



Dining with the Enemy. What do you serve an Iranian Islamist who is hungry for power?

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Among the lessons to be learned from the meltdown on Wall Street: Change is not always for the better. And even institutions that appear big, strong and permanent can collapse in a New York minute.

Such lessons are especially germane this week, as Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad pays another visit to U.N. headquarters in Manhattan. Most Americans know he is despicable, and that he speaks for the world's leading sponsor of terrorism. Most are aware that his regime has facilitated the killing of American troops in Iraq, violates the most basic human rights at home, and is developing nuclear weapons to project power abroad. But the conventional wisdom holds that while Iran may represent an existen-

tial threat to Israel, America is not in imminent peril.

How confident can we be of that? Is it not possible that Iran, should it acquire nuclear weapons, would follow the precedent established by al-Qaeda and attack the "Great Satan" first -- leaving the "Little Satan" for later?

Ahmadinejad's genocidal threats against Israel have been well-publicized. But from time to time he also likes to remind his followers that "a world without America ...is attainable."

Hassan Abbassi, another senior Iranian official, has outlined how that goal might be reached. "We have a strategy drawn up for the destruc-

tion of Anglo-Saxon civilization and for the uprooting of the Americans and the English," he has said. "The global infidel front is a front against Allah and the Muslims, and we must make use of everything we have at hand to strike at this front, by means of our suicide operations and by means of our missiles."

In recent days, Iran's military has been testing those missiles, launching them from ships in the Caspian Sea. Could they be developing the skills needed to target an American city? Or could they be preparing an Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP) attack against as many cities and towns as possible? Such an attack would require launching a missile with a nuclear warhead from a ship off America's shores. Detonation at high altitude over the center of the country would produce a devastating shock wave - one that would destroy America's communication and transportation infrastructure, everything electronic and/or computerized.

William Graham, who heads a congressionally appointed commission on the EMP threat, recently wrote that an enemy utilizing this strategy would eliminate "most of the operational hazards of smuggling a nuclear weapon into a U.S. port or city. Moreover, it offers less opportunity for detection, less risk of weapon seizure, less risk of crewmember defection, greater difficulty for the United States in conducting forensic analysis to determine who sponsored the attack, less certainty of prompt retaliation and greater long-

term, potentially catastrophic consequences for the nation."

Despite all this, a group of left-leaning American religious leaders this week invited Ahmadinejad to dinner. The Mennonite Central Committee, the World Council of Churches, and the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker group, billed the event as a "dialogue."

History provides a parallel: In the 1930s, many people in America and Europe believed it was not Adolf Hitler, but Winston Churchill, who was the "war monger." Germany, they believed, had "legitimate grievances," for example, the oppression of the German-speaking minority in Czechoslovakia. Such issues, they insisted, could be settled through dialogue and appeasement - the term had not yet become tainted.

On this basis, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain went to Munich to negotiate. In the end, he sold out Czechoslovakia but, he convinced himself, he prevented Europe from plunging into war. It soon became apparent how wrong he was. Hitler had found his weakness provocative - as tyrants always will. "Our enemies are little worms," Hitler would later say. "I saw them at Munich."

As late as November 1941, with much of Europe under the Nazi jackboot, Charles Clayton Morrison, editor of the magazine, *Christian Century*, still worried more about "a coming Anglo-American world hegemony" than a Nazi triumph.

Morrison said Britain's struggle against Hitler should be seen as "a war for imperialism"-- and rejected. After all, he added, the American people were "not in a crusading mood." Such arguments were finally refuted a month later – after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

There was a time when one could not conceive a world without with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, the

Ottoman Empire, Constantinople. There was a time when the World Trade Towers looked indestructible. There was a time when Wall Street investment banks seemed as sturdy as mountains.

But we live in an uncertain and perilous world – the more so when leaders lack the courage to stand up to despots and sheepishly break bread with them instead.

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