

A Nuclear Middle East Could Spell 'Doomsday'

As the Obama administration tries to unbury itself from snowballing scandals, my apocalyptic thriller novel *The Last Israelis* steadily crawls from fiction to fact.

The Middle East is an insane place. And it's going nuclear. Yet too many optimists, isolationists and self-deluded analysts think that rationality will prevail and keep us all safe.

Is it rational to take out the organs of a man you just killed and eat them on camera, as a Syrian rebel recently did? How about a senior Palestinian Authority (PA) official who recently, on Lebanese television, declared that the PA would nuke Israel if it had nuclear weapons? Jibril Rajoub, the deputy secretary of the Fatah Central Committee and the chairman of the PA Olympics Committee, apparently doesn't mind that the nuclear mushroom he wants over Israel would also kill millions of Palestinians living just miles away. The main goal is that Israel be nuked.

At best, one can say there is a "twisted rationality" in the Middle East, as exemplified by Iran's former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. In a December 2001 speech, Rafsanjani said, "If one day the Islamic world [acquires nuclear weapons], then the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything. However, it will only harm the Islamic world. It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality. Jews shall expect to be once again scattered and wandering around the globe the day when this appendix is extracted from the region and the Muslim world."

Despite the above, Rafsanjani is considered such a "moderate"

that regime hardliners disqualified him from running in Iran's presidential election next month. So if Rafsanjani thinks that nuking Israel would be worth a few million Iranians killed by an Israeli retributive nuclear strike, what does that say about the rationality of the current, less "moderate" regime (the one regularly threatening to destroy Israel)? Could the eschatology of Shia Islam further heighten the risk of Armageddon?

If the regime under Supreme Leader Ali Hosseini Khamenei genuinely believes that an apocalyptic war will hasten the advent of the Twelfth Imam (the Islamic messiah), doesn't that make a nuclear first strike on Israel that much more tempting? Scholars may disagree about the potential impact of messianic ideology on nuclear decisions, but the mere possibility that geopolitical conflicts could be viewed through a theological lens hardly adds rationality to the Middle East.

To spread its radical ideology, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard finances, trains and arms some of the world's most dangerous terrorist organizations: Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. These organizations are collectively responsible for thousands of deaths from decades of terrorist attacks and wars in Israel, Lebanon, Europe and Latin America.

Iran has also provided support to the Taliban, Iraqi insurgents and al-Qaida. The Islamic Republic supplies Syria with arms, training and fighters to help President Bashar Assad stay in power by massacring his own people every day. If this is how the Iranian regime has behaved without the impunity conferred by a nuclear deterrent, what can be expected of the regime once it has nukes?

Equally troubling, if Iran's large-scale and dispersed nuclear program continues, the regime will be able to produce dozens of nuclear bombs every year. Such massive production only increases the odds of intentional (or unauthorized) nuclear transfers to state or non-state actors, and spurs regional

rivals into acquiring or developing a matching nuclear deterrent.

Three trends will make a nuclear Middle East even scarier:

- Technological improvements and miniaturization will make it easier to create and transfer small nuclear devices.
- Climate change will aggravate water scarcity, which will only intensify generational conflicts in the Middle East.
- Increasing technological interconnectedness will exacerbate sectarianism (as has been the case in Syria, where atrocities from the civil war are constantly recorded on video and shared, only further radicalizing the belligerents).

Once Iran has nukes, the potential catastrophes are manifold: a Middle East decimated by a far-reaching Sunni versus Shia conflict (sparked in Syria) and/or by a nuclear war between Israel and Iran; a nuclear arms race among other Mideast countries; the end of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; and terrorists who can target major cities with small nuclear devices. However it plays out, oil prices will skyrocket and many will die.

The Iranian nuclear threat is the most important global security issue of this generation. To focus public attention on it, I authored *The Last Israelis* in a breathless 10 weeks, hoping to release the book in time to impact the May 2012 “P5+1” talks in Baghdad, when world powers tried yet again for a diplomatic solution. To continue raising awareness before Iran crosses the nuclear finish line, I just released a second edition and added paperback and audiobook formats to reach more people with my book’s urgent message.

But what happens when it’s too late to stop Iranian nukes? *The Last Israelis* depicts the doomsday scenario resulting from a nuclear-armed Iran, as experienced by 35 ideologically divided

and ethnically diverse Israelis aboard the Dolphin submarine. To write the apocalyptic thriller, I dropped everything in my life and secured interviews with veterans of Israel's elite and secretive submarine force.

Imagining 35 submariners confronting the unthinkable as World War III unfolds in their claustrophobic reality was bad enough. Watching the world gradually move in the same direction, knowing that it's not my imagination this time, is far worse.

Noah Beck is the author of *The Last Israelis*, a doomsday thriller about the Iranian nuclear threat and current geopolitical issues in the Middle East.