negotiations instead of sanctions. Finally, in late 2006, the UN started passing sanctions, blocking imports or exports of “sensitive nuclear material and equipment” and called for member states to freeze the assets of anyone involved with Iran’s nuclear program. In 2007, the Security Council banned all arms exports from Iran, froze Iranian assets, and restricted the travel of anyone involved in the Iranian nuclear program. The following year, it called for investigations of Iranian banks, and authorized member countries to start searching planes and ships coming or going from or to Iran. All of this brought no change and no curtailment of Iran’s nuclear program. Ledeen concludes: “Thirty years of negotiations and sanctions have failed to end the Iranian nuclear program and its war against the West. Why should anyone think they will work now? A change in Iran requires a change in government. Common sense and moral vision suggest we should support the courageous opposition movement, whose leaders have promised to end support for terrorism and provide total transparency regarding the nuclear program.” The silence of the current US government on this opposition has been deafening!

- Third, the US government’s policy toward Iran leaves Israel with little or no choice in terms of its own security. The current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, recently gave an impassioned speech at the UN, in which he warned the world community about the genuine threat of the world’s first Holocaust-denying nuclear state! There is little question that an Israeli airstrike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, spread throughout the country, would have unpredictable and destabilizing results throughout the Middle East. Perhaps Iran would launch missiles to Israel’s major cities; perhaps Hezbollah and Hamas would unleash a massive volley of rockets for days. Perhaps The Palestinian Authority would end all talks with Israel. But President Obama has done little to assure Israel of US sympathies. Obama has picked public fights with the Israeli government over settlements and has adopted a tone of neutrality on major Israeli issues. This is dangerous as well, for Israel may conclude that the US is an unreliable partner and that Israel must defend itself—alone! Michael Gerson, the columnist, writes: “[Israel must be able to trust] American goodwill, competence and strength of purpose. The immediate precedent does not encourage confidence. Israelis look at the North Korean crisis and see an example of meticulous, multilateral cooperation resulting in spectacular counterproliferation failure. Why, they wonder, is Iran going to be different? Weak credibility on North Korea has strengthened the argument for direct Israeli action against Iran.” Since the survival of Israel is at stake, who can blame Israel for striking Iran? The current administration has done little to instill confidence in the Israelis that the US is a loyal partner.

See Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (2 October 2009); Michael Ledeen in the *Wall Street Journal* (30 September 2009); and Alan Cowell and Nazila Fathi and Souad Mekkenet, two separate news article in the *New York Times* (29 September 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

ROMAN POLANSKI: AFFIRMING DEVIANCY

The case of film director, Roman Polanski, is troubling. In 1977 he gave a 13-year old girl Quaalude and champagne, and then raped her. In the 1978 trial he admitted doing so, but then fled the US and has lived in France ever since. Last week, he was arrested in Switzerland, where he had gone to receive the Zurich Film Festival's "Golden Eye" award for lifetime achievement. [Polanski is a French citizen and France had refused to extradite him.] The arts community in France, much of Europe and in the US has collectively come to Polanski's defense for this "so-called crime." As Terry Teachout has argued in the *Wall Street Journal*, "The unseemly rapidity with which Mr. Polanski's friends lined up to support him is also a demonstration of the extent to which Hollywood is isolated from the rest of the world. . . No matter what he may have done in the past, Mr. Polanski is an artist and therefore ought to go free. Period." Hollywood justice, perverted and deviant, has seen more than 100 filmmakers and actors petition for Polanski's release.

Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post* columnist, has correctly observed that "If it isn't deviant for a 43-year-old man to stalk, drug, rape and sodomize a 13-year old girl, what is?" That so many are now saying that this deviant has "suffered enough" and should be freed speaks volumes about the deviancy of Hollywood as a subculture! Roman Polanski is a fugitive in a rape case and has "an outstanding debt to society." Parker writes: "Justice isn't only for the pillaged girl, now a forgiving mother of three, but also for a world that needs to affirm without hesitation that civilized people don't abide the sexual abuse of children. Anything else sends a message that children aren't safe—and that predators are." Western civilization must hold Roman Polanski accountable for his despicable deviancy!

See Kathleen Parker in the *Washington Post* (4 October 2009) and Terry Teachout in the *Wall Street Journal* (3-4 October 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FAITH IN GOD

I just finished reading Ronald C. White, Jr.'s recently published and masterful biography of Abraham Lincoln. White focuses on the decision-making processes of Lincoln and on a detailed analysis of Lincoln's speeches—both his rhetoric and his oratory. It was a delight to read. What impressed me the most was his insights into Lincoln's theology. Lincoln did not join a church but, when President, he regularly attended the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., which was pastored by Phineas Densmore Gurley. Gurley studied at Princeton Theological Seminary under the great Calvinist scholar, Charles Hodge. Gurley stressed God's providence in the affairs of men and strengthened Lincoln's deep-seated commitment to the providence of

Almighty God. Phrases and arguments that were a part of Gurley's sermons inched themselves into Lincoln's speeches.

At some point during the latter part of Lincoln's presidency, he wrote, on a small piece of paper, on the question of the presence of God during the Civil War. He wrote that "In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose." This was written in private and was not found until after Lincoln had died.

Furthermore, Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address is perhaps the greatest and most profound address ever delivered by an American President. In the address, he concentrated on God as the primary actor in the Civil War. He described God's actions: "He now wills to remove," "He gives to both North and South, this terrible war," "Yet, if God wills that it continue." He observed that both sides in this terrible war "read the same Bible and pray to the same God." In the 701 words of his address, Lincoln mentioned God 14 times, quoted from the Bible 4 times and invoked prayer 3 times. Quoting from Matthew 18:7, Lincoln decreed that God can also be the author of judgment, and the Civil War should be understood in that way. In his remarkable address, Lincoln made an unexpected political and religious move. Speaking on the eve of military victory in 1865, when many expected him to celebrate the successes of the Union, he called upon his audience to recognize a perilous evil into their midst. Instead of self-congratulation, he asked his fellow citizens for self-analysis. Because of the horrific nature of slavery, the nation deserved God's discipline. He reminded his audience that the stain of slavery was enmeshed in the very fabric of American history—from the beginning. As White observes, "His images reached their zenith in 'until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword.'" The sword of military battle was the judgment of God.

Lincoln concluded his address: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." He championed forgiveness and reconciliation—key virtues, sourced in God—for a lasting peace!

Lincoln was the most remarkable president this nation has ever had. He did not give simple answers to complex questions. He wrestled with his theology and saw God's providence in everything. He believed that a President must lead and must challenge the nation's citizens to be virtuous and righteous. And, in doing so, he never hesitated to refer to God and to Scripture. May God in His grace give us another leader like Abraham Lincoln.

See Ronald C. White, Jr., *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography*, pp, 622-627 and 658-667.