

CHAPTER ONE

WORST-CASE SCENARIO

My conversation with the former commander of Delta Force

I FIRST MET HIM at the Pentagon in February 2007.

At the time, William G. “Jerry” Boykin was a three-star lieutenant general in the United States Army, serving as deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence. As such, he was responsible for overseeing the gathering and analysis of all military intelligence related to the global War on Terror. He had read my first nonfiction book, *Epicenter: Why the Current Rumbblings in the Middle East Will Change Your World*, and had invited my wife, Lynn, and me for lunch to discuss my research and conclusions.

After taking us and some mutual friends on a tour of the Pentagon and showing us the memorial chapel where Flight 77 hit on 9/11, General Boykin took us to a private dining room where we began to chat. We talked about his family and his years in the military. We talked about his thoughts on the ongoing battles in Iraq and Afghanistan and about the rising Iranian nuclear threat. He asked me about my assessment of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and why I believed the president’s Shia eschatology, or end times theology, was driving Iranian foreign policy. It was not a subject that was being discussed much inside the Pentagon’s higher echelons at the time, and he was curious. It was the beginning of a friendship that would soon deepen between our two families.

Few men I have ever met in Washington understand the mind-set and mission of the Radicals better than Boykin. He has, after all, been hunting Radicals for nearly thirty years, and his firsthand knowledge and insight were invaluable.

TWO PROPAGANDA WINDFALLS . . . AND A THIRD

When the Iranian Revolution erupted in 1979, Boykin was a thirty-one-year-old commando training with the U.S. Army's newly formed and highly classified counterterrorism team known as Delta Force. In November of that year, Radicals seized the American Embassy in Tehran and took dozens of American diplomats and Marines hostage. Boykin and his boss, Col. Charlie Beckwith, the legendary Delta commander, were ordered to the Pentagon. There they were briefed on the latest intelligence and began planning a rescue.

This was America's first direct confrontation with Radical Islamic jihadists. No one in Washington had ever encountered a crisis quite like this. In the months that followed, Boykin and his colleagues studied everything they could find on the Ayatollah Khomeini, the nature and loyalty of his followers, the students that had stormed the embassy compound, and the religious and political beliefs that drove them to wage jihad against the West. When President Carter finally ordered the rescue of the hostages, Boykin was one of the Delta team leaders penetrating Iranian airspace in the dark of night. The mission, as I will detail in a later chapter, was a disaster, not simply due to failures of equipment and human error, but because it emboldened the Radicals and gave them a sense of divine choosing and invincibility.

"I'll say two things, Joel," Boykin told me when we sat down for a formal interview in the winter of 2008, several months after he retired from the Army. "First of all, that failed rescue attempt was the greatest professional disappointment of my thirty-six-plus years in the military. In our view, we had not only failed the fifty-three Americans in the embassy, we'd failed the nation. And it was a tremendous burden that we all still carry today. But the second thing is that the hostage crisis was the beginning of our focus on the Islamic Revolution. That was when we really started paying attention to what was happening among the Radical jihadists."¹

"What was the impact of that failure?" I asked Boykin.

“If you stop and think about it, that was one of the two most significant propaganda windfalls in Radical Islam’s recent history,” he replied. “The fact of the matter is the jihadists were able to say with some credibility to the rest of the Islamic world, ‘We have just defeated the Great Satan. We held their hostages for 444 days, and they were inept. Allah has shown us favor. Allah is with us.’”

“What was the second?” I asked.

“The second was when the Russians left Afghanistan and went home defeated, and the Soviet Union disintegrated,” Boykin replied immediately. “Now, Osama bin Laden used that for propaganda purposes. He said, ‘We have defeated the world’s great infidel power. Now the effeminate Americans will be easy.’”

The combination of those two events, Boykin told me, became the greatest recruiting tool in the history of the Radicals and dramatically swelled their ranks in the years to come.

I noted that there was a third event that aided the growth of the Radicals: Hezbollah’s suicide truck bombing attack against the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983.

Boykin agreed. “That was a devastating day for America when they killed our Marines at the barracks,” he said, noting that before 1983, U.S. forces had never encountered a suicide bombing. “People who would blow themselves up? This was something we didn’t understand.”

The incident was horrifying for the entire Marine Corps and specifically for the families of the men who were directly involved. But compounding the disaster, the Reagan administration chose to cut and run, pulling all U.S. military forces out of Lebanon.

“The great tragedy of that whole thing geopolitically,” Boykin argued, “is that we immediately withdrew our forces. What did that say? What did it say to the Islamists? What did it say to the extremists? It made them think, ‘We won; you lost.’ And they were able to make that point with some credibility. After all, they blew up our Marines, we withdrew, and Beirut was back in their hands.”

“WE HAVE A BLACK HAWK DOWN”

Ten years later, Boykin again found himself at the vortex of a battle between the U.S. and Radical Islam, which became yet another

propaganda windfall for the Radicals. The time: August 1993. The location: Mogadishu, Somalia. The enemy: the jihadist militia run by Somalian warlord Mohammed Farrah Aidid, supported by al Qaeda jihadists, financed and trained by none other than Osama bin Laden.

“Almost 4.5 million people, more than half the total number in the country, were threatened with starvation, severe malnutrition, and related diseases,” reported a U.N. assessment team. “The magnitude of suffering was immense. Overall, an estimated 300,000 people, including many children, died. Some two million people, violently displaced from their home areas, fled either to neighboring countries or elsewhere within Somalia. All institutions of governance and at least 60 percent of the country’s basic infrastructure disintegrated.”²

At the order of President Bill Clinton, U.S. special forces were sent to capture General Aidid and stop the bloodletting. This time, Boykin was no longer just a member of the Army’s most elite fighting force. He was now the Delta Force commander, and he was horrified by what he found.

“We went into Mogadishu not fully realizing the difficulty of our task,” Boykin explained. “Given that this was a lawless society, this was anarchy in its purest form—it was nothing but sectarian violence, clan against clan. And they were all, in one form or another, extremists—Islamic extremists. They were doing things that were alien to us. They were using unarmed women as shields as they would approach our positions. When we would go into certain facilities, they would throw their children up in front of them as a shield. It is difficult for us as Americans to understand that kind of mentality.”

On October 3, U.S. forces received intelligence that a small group of Aidid’s closest associates were having a meeting in an area called the Bakara Market, euphemistically known as the “Black Sea.” It was known to be the most violent part of the Somalian capital, and one that Boykin and his men had not gone into previously. “In a situation like that, you don’t choose your locations; the people you’re after do,” Boykin told me. “The intelligence was credible. We knew they were there. We were expecting about half a dozen of them. So we went in.”

Major General Bill Garrison was responsible for the overall operations of Task Force Ranger, as well as for coordinating U.S. strategy

with the U.N. forces. Boykin had the specific tactical responsibilities for going after the targets in Mogadishu.

“We made our assault, captured roughly twenty-one people, and then loaded them on trucks and started back to our base to bring them in for interrogation,” Boykin recalled. “As we were trying to get out of the city, one of our helicopters was shot down, and it changed everything.”

With the crash of a Black Hawk helicopter in the middle of a Radical no-man’s-land, the Americans had suddenly lost the initiative. Now, rather than a quick strike and rapid extraction operation, U.S. forces had to literally fight their way house by house, street by street, block by block just to get to the crash site and try to recover the dead and wounded that were there. Thousands of heavily armed jihadists poured into the streets and began converging on the site. As the hours passed and night fell, the firefight intensified. Neither the Delta teams nor the Rangers were having success in extracting the bodies of the chopper’s two crew members.

The battle lasted eighteen hours. Eventually the Delta operators and Army Rangers were able to reassemble their team and fight their way out of the city. But they were completely unprepared for what they would see next.

“If you remember the news footage of our soldiers,” Boykin recalled, “their bodies were dragged through the streets and mutilated. And some of the stories have never even been told. It would be too painful for the families to tell the whole story, but the abuse and mutilation, particularly by the women in Mogadishu, was something that just is incomprehensible to us. What causes someone to be that way? Is it just a tribal thing? Is it just a cultural thing? Or is it part of their theology?”

“By military standards, it was a victory for us,” Boykin concluded. “We captured more than the six [of General Aidid’s top commanders] that we went after—we captured about twenty-one of them. We lost eighteen Americans dead and over seventy wounded. It seems like a high casualty count. But then compare it to the casualties on the other side. Conservative estimates by the Red Cross are that we killed and wounded 1,100 people in an eighteen-hour battle. Now, by any standards, that’s a victory. However, that was when we realized you can win the battle and lose the war.”

“How so?” I asked.

“First, because the American media called it a disaster—a huge military failure,” Boykin explained. “Second, the Clinton administration pulled all of Task Force Ranger out of Mogadishu before we had completed our mission, before we had captured Mohammed Aidid.”

“What was the effect of the White House decision to withdraw prematurely?” I asked.

“The extremists there were encouraged, particularly Osama bin Laden,” Boykin replied without hesitation. “Now, I am one who does not believe Osama bin Laden was there, involved in that battle. I’ve seen no evidence of that. But he was certainly associated with it. He was certainly tied to it in terms of probably providing material and financial support to those people, but certainly ideological support, moral support. And then we gave him an opportunity, as a result of our withdrawal, to once again proclaim that Allah had shown them favor and that more good Muslims should come to the Islamic extremist cause. And they did.”

HOW SERIOUS A THREAT?

I asked General Boykin to take these four examples—the U.S. failure to rescue our hostages in Iran, the U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon after the Marine barracks attack, the Soviets pulling out of Afghanistan, and the U.S. pulling out of Somalia—and put them into a broader context. What were the implications of these events? What was the Big Picture?

“Well, first of all, there are 1.3 billion Muslims around the world,” Boykin told me. “And I’ll just tell you right now, Joel, I don’t think that every Muslim is a threat to America or to the West. I think there are many who really would like to see this extremism go away because it in fact is causing more problems for them than it is helping their cause. But if only one percent of the 1.3 billion are extremists and jihadists, do the math. That’s frightening. I mean particularly when they are willing to die for their cause, when they believe that martyrdom is the surest way to heaven—that’s frightening. If that one percent all turned into suicide bombers, just think what a threat that would be.

“As we look at every time that we have been up against these extremists,

we've either been unsuccessful in our objectives or, more importantly, we've not been willing to stay the course and see it through and to fight to win, which is exactly what happened in Mogadishu. It's exactly what happened after the Beirut bombing in 1983. And it's exactly what many advocate in terms of our operations in Iraq and even Afghanistan today. All that has done is emboldened the extremists. All that has done is given them fodder for their propaganda. It has given them credibility as they use the Internet, use the broadcast media, use every outlet to broadcast their propaganda, to say that Allah has shown them favor, to say, 'You need to now align yourself with our cause.' It has allowed them credibility to bring more young Radicals into the cause.

"That's one of the reasons that I think that staying the course—and I don't mean tactically, I don't mean necessarily using exactly the same methodologies that we're using today, but staying the course strategically—in Iraq is very critical. Why? Because if we give the Radicals this opportunity for more propaganda by pulling out and not fighting this radicalism, all we're going to do is increase their recruiting, increase their opportunities for finding more young Radicals."

I asked, "With all your years of experience in the Pentagon, commanding Delta Force, hunting jihadists around the globe, in your judgment, how serious to U.S. national security is the threat of Radical Islam in the twenty-first century?"

"When I came into the Army in 1971, we were focused on the Soviet Union," Boykin replied. "Even though we were fighting in Vietnam, our real threat was the Soviet Union. But I would say to you, Joel, that the threat that Radical Islam presents to not only America but to the world today is an even more serious threat than when we were in a nuclear standoff during the Cold War. And it's more concerning to me because this is an enemy that is hard to understand. It is an enemy that is easy to ignore, and it is an enemy that is absolutely relentless."

"What's the mind-set of the jihadist movement? What do they want? What's driving them?"

"Well, first of all, I think their mind-set is very clearly based on their own manifesto that they are adhering to—a very radical, extreme interpretation of the Qur'an. They clearly believe that infidels—infidels defined as those that do not serve Allah—must either be converted or killed."

THE “TOP FIVE” LIST

“What, then, is the worst-case scenario?” I asked.

“I think the worst-case scenario is that the jihadists continue in their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction,” Boykin said without hesitation. “Weapons of mass destruction are available to them now, particularly chemical and biological, and those are not hard to make. But the worst-case scenario is, I think, that they have nuclear capabilities within these terrorist organizations, within the jihadist movement; that they intimidate Europe to the point that Europe is no longer capable of standing against them as they have done historically; and that they take their extremism to the entire world, and people start to buckle under the intimidation and pressure of what I would see as a huge Islamic movement.”

How exactly would the Radicals hit us?

Boykin gave me his “top five” list of scenarios that deeply trouble him and his colleagues in the military and intelligence community.

Worst-Case Scenario No. 1: Once Iran acquires operational nuclear weapons, they could attach these warheads to short-to-medium-range ballistic missiles, hide such missiles in commercial containers (used to transport cars, farm equipment, toys from China, and so forth), and then launch those missiles off the backs of container ships approaching major American port cities. As portrayed in my novel *Dead Heat*, this would give the enemies of the United States the decisive element of surprise. A missile fired at Manhattan, Los Angeles, Seattle, or Washington, D.C., would take less than five minutes to impact, giving civilians no effective warning and no time to evacuate, and giving U.S. military forces precious little opportunity to intercept those missiles—even if we had a missile-defense system guarding the homeland, which we currently do not.

Iranian forces would not have to carry out such attacks themselves, of course. They could provide nuclear weapons and missiles to terrorist groups such as al Qaeda, Hezbollah, or some other Radical group as proxies to carry out their apocalyptic agenda.

Worst-Case Scenario No. 2: Iran or other Radical states or groups could load nuclear weapons onto private planes taking off from

Canada, Mexico, or another foreign country, bound for the United States. Once inside our airspace, they could then fly kamikaze missions into American cities or simply detonate the nuclear weapon inside the plane itself—over their intended target—without initiating a dive-bombing sequence or making any other obviously hostile moves that might alert air-traffic controllers to the threat. Passengers and cargo on private planes receive few if any security clearances before entering U.S. airspace. No ID checks. No metal detectors. No luggage screening. All this creates enormous holes in our homeland security defense systems, which Radicals may soon take advantage of.

Worst-Case Scenario No. 3: Radicals could load nuclear weapons onto private yachts or other boats entering the harbors of major American cities and detonate these weapons close to population centers, airports, and naval bases.

Worst-Case Scenario No. 4: Radicals could smuggle nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction into the U.S. through Canada or Mexico to be detonated deep in the interior of the country. People, drugs, and weapons are smuggled into the U.S. all the time. U.S. homeland security has improved significantly since 9/11, but in many ways, our borders are still Swiss cheese, making us extremely vulnerable to catastrophic attacks of this nature.

Worst-Case Scenario No. 5: Even without access to fully developed, state-of-the-art nuclear bombs and nuclear warheads, Radicals could still hit us hard. They could, for example, build and detonate “dirty bombs”—bombs made with conventional explosives such as dynamite, mixed with waste from nuclear power plants or other radiological substances—inside the United States. Experts say such devices would not cause the same magnitude of catastrophic death or destruction as a true nuclear weapon, but they would still be psychologically and economically devastating.³ We are also vulnerable, Boykin noted, to chemical and biological weapons in subways and water systems.

“The fifth scenario is my greatest concern,” Boykin would later elaborate in an e-mail to me, although he added that the combination

of elements from several of these scenarios is very worrisome. “All the others are real possibilities, but they require a fair amount of logistics and consequently a fair number of people who know what is happening. That means there is a greater chance of one of the intel services finding out and preventing it. But dirty bomb (or chemical or biological) materials could come in across the Mexican border fairly easily, I am sad to say.

“The other way is for the terrorists to recruit a local in the North Carolina or South Carolina coastal region to bring things in aboard his sport fishing vessel, to which no attention is paid, and put it in his pickup and drive it to D.C. A dirty bomb would shut down our government even though it would not kill millions of people. In the confusion inside D.C., other conventional bombs could be used to destroy much of the U.S. government infrastructure. I am concerned about the growing number of Americans who have been recruited to Islam. They are usually angry young men with a sense of hopelessness. Even if they are not suicidal, they may very well be genocidal as well as eager to seek revenge for what they see as injustice. These people could make several scenarios more feasible. Think of the devastating psychological effects of a dirty bomb disrupting our government. The recruiting of the Radicals would go off the scale and embolden every radical Muslim in America to support the ‘soon return of the Mahdi and the soon rise of the caliphate.’”⁴

Longer term, Boykin also worries about a sixth scenario. Once Iran or another Radical state is able to build long-range, intercontinental ballistic missiles and attach nuclear warheads to them, such states could fire these missiles at the U.S. and our allies. We are working hard on building missile-defense systems capable of stopping such attacks, but these systems are not yet fully operational and continue to arouse enormous resistance from some members of Congress, from some of our allies, and most notably from the Russians.

THE IRANIAN BOMB

How close is Iran to having nuclear weapons?

Boykin told me that based on everything he had seen and heard during his tenure at the Pentagon, he believes that “within two years,

maybe three,” the Iranians will “develop a nuclear weapon, a deliverable nuclear weapon.”

Translation: 2010 or 2011.

“We know that Ahmadinejad has centrifuges spinning. We know that he has the technology. He has the scientists, and he certainly has the determination. Ahmadinejad is a very, very dangerous man in my view. I believe that the world should pay close attention to what he has said. Some would say, ‘Well, that’s just rhetoric.’ But let’s go back and look at Hitler’s rhetoric in 1933 and what ultimately occurred.”

“Given all that you know about the Ayatollah Khomeini from the 1970s and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad today,” I asked, “which one is more dangerous?”

For Boykin, it was not a close call. “I think Ahmadinejad is far more dangerous than the Ayatollah Khomeini was because he has more resources,” he told me. “Certainly he has more money as a result of the oil in Iran. He has greater weapons capabilities. He has a more sophisticated army and military in general. And regardless of what the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate says, he is developing nuclear capabilities.”

“In your view,” I asked, “can the West successfully deter or negotiate with Ahmadinejad and his regime in the kind of classic balance-of-power approach that worked with the Soviets?”

“My view is that negotiating with Ahmadinejad is a waste of time,” Boykin replied. “I don’t think there’s anything that you can appeal to in Ahmadinejad’s view of geopolitics, of life in general, that would result in any kind of meaningful agreement with the West. I think Ahmadinejad sees himself as a man who is supposed to hasten the arrival of the Mahdi. He has even indicated that in his speeches. Ahmadinejad believes that the Mahdi will come as a result of his efforts, part of which includes destroying or at least subjugating Israel. And so I think the threat goes beyond just nuclear weapons. I think the threat really is a threat of growing Radicalism within Iran, which is influencing much of the thinking in the rest of the Islamic world. And ultimately, when a man is that driven—when a man is that convinced that Allah is holding him accountable to do that [destroy Judeo-Christian civilization]—I think to believe that we could negotiate with him in any meaningful way is just inane.”

A GRAND FINALE

Is General Boykin correct?

Are Radical Islamic jihadists in general—and the Ahmadinejad regime in Iran in particular—actively seeking weapons of mass destruction and specifically nuclear weapons to destroy Western civilization and usher in the end of days?

Kamal Saleem certainly thinks so. “Ahmadinejad is in a race to create nuclear weapons,” this former Lebanese terrorist—once a member of the Muslim Brotherhood—told me. “Ahmadinejad is a true Muslim zealot. You know in the Muslim world he is a hero. Why? Because he’s fulfilling his duty to usher in the Mahdi. The Mahdi is the Muslim Messiah who would usher in a Muslim one-world order, which is ruled by one Muslim man. And that’s his heart’s desire. If you ask anybody on the street in the Middle East, they know this. But when you ask somebody in the United States of America about this, they have no clue. They don’t know what Ahmadinejad is all about. It’s world domination, to take over the world—one world order—that’s it.”⁵

Walid Shoebat agrees. “They want a grand finale,” this former Palestinian terrorist told the producer of our *Epicenter* documentary film. “They don’t want to simply put a bomb in a bus or in a mall. They want a grand finale; they want one operation that kind of cripples America once and for all—be it dirty bomb, or be it a real nuke.”⁶

Porter Goss, director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 2004 through 2006, thinks so as well. “There’s no question in my mind that Ahmadinejad and people in the military in Iran are seeking the Persian Bomb for military purposes,” he told me as I researched this book. “If that is allowed to happen, we’re talking about a nuclear weapon in the hands of a Radical. That would be a huge, huge watershed in the geopolitical world.”⁷

“Will the CIA know when Iran has the Bomb *before* they use it?” I asked.

Goss was not so sure. Back in 1998, he noted, India and Pakistan stunned the world by testing nuclear weapons within days of each other when not a single Western intelligence agency—including the CIA—had any idea either country was so close to having the Bomb. Calling it “the biggest intelligence failure” in the CIA’s history to that point, Goss

warned that “the intelligence community had failed to give sufficient priority to the development of nuclear weapons by sovereign states. I think we had been lulled into the fraternity of the nuclear club and [into thinking] that the folks in the International Atomic Energy Agency had things under control and were doing their job effectively. It turned out not to be true.”

“Could such a catastrophic intelligence failure happen again?” I asked. “Is it possible that the CIA and other U.S. and Western leaders might fundamentally misunderstand Iranian intentions and misread Iran’s technological capabilities and suddenly be confronted with a nuclear-armed Islamic regime well ahead of their current assessments?”

“Yes,” Goss conceded, “there could be another surprise.”

Alireza Jafarzadeh, a leading Iranian dissident who strongly opposes the Ahmadinejad regime, also believes Tehran is feverishly pursuing nuclear weapons. “This is the nightmare scenario,” he told me when I interviewed him in 2008, “that the most Radical Islamic extremist regime—which is already the world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism; which is now fully entrenched in the most violent way in Iraq, killing thousands of innocent people; which has called for wiping Israel off the map and an end to the United States; and which has this global Islamic rule agenda and believes in the end of the world—would now get the nuclear bomb.”⁸

Jafarzadeh certainly knows what he’s talking about. An outspoken advocate of a “non-nuclear, secular, democratic state” in the country of his birth, it was Jafarzadeh who on August 14, 2002, held a press conference in Washington to reveal the existence of two top secret Iranian nuclear weapons research facilities. Up to that point, both facilities—a uranium enrichment plant in Natanz, about 100 miles north of Isfahan, and a heavy-water uranium production plant in Arak, about 150 miles south of Tehran—were completely unknown to U.S. or Western intelligence agencies. But the existence and significance of both have now been confirmed by the CIA and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), intensifying Western fears that Iran is hiding advanced nuclear weapons research facilities and could be closer to the Bomb than previously believed. During his 2002 news conference, Jafarzadeh

also revealed that in a closed session of the Iranian regime's Supreme National Security Council earlier that year, it had been agreed that "access to [a] nuclear bomb is the most important guarantor of our survival and in case of having the bomb, the Western countries will not be able to block penetration and expansion of the Islamic Revolution."⁹

Senator John McCain is also deeply concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions and the implications of the mullahs getting the Bomb. "There's only one thing worse than using the option of military action [to stop Iran], and that is the Iranians acquiring nuclear weapons," the Arizona Republican said on NBC's *Meet the Press* while gearing up to run for president. If Iran gets the Bomb, he said, "I think we could have Armageddon."¹⁰

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

The bottom line: time is running out.

Western diplomatic efforts to persuade Tehran to abandon its feverish bid for nuclear weapons have not succeeded as of this writing. Nor have economic sanctions. By the fall of 2008, Iran claimed to have upwards of 6,000 operational centrifuges, sophisticated machines that can turn low-grade uranium into highly enriched, weapons-grade, bomb-making material.

Senior Israeli intelligence officials tell me they now fear Iran could have operational nuclear weapons by the end of 2009 or sometime in 2010. Senior U.S. intelligence and military officials tell me they think we have a bit more time. Some believe Iran will not have the Bomb until perhaps 2011. Others believe it could be as late as 2015.

Hopefully, those who say Iran is still quite a few years off from having nuclear weapons are right. But all the military and intelligence officials I interviewed for this book readily acknowledge that no one knows for certain how close Iran is to getting the "Islamic Bomb" and either holding hostage every power in the Middle East or actually carrying out their apocalyptic agenda.

In the end, it may not matter if U.S. and European intelligence analysts believe the world has more time before Iran gets the Bomb. It may not even matter if they are correct in their analysis. Why not? Because if the U.S. and NATO refuse to take military action to neutralize the

Iranian nuclear threat, and if Israel thinks that time has run out, leaders in Jerusalem may feel as if they are in the same situation their fathers were in 1967.

Then, Israel's enemies threatened to "throw the Jews into the sea" while they amassed state-of-the-art military forces on the borders of the Jewish state. Israeli officials faced an existential threat, and they concluded that they had no choice but to launch a preemptive strike in the hopes of neutralizing, if not eliminating, that threat. If they waited to be attacked, they feared they could be hit so hard, so fast, with so much firepower that they could never recover. So strike they did. Miraculously, the war lasted only six days.

Today, Israel faces an even more dangerous scenario than that of 1967. If Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad are able to acquire nuclear warheads and attach them to the high-speed ballistic missiles already in their possession, they would be in a position to accomplish in about six minutes what it took Adolf Hitler nearly six years to do: kill six million Jews.

Israeli leaders may, therefore, choose a strategy similar to the one their predecessors chose in 1967. In this case, they may launch a massive air and missile strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, air bases, missile launchers, air defense systems, and possibly government offices and critical infrastructure facilities before Iran has the opportunity to strike Israel first.

Such a move may prove necessary in the end, but it could also set the whole region on fire. Israel could face hundreds of incoming retaliatory missiles from Iran as well as tens of thousands of incoming ballistic missiles and rockets from Syria, from Hezbollah in Lebanon, from Hamas in Gaza, and possibly from the West Bank, as well. Some of these missiles could be carrying chemical or biological warheads, even if the nuclear warheads in Iran were not in the picture. Ballistic missiles could also be fired from Iran at the oil fields in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, at oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, and at U.S. bases and forces in Iraq. Thousands of suicide bomber cells could be activated in the region, particularly against Iraq and Israel. At the same time, sleeper terrorist cells could be activated in Western Europe, Canada, and the United States.

Meanwhile, terrorist efforts to topple pro-Western Middle Eastern leaders, such as Jordan's King Abdullah II and Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, in favor of Radical Islamic regimes friendly to Tehran could also be set in motion. Amid such global carnage and chaos, oil prices could soar to \$300 a barrel or more. U.S. gas prices could spike to \$10 a gallon or more, with horrific domestic and international economic repercussions. Worst of all, tens of millions of innocent civilians could be caught in the cross fire of a war they don't want but cannot prevent.

THE VIEW FROM JERUSALEM

General Moshe Ya'alon, former chief of staff of the Israeli Defense Forces, sees a major war with Iran coming soon because the West has been so feckless and unconvincing in confronting the regime in Tehran. When I met with him in his office in Jerusalem, he was clear and direct. "The confrontation with the Iranian regime is inevitable, and it is going to be a military one rather than a political one because of the lack of determination when it comes to the international community to deal with it [the Iranian threat] by political or economic means. And we can't avoid it, unless we are going to give up our way of life, our values, our culture."¹¹

"How much time does the West have to make a decision about how to stop Iran?" I asked.

"When it comes to the Iranian military nuclear project," he said, "it is in terms of a couple of years—might be a couple of months."

That was March of 2007.

"Can the West successfully stop Iran?" I pressed.

It can, he insisted, if it gets serious—quickly. "In military terms, the Iranians are not so strong." The problem, he said, is that "the West has a lack of determination. There are few leaders today who really understand that we are engaged in World War III."

Like Generals Boykin and Ya'alon, former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also worried about the rising Iranian nuclear threat and the West's inability or unwillingness thus far to confront the crisis effectively. And he, too, believes the day of reckoning is fast approaching.

“I think the West misunderstood, and still misunderstands, the threat of Radical Islam,” he told me in his Tel Aviv office in March of 2007. “It is a fanatic, messianic ideology that seeks to have an apocalyptic battle for world supremacy with the West. It seeks to correct what its disciples see as an accident of history, where the West has risen and Islam has declined. The correction is supposed to be accomplished by the resurrection of an Islamic empire and the acquisition and use of nuclear weapons, if necessary, to obliterate Islam’s enemies, and to subjugate the rest. This is a pathological ideology, much like Nazism was. And it poses a threat, in my judgment, in many ways bigger than Nazism because Hitler embarked on a world conflict and then sought to achieve nuclear weapons, whereas the leading radical Islamic regime, Iran, is seeking to first acquire nuclear weapons and then embark on a world conflict. And that is what is not yet understood in the West, and certainly, if it’s understood, it’s not acted upon.

“Once Iran has nuclear weapons,” Netanyahu continued, “they could threaten the West in ways that are unimaginable today. They could take over the Persian Gulf on all its sides and take control of the oil reserves of the world, most of them. They could topple Saudi Arabia and Jordan in short order. And, of course, Iraq. All your internal debates in America on Iraq would be irrelevant, because nuclear-armed Iran would subordinate Iraq in two seconds. And, of course, they threaten to create a second Holocaust in Israel and proceed on their idea of building a global empire, producing twenty-five atomic bombs a year—250 bombs in a decade—with missiles that they are already working on, to reach the eastern seaboard of the United States. Everything else pales in comparison to this development. This has to be stopped.”

How much time, I asked him, does the West have to act decisively to stop Iran?

“Not much,” he replied. “We are running out of time. I can’t tell you if it’s a period of months or a few years. Certainly no more than a few years.”¹²