

BOOKS

[*Showdown With Nuclear Iran*,
Michael D. Evans and Jerome R.
Corsi, *Nelson Current*, 288
pages]

His God Must Be Crazy

By Gary Brecher

IF YOU COULD WAIT half a lifetime before getting revenge, we nerds would die happy because every nerd dreams of vengeance on the guys who beat him up in ninth grade. Then you wake up and realize whoa, I'm a 30-something working man with cardiac issues. My window of opportunity is gone, revenge-wise.

That's the first problem with this new book arguing for an invasion of Iran and with the entire let's-invade-Iran choir that's gaining ascendancy: it's 2006, not 1979. Everything's changed between Iran and us since they first attacked our embassy and deserved a good smack-down—and it hasn't changed in our favor. That probably explains why these authors spend so little time actually discussing an invasion of Iran—they know it's just not possible—and devote the bulk of their book to discussing Israel. In fact, it almost half reads like some kind of travel diary by one its authors, Michael Evans, describing his tour of Israel during the August 2006 border war with Hezbollah.

Evans tries to confuse the issue by saying it was "Iranian militants" who kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and took them into Lebanon. It's a pretty brazen lie, right there in the first paragraph of the book: "I'm in northern Israel, which is under a rocket attack by the Hezbollah terrorists of southern Lebanon on this bright summer day. A few days ago Iranian militants staged a raid into northern Israel, ambushing an Israeli Defense Force patrol, killing three sol-

diers, and abducting two as hostages for ransom."

Notice how in the first sentence he says "Hezbollah terrorists" are rocketing Israel, but in the next one he says "Iranian militants" kidnapped the IDF soldiers. I've searched all over the Internet, and I can't find anybody who claims that Iranians took those soldiers. Everybody in the world except Michael Evans says Hezbollah did it. And Hezbollah is not Iranian. It's pro-Iran, but that doesn't mean it's Iranian any more than the Iraqi Kurds are Americans just because they (sort of) support us.

Hezbollah's membership consists of Shi'ite Arabs from South Lebanon and Beirut, people who were born a few miles from the Mediterranean—a thousand miles west of Iran—and can't speak a word of Farsi. You would think a so-called "Middle East expert" like Evans would know the difference.

I suspect he does, actually. He's just trying to persuade his Bible-oriented readers that Iran is threatening the Holy Land. So he plays this shell game with the suckers: one minute it's Iranians capturing Israelis, next minute it's Hezbollah. Eventually he compromises by calling Hezbollah "a proxy of the Iranian government."

That's another lie, of course. Even if you don't know recent Middle Eastern history, you should be able to see through this "proxy" nonsense. If there's anything that recent military history shows clearly, it's that nobody, not even a superpower, can create a proxy army that will really fight—and Hezbollah proved pretty clearly that they can fight.

America and the USSR tried creating proxy armies all through the Cold War years. The only time it worked was when the locals had their own reasons to want to fight. In those cases, it's just a matter of sliding the cartons off the C-130's and cracking 'em open. Local war-lust will do the rest.

But when the locals are only fighting because some foreign power pays them, they're worthless. I hate to bring up painful memories, but anybody remem-

ber our old pal ARVN—the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, aka South Vietnam? We poured so much blood and money into the South Vietnamese Army that it still hurts to think about it. At its peak, ARVN had 544,000 soldiers, one of the biggest and definitely one of the best-funded armies in the world. But without U.S. combat troops to provide some spine and USAF sorties to run their offense, ARVN collapsed as fast as Enron—and for pretty much the same reasons.

The Soviets tried the same technique in Africa and Afghanistan, with the same results. It's hard to believe now, but back in the 1970s people thought the USSR was going to take over Africa because those Soviets were funding so many proxy wars. All those African safaris got the Russians were tropical diseases and a huge cash drain. Most of the money went right into the pockets of the commanding officers of these proxy armies, and the armies either never existed in the first place or melted away the first time they met real troops.

That's exactly what happened to our worst-ever proxies, the Contras. They were supposed to be our Latin American version of the Colorado kids in Red Dawn—freedom-loving rebels who would overthrow the Sandinista commies. Instead they spent your tax dollars on fast boats and clothes—they were the only insurgents in history who dressed like extras on "Miami Vice." And as for how they behaved, it was more like Tony Montana, who would happily talk about how "I keel a Commyunis' fo' fun!" but then lose interest after the coke money started flowing.

So let's drop the nonsense that Hezbollah is just a stand-in for Iran. You can tell stand-ins by the way they fight, or rather don't fight. And Hezbollah has proved again and again that it's a serious army. It was Hezbollah that drove the IDF out of Lebanon in 2000. It was Hezbollah that launched the first suicide-bomb attacks on the IDF, long before any Palestinian even dreamed of doing anything that extreme. And in the 2006 border-war Evans is writing about,

Hezbollah defeated much better equipped IDF units. Even Israeli soldiers returning from the front admitted their admiration for the Hezzies who were willing to rush into IDF automatic fire in hopes of capturing another Israeli soldier. That's not how proxies fight.

It wasn't Iran that made the Shi'ites of southern Lebanon so tough. It was Israel. Before Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, the Shi'ites of southern Lebanon were the quietest, most peaceable tribe in the whole crazy country. There's no faster way to turn submissive peasant-types into kamikazes than by grabbing their land, and that's what Israel did, declaring a "security zone" in southern Lebanon. It was Israeli occupation that turned those Shi'ite peasants into the best soldiers in the Middle East, not Iranian cash. Cash just makes Contras; occupations make fighters.

If you want an ultra-painful example of that, just compare the Iraqi army before we occupied Iraq—a bunch of cowards who were surrendering to news crews—to the hardened insurgents we have to deal with now. That's what the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon did. In 1982, the Shia were still mostly humble farmers trying to scratch a living out of the dry hills of southern Lebanon. Then the IDF swooped in, killed a bunch of people, seized their land, and installed their own proxy army, a strange group called the South Lebanon Army (SLA) whose members were recruited from diehard Lebanese Christian clans, to keep the Shi'ites down. It went about the way you'd expect: the locals turned nasty, the proxy army dissolved, and Israel ended up abandoning its "security zone" in 2000.

In fact, I've been wondering where the soldiers of that proxy army, the SLA, went after Israel pulled out. Obviously they couldn't stay in southern Lebanon, so they were evacuated to Israel. But some of my sources there tell me that no SLA men have been seen in Israel for the last few years. Anybody know where they went?

Evans keeps trying to drag Iran over

to Israel any way he can. His whole argument is based on two equations:

1. Hezbollah = Iran
2. Israel = America

So according to Evans, when Hezbollah guerrillas attack an Israeli patrol, what's actually happening is Iran is attacking America—which is insane. I've already discussed the dishonest ways he tries to prove that Hezbollah equals Iran, but the ways he tries to prove that Israel equals America are even weirder. Here's a classic example: he talks about how the Iranians are planning an assault on "... the two DCs: Jerusalem DC (David's Capital) and Washington DC."

EVANS DOESN'T NEED ANY **REAL MIDDLE EASTERN HISTORY** BECAUSE HE'S CONVINCED THAT **MODERN ISRAEL IS IDENTICAL TO ANCIENT ISRAEL**, THE HOLY LAND OF THE BIBLE.

"Jerusalem DC," huh? That's so lame it would have made my old youth minister blush, and we're talking about a guy who literally played "Kumbaya" with a straight face.

It's time to hire a deprogrammer to take these neocons to a soundproof motel room and slap some sense into them before they get us all killed. Israel is not America. Israel is a small state established by force less than 60 years ago on land already occupied by a group of mixed Christian/Muslim Arabs who called themselves Palestinians, docile farmers who didn't like to fight. What turned them into Hamas was Israeli occupation.

These people were treated rough. Just consider the career of the man to whom Evans chose to dedicate this book: Menachem Begin. Evans praises Begin as a "brilliant man" whose "friendship" was a "privilege." Well, this "brilliant man" masterminded the terrorist bombing of the King David Hotel, killing 91 people including 17 Jews. This "brilliant man" ran the Irgun, a terrorist outfit responsible for killing at least 100 Arab civilians at Deir Yassein. This "brilliant man" ordered the 1982 invasion of Lebanon that resulted in the rise of

Hezbollah, and when the drive to Beirut ended with the massacre of about a thousand Palestinian refugees by Lebanese militias allied to Israel, Begin's only comment was "goyim kill goyim and Jews get the blame!" Begin was an interesting guy, to put it mildly, but he was no saint and Israel isn't God's proxy army in the Middle East.

But Evans thinks it is. He really believes that Israel is God's team, and anybody in their way is God's enemy. At the moment, the Israelis are worked up about Iran—Evans quotes Bibi Netanyahu trying to talk America into attacking Iran—and gullible Christians like Evans are ready to jump into a nasty

old gang-fight just because it happens to be fought on the territory of the Good Book. That's why Evans spends so much time touring "the peaceful Galilee of the Scriptures"—as if Galilee has ever been peaceful or ever will be.

Evans, a powerful evangelical leader, tries to soft-pedal his religious side in this book, but he's not so bashful in his other bestseller, *American Prophecies*, where it turns out everything in the Bible is about America, which is obvious by the fact that America isn't mentioned once. The last chapter of *American Prophecies* is titled, "Lunatics, Liberals, and Liars"—three words that start with "L" and prove that anybody who argues with Dick Cheney is going against God.

That's why there's so little argument or information in this book. Evans doesn't need to learn, let alone teach, any real Middle Eastern history because he's convinced that modern Israel is identical to ancient Israel, the Holy Land of the Bible. The less you know about the region, the easier it is to believe that.

The more you learn about the actual history of the Middle East, the harder it gets. Take for example Evans's favorite place, "the peaceful Galilee of the Scriptures." He's all broken up over the fact

that “peaceful Galilee” is getting Hezbollah rockets lobbed into it on a daily basis as he writes. If he only knew a little about Galilee, he wouldn’t be so worried. Galilee can take it, dude. Galilee has been a battleground for thousands of years; the Israelis and Hezbollah are just doing what comes naturally in Galilee, just like the Byzantines, Druze, Fatimids, Crusaders, and Ottomans did before them.

A little more than 800 years ago, Galilee was the site of a battle between the armies of Christ and Allah, a truly apocalyptic showdown won by the Muslims under Saladin, who jumped a Crusader army marching to the relief of Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee and wiped out the Christians, ending the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands of Christian believers had died to win that kingdom, and in one day’s battle, Saladin destroyed it. Where do all those soldiers of Christ fit into Evans’s nonsense? If you ask me, the medieval Europeans who left their homes and marched to Jerusalem to regain the Holy Land for Christendom were a way more noble, courageous bunch than Evans and his readers sitting in their recliners pretending that Likud politicians like Netanyahu and Sharon are God’s anointed, preparing the way for Christ’s Kingdom.

If Evans had been around back then, no doubt he’d have read the battle of Hattin as a sign. If he’d been born any time between then and now, he’d have had other battles, much bigger and more important than the skirmishes between the IDF and Hezbollah, to interpret as proof that the end times were upon us. The only reason he takes current events as his signal is that he’s too ignorant to know any others.

I guess this is a matter of faith, and you’re never, ever supposed to question somebody’s faith. So I’ll just say that Evans’s faith is a wonderful thing, etc.—but if guys like Begin and Netanyahu are God’s anointed, then somebody in Heaven’s Human Resources Division needs to be fired.

Of course you need faith sometimes.

Especially if you’re planning to invade Iran when your army is already stuck in a disastrous counter-insurgency war in Iraq while you’re trying to hold Afghanistan together with string and rubber bands. If there was ever a case for faith-based solutions, this is it—because faith is all that’s left when every brain cell you’ve got is saying, “Are you crazy? Invade Iran? Now? Have you been sniffing gasoline again?”

No matter how hard you look for a realistic discussion of what an invasion would cost, you won’t find it in this book. That’s where Evans’s faith comes in. By his logic, we couldn’t possibly fail because God wants us to do it. Now I don’t want to question his faith, because in America, you can never, ever say that a man of God is a reckless idiot who’s trying to destroy our country. But would it be too much, Pastor Evans, sir, Your Holiness, to ask for some discussion of real-world problems, like how we’re going to invade a country three times bigger than Iraq while keeping the lid on the mess there? Or how we’ll cope with Iran’s mountainous terrain, history of anti-American nationalism, and Shi’ite martyr culture?

HE’S MUCH MORE AT HOME WITH NONSENSICAL WORD GAMES LIKE “JERUSALEM DC” THAN TRYING TO CONCENTRATE ON MATTERS LIKE TROOP NUMBERS.

Actually, Evans does mention these problems. Yup, he gives each of them about a paragraph, then moves on. It’s eerie. They obviously don’t register with him. He’s much more at home coming up with nonsensical word games like “Jerusalem DC” than trying to concentrate on earthly matters like geography, logistics, troop numbers, and history.

When Evans finally gets down to military details, in the last third of the book, he sounds weirdly distracted, as if he’s taking dictation rather than actually thinking about the problems. He passes over difficulties that would have made Patton faint as if they’re just whining from fussy parents about the upcoming church picnic. Here, for instance, is his

casual guess at how the actual campaign would go: “...the Iranian military forces would most likely be no more effective than Saddam Hussein’s military had been in stopping the United States’ military invasion. A war focused on Tehran would probably last no longer than a few weeks, following the same hard-charge strategy as the drive on Baghdad.”

Just read that over a couple of times. Then help me look up how to get a person involuntarily committed because this guy is patently clinically insane. Here’re a few scary key facts: Iran has almost 70 million people, compared to 26 million in Iraq. We can’t hope to exploit ethnic divisions because more than half are ethnic Persians; another 24 percent are Azeris, very close to the Persians and highly unlikely to side with an invader against them. A disproportionate number of the Iranian population is of fighting age because the birthrate soared back in the early days of the revolution then dropped quickly. That means Iran has millions of young men eager to die repelling infidel American invaders, with relatively few babies to take care of. It’s a recruiter’s dream. And Iranians have always had the reputation

for being fierce soldiers, especially when defending the homeland. It was the Iranians who attacked in “martyr battalions” during the Iran-Iraq War, while the Iraqis cowered in their berms.

For all these reasons, no sane military writer would just casually say that Iran “will be no more effective than Saddam Hussein’s military” in opposing a U.S. invasion. But I guess that kind of cheap equation, Iran = Iraq, fits Evans’s childish way of thinking. After all, he’s already decided that Israel = America and Hezbollah = Iran. Why shouldn’t he assume that all Muslim countries beginning with “Ira-” are pretty much the same?

Evans barely even bothers to acknowledge that we’ve run into a few problems

in Iraq. It doesn't seem to occur to him that these same problems might crop up once we're patrolling the streets of Tehran—which, as you'll recall, we'll reach in “a few weeks.” He devotes a whole half-sentence to the issue of our overextended military and then manages to turn it into a positive for us by pointing out that our troops will have a much shorter trip! “Skeptics within the United States as well as worldwide will argue that an invasion of Iran will overstretch the US military and prove too costly to undertake. Yet, with US military force levels currently being reduced in Iraq, redeployment to Iran is more achievable now, possibly even less costly than it would be should forces deployed from Iraq be fully repositioned at home.”

Sure, that's the ticket! We'll just tell those National Guard units who have already stayed in the Baghdad shooting gallery far past their designated time that we're repositioning them a little further to the northeast, specifically to Tehran. Just think of the savings when we tell them they don't even get to go home in between. Boy will they be happy!

That passage is typical of the odd callousness toward American soldiers Evans shows throughout the book. He's so convinced that God is on his and Menachem Begin's side that he never considers what it would cost America to launch this suicidal attack on Iran while trying to manage Iraq and Afghanistan. He just doesn't care about any country on earth except Israel. His only worry is that “an attack on Iran might further destabilize the Middle East, such that Israel's ultimate survival is even more at risk...”

Wait, what? “Israel's ultimate survival”? Dude, what about America? Ever worry what a failed invasion of Iran would do to America's “ultimate survival”? Clearly not. America, which he's eager to send into the meat grinder, is not even on Evans's agenda. ■

Gary Brecher writes the War Nerd column for the eXile, a Moscow-based alternative newspaper.

[*Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, David Kuo, Free Press, 283 pages]

David Out of the Lions' Den

by Doug Bandow

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT has long targeted those many Christians have seen as the devil's political helpers—Bill Clinton, Ted Kennedy, People for the American Way, the American Civil Liberties Union. Of late, David Kuo has joined that list.

A Christian political activist who worked for the National Right to Life Committee, Bill Bennett's Empower America, the CIA, a Christian charity, and the Bush administration's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Kuo is an unusual addition to the list. But Kuo has criticized administration officials and evangelical politicians, earning him the enmity of both.

Tempting Faith is one of those rare Washington books that is worth reading—clearly written, disarmingly honest, thoughtfully introspective, and unusually substantive. We are enriched as we learn about Kuo the person as well as his involvement in Christian politics.

Kuo was a high-school convert to Christianity who got excited about political activism in college. He found it easier to advocate theology than to apply it. He notes with unusual candor, “I had never thought much about abortion until my girlfriend had one.” It's not a line that most religious conservatives would use. Explained Kuo, “Jesus was no match for my hormones.”

Despite some liberal impulses—Kuo interned for Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) for instance—his religious enthusiasm soon led him into the conservative political hive. Kuo writes, “The biggest surprise for me in my new church was learning that our Christian faith presupposed a common political agenda.” Opposition to abortion and gay rights

were bedrocks. “My political education didn't stop there. I learned that Christians were absolutely pro-capitalism and that meant taxes were bad and always needed to be cut,” he notes.

Today a more mature and sober Kuo writes, “Ironically, opposing sin became a sort of substitute for pursuing God. Opposing political parties is very easy when compared to some of Jesus' daunting challenges.” As he explains, “Jesus required my life. Politics required only my attention. And I really, really loved politics.”

Yet Kuo discovered that love threatened to subvert his commitment to the poor—which originally brought him into politics. He didn't like what he saw: “As C.S. Lewis warned in *Screwtape*, my faith had become a means to a political end, and not an end unto itself. When that happened, Lewis warned, the enemy almost has his man. I needed that to end before I lost my soul.”

Kuo writes about how, while working for Bill Bennett and Sen. John Ashcroft (R-Mo.), he learned about the “use of code language,” mostly Biblical imagery, which allowed politicians to convince religious leaders that they all were soul brothers. He writes, “this *should* have been driving me nuts. It should have offended me far more than anything President Clinton or the Democrats were doing. We were bastardizing God's words for our own political agenda and feeling good about it. The truth is I didn't think anything of it. I wouldn't for years.”

Many people have grown frustrated with politics; Kuo obviously was touched at a deeper level. After a time, he worried that he “had spoken mistruths in hate” about the Clintons. He had used cheap applause lines, but “that had to stop. If I ever could, I knew I ought to apologize for doing it.” This is another observation that few conservatives, and especially few Christian conservatives, would make, let alone act on.

In one of the moments that suggests God must exist—and that gives Kuo's book an unusual authenticity—he tells of attending a dinner before the National