

Before We Bomb

“Diplomacy has failed,” Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) told AIPAC. “Iran is on the verge of becoming nuclear and we cannot afford that.”

“We have to contemplate the final option,” said Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), “the use of force to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon.”

War is a “terrible thing,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), but “sometimes it is better to go to war than to allow the Holocaust to develop a second time.” Graham then describes the war we Americans should fight: “If military force is ever employed, it should be done in a decisive fashion. The Iran government’s ability to wage conventional war against its neighbors and our troops in the region should not exist. They should not have one plane that can fly or one ship that can float.”

Danielle Pletka of the American Enterprise Institute, Neocon Central, writes, “The only questions remaining, one Washington politico tells me, are who starts it, and how it ends.”

As to who starts it, we know the answer. Tehran has not started a war in memory and is not going to launch a suicide attack on a superpower with thousands of nuclear weapons. As with Iraq in 2003, the war will be launched by the United States against a nation that did not attack us—to strip it of weapons it does not have.

But to Graham’s point, if we are going to start this war, prudence dictates that we destroy Iran’s ability to fight back. At a minimum, we would have to use airstrikes and cruise missiles to hit a range of targets. First, Iran’s nuclear facilities such as the uranium enrichment plant at Natanz, the U.S.-built reactor that makes medical isotopes, the power plant at Bushehr, the centrifuge

facility near Qom, and the heavy water plant at Arak.

Our problem here is that the last three are not even operational and all are subject to UN inspections. There are Russians at Bushehr. And there is no evidence that diversion to a weapons program has taken place.

If Iran has secret plants working on nuclear weapons, why have we not been told where and demanded that UN inspectors be let in? Why did 16 U.S. intelligence agencies, three years ago, tell us they did not exist and Iran had given up its drive for a nuclear weapon in 2003? If Iran is on the “verge” of a bomb, as Schumer claims, the entire U.S. intelligence community should be decapitated for incompetence.

In a hyped headline, “CIA: Iran capable of producing nukes,” the *Washington Times* said that a new CIA report claims, “Iran continues to develop a range of capabilities that could be applied to producing nuclear weapons, if a decision is made to do so.” Excuse me, but this is mush. We could say the same of a dozen countries that use nuclear power and study nuclear technology.

But let us continue with Graham’s blitzkrieg war. To prevent a counterattack, the United States would have to take out Iran’s 14 airfields and all its warplanes on the ground. We would also have to sink every warship and submarine in Iran’s navy and destroy some 200 missile, patrol, and speedboats operated by the Revolutionary Guard, else they would be dropping mines and mauling our warships.

Also, it would be crucial on day one to

hit Iran’s launch sites and missile plants for, like Saddam in 1991, Iran would proba-

bly attack Israel, to make it an American and Israeli war on an Islamic republic.

Among other critical targets would be the Silkworm anti-ship missile sites on Iran’s coastline that would menace U.S. warships and oil tankers transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Any Iranian attack on ships or seeding of mines would likely close the Gulf and send world oil prices soaring.

Revolutionary Guard barracks, especially the Quds Force near Iraq, would have to be hit to slow troop movement to and across the border into Iraq to kill U.S. soldiers and civilians. The same might be necessary against Iranian troops near Afghanistan.

With Iran’s ally Hezbollah in south Beirut, all U.S. civilians should probably be pulled out of Lebanon before an attack, lest they wind up dead or hostages. And how safe would Americans be in the Gulf, especially Bahrain, home of the U.S. Fifth Fleet, a predominantly Shia island?

And whose side would Shia Iraq take? Would we have to intern all Iranian nationals in the United States, as we did Germans and Italians in 1941? How many terror attacks on soft targets in the U.S. could we expect from Iranian and Hezbollah agents in reprisal for our killing thousands of civilians in hundreds of strikes on Iran?

Before the War Party stampedes us into yet another fight, the Senate should find out if Tehran is really on the “verge” of getting a bomb, and why deterrence, which has never failed us, cannot succeed with Iran. ■



Cultured Conservatism

Why aesthetics is at least as important as politics

In the literary journal Image: Art, Faith, Mystery, Gregory Wolfe presents the essays, poems, criticism, paintings, and photographs of a wide variety of religiously informed writers and artists—too wide a variety, for many conservatives. Annie Dillard, Denis Donoghue, Ron Hansen, Mark Helprin, Kathleen Norris, Richard Rodriguez, and Larry Woiwode all sit on the journal's editorial advisory board. Many of his critics, Wolfe admits, would prefer that Image be a "highbrow outpost of the culture wars." But he has determinedly charted an independent course.

Before he started Image with his wife, Suzanne, Wolfe was a child of the conservative movement. He attended Hillsdale College, where he studied under Russell Kirk, and later served as one of Kirk's assistants at Piety Hill. He then migrated to the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, where he edited the Intercollegiate Review. He left ISI in 1989 to found Image. But he never turned against the brand of conservatism he imbibed from Kirk; rather, he acted on what he took to be its most important cultural insights.

Jeremy Beer: *Image* celebrated its 20th anniversary last year. Has its course surprised you?

Gregory Wolfe: The major surprise is that we're still around. When we started, I imagined we might only last a few issues—enough to make footnote 279

on page 400 of some scholar's cultural history of the late 20th century. ("This short-lived literary journal attempted to show that art and faith could still interact powerfully a la Dante and Milton.") At the time of starting *Image*, I wasn't entirely sure this was still happening. My own education was profoundly influenced by 20th-century writers who grappled with faith, particularly T.S. Eliot and Flannery O'Connor, and I posited that people like that should be continuing to produce material, even in the postmodern era, but I wasn't sure. As it happens, we're sending issue 65 to the printer this week.

Beer: To what extent do you think *Image* helped create those kinds of writers, if nothing else by providing space?

Wolfe: Part of what we do is to make certain things believable. I came across a throwaway line from a book review by one of the great critics of the 1930s that said, "This book is worthy. It adds to the stock of available reality." The minute that phrase entered my brain, I knew what it was all about. How much reality is available to a culture at any given time? What are the blinders? What is considered possible and not possible? One of the missions of *Image* is to enlarge the stock of available reality in a way that enables people to say, "Oh! I can do that?" Some people have been willing to come out, to borrow some language, thanks to what *Image* has done. These things build on each other, and one

organization becomes part of a larger movement.

Beer: I like that phrase, "enlarge the stock of available reality." It's related to another phrase—"openness to mystery"—that you've used to describe what you're trying to create. You've talked about how reason, imagination, and faith have to be integrated for us to achieve that kind of openness. What are the main factors that you see in American life today that keep that from occurring?

Wolfe: My education in this area was profoundly influenced by my mentor at Hillsdale College, Russell Kirk. He argued that two forces were diametrically opposed: ideology and imagination. The ideologue is somebody who has a closed system of abstract certainties about the world that results in pride and a loss of connection to reality. So the ideologue has to impose his vision on the world more by violence than by persuasion.

Imagination is an awareness of reality outside of ourselves and our limited natures, the difficulty of being able to comprehend not only the mysteries of the universe, but even the full ramifications of political and social action. Imagination cultivates a sense of our contingent nature as human beings and seeks humility before that mystery—that is what I understood Kirk to be saying was the conservative virtue. Humility before the world's complexity meant that the conservative was someone who