



'Great Men' have grating effect on Mideast

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I was on the road the other night and so found myself watching CNN's coverage of Israel, Lebanon, Gaza, etc. It was "Larry King Live," and it was one of those shows where Larry interviews great men about what needs to be done and the great men all agree that what needs to be done is that the president needs to get other great men involved to "broker" a "deal." Sen. Chuck Hagel proposed that Bush appoint Colin Powell or Jim Baker as his Special Envoy; Sen. Barbara Boxer proposed that Bush appoint Madeleine Albright as his Even More Special Envoy. Sen. George Mitchell, who himself served as Extra-Special Super-Duper Envoy a few years back, proposed that Bush involve the European Union. And someone else proposed the G-8. And Larry suggested Putin. Oh, and some smooth-talking apologist in Savile Row pin-stripes proposed Chirac, because he and Bush had agreed a U.N. resolu-

tion on something or other a year or two back.

Aside from Larry's closing tribute to Red Buttons, I've never heard more rubbish in a single hour since . . . well, come to think of it, since the last time I saw "Larry King Live." But at least that was a special with Heather Mills (Paul McCartney's missus), with which subject Larry seemed rather more engaged, at least after Lady McCartney plunked her artificial leg up on the desk and invited Larry to feel its lifelike texture, which is more than one can say for Larry these days. But the point is that Larry and his Friars' Club Roast approach to geopolitics is about as irrelevant to what's going on there as could be devised, short of Sen. Hagel proposing Heather Mills as his Special Envoy, which may be just what Hamas and Hezbollah deserve.

It's easy to fly in a guy in a suit to hold a meeting. Half the fellows inside the Beltway have Middle East "peace plans" named after them. Bush flew in himself a year or two back to announce his "road map." Before that it was Cheney, who flew in with the Cheney plan, which was a plan to open up a road map back to the last plan, which would get us back to "Tenet," which would get us back to "Mitchell," which would get us back to "Wye River," which would get us back to "Oslo," which would get us back to Kansas.

And none of these Great Men meeting with other Great Men gets us anywhere. Some of the Great Men can't speak for their peoples (Mubarak) or their legislatures (Abbas). And a lot of the Great Men can't even speak for themselves: From the late Yasser Arafat to Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, they say one thing in meetings with Western emissaries and something entirely different to their compatriots. And some of the Great Men we send to negotiate aren't all that great: the wretched Mohammed El Baradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Authority, is, in fact, a patsy for the nuclear mullahs. To reprise one of my all-time favorite Iranian negotiating positions, let's recall the perfect distillation of what Great Man diplomacy boils down to in the Middle East, as reported in the New York Times exactly a year ago:

"Iran will resume uranium enrichment if the European Union does not recognize its right to do so, two Iranian nuclear negotiators said in an interview published Thursday."

If we don't let Iran go nuclear, they'll go nuclear. Negotiate that, Chuck Hagel.

The forces at play in the Middle East are beyond the Geopolitical Friars' Club. The median age in Gaza is 15.8 years old. How likely is it that any of those bespoke Palestinian "moderates" who've been permanent fixtures on CNN and BBC Middle East discussion panels for 30 years have any meaningful sway over a population of unemployed uneducated teenage boys raised by a death cult? Israel withdrew from Gaza and, instead of getting on with a prototypical Palestinian state, Hamas turned the territory into an Islamist camp. Israel withdrew from Lebanon entirely in 2000, yet Hezbollah is now lobbing rockets at Haifa.

Why? Because in both cases these territories are now in effect Iran's land borders with the Zionist Entity. They're "occupied territories" but it's not the Jews doing the occupying. So you've got a choice between talking with proxies or going to the source: Tehran. And, as the unending talks with the EU have demonstrated, the ayatollahs use negotiations with the civilized world as comedy relief. They don't get Larry King's salutes to Red Buttons and Don Knotts on Iranian TV, so entering into talks with the French foreign minister is as near to big-time laughs as the mullahs get.

One of the interesting features of the present escalation is the circumspection of Israel's Arab neighbors. Once upon a time, it would have been

Egypt and Jordan threatening the Zionist usurpers. But these countries have been, militarily, a big flop against the Zionist Entity since King Hussein fired Sir John Glubb as head of the Arab Legion. So after '73 they put their money on terrorism, and schoolgirl suicide bombers -- the kind of "popular resistance" that buys you better publicity in the salons of the West. And one result of that has been to deliver Palestinian pseudo-"nationalism" away from Arab influence and into hard-core Iranian Islamist hands. It's Iran that wants war, not Egypt or Jordan, So Jim Baker jetting in to shake hands with, say, Jordan's King Abdullah is a waste of time, because King Abdullah cannot impact on the scene in any useful way.

During all the time the Great Men were shuttling back and forth, a kind of toxic globalization occurred: The Palestinian "movement" (insofar as there ever was a genuine nationalist movement) became infected and eventually annexed by hard-core Islamism and the Palestinians'

most depraved terror techniques were exported to every corner of the world. You can build a "security fence" in the region, but what we might call Palestinianism has leapt the psychological fence and incubated in radicalized Muslim communities worldwide: It's not just Palestinians but also Yorkshiremen who now blow themselves up on public transit. What's happened in Gaza, in Lebanon, in Syria and elsewhere is that the weaknesses of those polities were exploited by Iran and others through various client groups and a potent ideology that's really a virus.

That's a much more cunning and effective strategy than sending a fellow in a suit to concoct a plan in his name. We need to learn from the Iranians. We need to wage war on the ideology, because until we do, the reality is that the Middle East's fetid "stability," its demography, its remorseless nuclearization and proxy militarization all favor Israel's and our enemies.