

In Iran, Arming for Armageddon

By Charles Krauthammer

The Washington Post
Friday, December 16, 2005; Page A35

Lest you get carried away with today's good news from Iraq, consider what's happening next door in Iran. The wild pronouncements of the new Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have gotten sporadic press ever since he called for Israel to be wiped off the map. He subsequently amended himself to say that Israel should simply be extirpated from the Middle East map and moved to some German or Austrian province. Perhaps near the site of an old extermination camp?

Except that there were no such camps, indeed no Holocaust at all, says Ahmadinejad. Nothing but "myth," a "legend" that was "fabricated . . . under the name 'Massacre of the Jews.'" This brought the usual reaction from European and American officials, who, with Churchillian rage and power, called these statements unacceptable. That something serious might accrue to Iran for this -- say, expulsion from the United Nations for violating its most basic principle by advocating the outright eradication of a member state -- is, of course, out of the question.

To be sure, Holocaust denial and calls for Israel's destruction are commonplace in the Middle East. They can be seen every day on Hezbollah TV, in Syrian media, in Egyptian editorials appearing in semiofficial newspapers. But none of these aspiring mass murderers are on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons that could do in one afternoon what it took Hitler six years to do: destroy an entire Jewish civilization and extinguish 6 million souls.

Everyone knows where Iran's nuclear weapons will be aimed. Everyone knows they will be put on Shahab rockets, which have been modified so that they can reach Israel. And everyone knows that if the button is ever pushed, it will be the end of Israel.

But it gets worse. The president of a country about to go nuclear is a confirmed believer in the coming apocalypse. Like Judaism and Christianity, Shiite Islam has its own version of the messianic return -- the reappearance of the Twelfth Imam. The more devout believers in Iran pray at the Jamkaran mosque, which houses a well from which, some believe, he will emerge.

When Ahmadinejad unexpectedly won the presidential elections, he immediately gave \$17 million of government funds to the shrine. Last month Ahmadinejad said publicly that the main mission of the Islamic Revolution is to pave the way for the reappearance of the Twelfth Imam.

And as in some versions of fundamentalist Christianity, the second coming will be accompanied by the usual trials and tribulations, death and destruction. Iranian journalist Hossein Bastani reported Ahmadinejad saying in official meetings that the hidden imam will reappear in two years.

So a Holocaust-denying, virulently anti-Semitic, aspiring genocidist, on the verge of acquiring weapons of the apocalypse, believes that the end is not only near but nearer than the next American presidential election. (Pity the Democrats. They cannot catch a break.) This kind of

man would have, to put it gently, less inhibition about starting Armageddon than a normal person. Indeed, with millennial bliss pending, he would have positive incentive to, as they say in Jewish eschatology, hasten the end.

To be sure, there are such madmen among the other monotheisms. The Temple Mount Faithful in Israel would like the al-Aqsa mosque on Jerusalem's Temple Mount destroyed to make way for the third Jewish Temple and the messianic era. The difference with Iran, however, is that there are all of about 50 of these nuts in Israel, and none of them is president.

The closest we've come to a messianically inclined leader in America was a secretary of the interior who 24 years ago, when asked about his stewardship of the environment, told Congress: "I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns; whatever it is we have to manage with a skill to leave the resources needed for future generations." But James Watt's domain was the forest, and his weapon of choice was the chainsaw. He was not in charge of nuclear weapons to be placed on missiles that are paraded through the streets with, literally, Israel's name on them. (They are adorned with banners reading "Israel must be wiped off the map.") It gets worse. After his U.N. speech in September, Ahmadinejad was caught on videotape telling a cleric that during the speech an aura, a halo, appeared around his head right on the podium of the General Assembly. "I felt the atmosphere suddenly change. And for those 27 or 28 minutes, the leaders of the world did not blink. . . . It seemed as if a hand was holding them there, and it opened their eyes to receive the message from the Islamic Republic."

Negotiations to deny this certifiable lunatic genocidal weapons have been going nowhere. Everyone knows they will go nowhere. And no one will do anything about it.

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