



From an Israeli vantage point then, it was shocking to see that immediately after Bush stepped down from the rostrum, Obama and his Democratic supporters began pillorying him for his remarks. Most distressing is what Obama's reaction said about the Democratic presidential hopeful.

OBAMA'S RESPONSE to Bush's speech was an effective

acknowledgement that appeasing Iran and other terror sponsors is a defining feature of his campaign and of his political persona. As far as he is concerned, an attack against appeasement is an attack against Obama.

Obama and his supporters argue that seeking to ease Iranian belligerence by conducting negotiations and offering military, technological, military and financial concessions to the likes of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who refers to Israel as pestilence, daily threatens the Jewish state with destruction, and calls for the eradication of the US while claiming to be divinely instructed by a seven-year-old imam who went missing 1100 years ago is not appeasement. Indeed, Obama claims that conducting direct face-to-face negotiations with the likes of Ahmadinejad is the right way to be "tough."

But is this true? Obama recalls that US presidents have often conducted negotiations with their country's enemies and done so to the US's advantage. And this is true enough. President John F. Kennedy essentially appeased the Soviet Union during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis when he offered to remove US nuclear warheads from Turkey in exchange for the removal of Soviet nuclear missiles from Cuba.

But there are many differences between what Kennedy did and what Obama is proposing. Kennedy's offer to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was made secretly. And the terms of the deal stipulated that if its existence was revealed, the US offer would be cancelled. More importantly, Khrushchev was open to a deal and was ready to give up the Cuban nuclear program. And - most importantly of all - Kennedy deployed military forces and went to the brink of war to make the alternatives to negotiation credible.

Obama has repeatedly stated that unlike Kennedy, if he is elected president, he will not openly threaten war while being open to private talks. Instead, Obama intends to surrender the war option while conducting direct, public negotiations with the mullahs. So from the very beginning, he wants to undermine US credibility while giving Ahmadinejad and his murderous ilk the legitimacy that Kennedy refused to give Khrushchev.

Far from exerting force to strengthen his diplomatic position, Obama has pledged to withdraw US forces from Iraq where they are fighting Iranian proxies, cut military spending and shrink the size of the US nuclear arsenal.

SINCE THE definition of appeasement is to reward others for their bad behavior, and since the US has refused for 29 years to reward the Iranians for their bad behavior by having presidential summits with Iranian leaders, Obama's pledge represents a massive act of appeasement. And since it is Iran's illicit nuclear weapons program that would bring a President Barack Obama to the table, his policy would invite nuclear blackmail by other countries by signaling to them that the US rewards nuclear proliferators.

But even if Obama and his supporters were right and negotiating with the ayatollahs was not by its nature an act of appeasement, the question remains whether it would be possible to reach a deal with them that would not endanger US interests or US allies a la Neville Chamberlain at Munich.

Since the EU-3 began negotiating with the Iranians four years ago, the Iranians have made clear at every opportunity that while they welcome negotiations, they will never give up their nuclear program. Over the weekend, Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei again repeated that there is no deal that anyone can offer Iran that would move the regime to give up its nuclear aspirations and nascent arsenal. So there is no deal to be had.

Iran's support for terrorism and its nuclear aspirations make confrontation

ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee
of Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

Events...

Sunday, June 15, 8:00 PM

Concert featuring the North American Debut of Israeli Roots/Soul/Reggae Superstar **Mosh Ben Ari** (lead singer of the renowned world music group Sheva and the composer of the international hit "Salaam"), at The Mod Club, 722 College St. (just west of Bathurst), to benefit Sderot. Tickets available at Israel's Judaica (North 905-881-1010, South 416-256-1010) Hillel of Greater Toronto 416.913.2424, Soundscapes, Play De Record, Sonic Temple, Rotate This & www.ticketweb.ca

Quote for the Week...

"East Jerusalem belongs to us and we'll get it back sooner or later."
- Palestinian Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, speaking at the opening ceremony of the Palestine Investment Conference. (IMRA/Ma'an May 21)

Commentary...

Obama's Unique Appeasement Style By Caroline Glick

Spin doctors were relabeled "strategists" in the early 1990s. And as Mark Steyn wrote last week in National Review, "Increasingly, the Western world has attitudes rather than policies."

The latest attitude to be flouted as policy is indignation. Specifically, Democratic Presidential hopeful Senator Barack Obama's furious indignation at President George W. Bush's address before the Knesset last week where he celebrated Israel's 60th anniversary and extolled the US's alliance with Israel. Beyond praising the Jewish people's 4,000 year-old devotion to the Land of Israel and to liberty, Bush used the speech to warn against those who think that Iran and its terror proxies can simply be wished away through appeasement.

As the president put it, "Some seem to believe that we should negotiate with the terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along. We have heard this foolish delusion before. As Nazi tanks crossed into Poland in 1939, an American senator declared: "Lord, if I could only have talked to Hitler, all this might have been avoided. We have an obligation to call this what it is - the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history."

To Israeli ears, Bush's words were uncontroversial. Israel is beset by enemies who daily call for its physical annihilation and while doing so, build and support terror forces who attack Israel. For most Israelis, the notion that these enemies can be appeased is absurd and deeply offensive.

The only strong reaction that Bush's remarks provoked in Israel was relief. In spite of the Bush administration's own participation in the six-party talks with North Korea, its support for the EU-3's feckless discussions with the mullahs, its paralysis in the face of Hizbullah's takeover of Lebanon, and its support for the establishment of a Palestinian state run by Fatah terrorists dedicated to Israel's destruction, at the very least, standing before the Knesset, Bush effectively pledged not to allow Iran to acquire the means to conduct a

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with the US inevitable. Since there is no way that in the midst of presidential negotiations the US would confront Iran, by pushing for such summitry, Obama is conceding to Iran the US's right to choose when and how the confrontation will begin.

IN MANY ways, Obama and his allies call to mind the influential American newspaperman H.L. Mencken. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Mencken was the most influential writer in the US. He was an anti-Christian and anti-Semitic agnostic, a supporter of Germany during World War I, and a fierce opponent of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. He also opposed American participation in World War II.

In his biography of Mencken, *The Skeptic: A Life of H.L. Mencken*, Terry Teachout argues that the reason Mencken did not think it was worth fighting Hitler's Germany was because Mencken simply couldn't accept the existence of evil. He could see no moral distinction between Roosevelt, who he despised, and Adolf Hitler who he considered "a boob."

There are strong echoes of Mencken's moral blindness to Hitler's evil in the contemporary Left's refusal to understand the nature of the threat posed by Iran and its terror proxies. And Bush made this clear in his speech to the Knesset when he said, "There are good and decent people who cannot fathom the darkness in these men and try to explain away their words. It's natural, but it is deadly wrong."

Obama's supporters seek to silence these echoes by pointing to Obama's life story as Obama told it in his two autobiographies, *Dreams From my Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*. His supporters, argue that since his life story is unique, his decision to appease the Iranians is uniquely wise. Yet the most interesting aspect of his life story is how little is actually known about it.

As the *New York Times* noted in an article Sunday about Obama's career as an autobiographer, "In the introduction [of *Dreams from my Father*], Mr. Obama acknowledged his use of pseudonyms, composite characters, approximated dialogue and events out of chronological order."

That is, the man who is supposedly uniquely qualified to appease, adopted an attitude of indignation at Bush's condemnation of those who seek to cut deals with evil men, is also rather cavalier about facts. Justifying Obama's fast and loose treatment of the truth about his past, his editor Deborah Baker explained that Obama's attitude was more important than the facts or, in her words, "The fact is, it all had a sort of larger truth going on that you couldn't make up."

LIKE HIS life story, Obama's policies are not based on facts, but on his attitude. And his attitude, like Mencken's in the 1930s, is based on a naïve and arrogant belief that the worst thing that can happen is to have someone who talks about evil in the White House.

Peter Osnos, Obama's former publisher told the *Times* that Obama's meteoric rise to the pinnacle of politics is due in large part to his gift as a storyteller. In his words, "It's almost all based on these two books, two books not based on a job of prodigious research or risking one's life as a reporter in Iraq. He has written about himself. Being able to take your own life story and turn it into this incredibly lucrative franchise, it's a stunning fact."

Indeed, it is stunning. And frightening. It says that in a world in which evil men are combining and preparing for war and genocide, good men are preparing for pleasant chitchat with their foes because they have come to prefer attitude to substance. It is a world in which indignation can be summoned as readily (and perhaps more easily) for partisan political attacks as for delusional dictators, open preparation for genocide. And it is a world in which it is more important to discuss "healing" emotional wounds than devising policies capable of coping with an ever-more-dangerous international coalition of murderers. (Jerusalem Post May 20)

A Cease-fire with Terror? By Moshe Arens

Terror is endemic to the Middle East. The early Zionist settlers faced acts of terror, and citizens of the State of Israel have been subjected to acts of terror for the past 60 years. But what for many years had been seen as a secondary danger, as compared to the danger of aggression by neighboring Arab states, became a full-fledged threat to the state during the second intifada, when Palestinian terror reached into the heart of Israel's cities almost daily.

How to fight terror became the subject of endless discussions during that difficult time. As long as Israel seemed unable to find an effective answer to Palestinian terror, the defeatists in our ranks claimed that terror could not be defeated by force, while the more cautious argued that terror could not be defeated by the use of force alone. The implication was that Israel had no

choice but to concede to at least some of the terrorists' demands - that they must be given a "political horizon."

But once the Israel Defense Forces and the security services began to seriously tackle Palestinian terror, following the massacre at the Park Hotel in Netanya in the spring of 2002, it quickly became clear that terror could be defeated by force. As a matter of fact, it could be defeated only by the use of force. The terrorists view any hints of Israeli willingness to give in to a portion of their essentially limitless demands as a sign of weakness, which only serves to encourage further acts of terror.

But Israel's victory over Palestinian terror, which put an end to the daily bouts of suicide bombings, also induced amnesia in the minds of some of Israel's leaders. The lesson was quickly forgotten. The shameful unilateral withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon, which served to trigger the second intifada, was acclaimed by them as a great success that brought peace to northern Israel - until the wake-up call came with the Second Lebanon War. At that point, twisted logic took over the minds of members of the Olmert government, and they acclaimed the first defeat Israel had suffered in its entire history as a defeat of Hezbollah. Maybe they will finally get some sense into their heads when they see what Hezbollah, which they claim to have defeated, is doing in Lebanon these days. What a missed opportunity!

But they forgot everything and learned nothing. Though forcefully denying that they are carrying out any negotiations with Hamas while rockets and mortar shells are falling daily on hapless Israeli citizens in the South, they have actually been proceeding, via Egyptian mediation, with talks on a cease-fire with Hamas in Gaza. Abandoning the strategy of defeating terrorism, they are now offering Hamas terrorists a respite so they can rearm, train and prepare for the next round of attacks against Israel, with the help of the Iranians.

Each round of attacks on the towns and villages of southern Israel has been greeted by completely senseless statements by our prime and defense ministers. After repetitive announcements that there is "no magic solution" to this problem, we were promised that in two and a half years, the army would install a system that would intercept Hamas missiles in flight. Then we were told that Israel would put an end to these attacks, but not right now: that a large-scale IDF operation was getting closer by the day, that there was a limit to our self-restraint.

None of this rhetoric has made any impression on Hamas, or on Israeli residents of the South. Israelis living in the areas under attack were told to be strong and get used to it. After the latest attack on Ashkelon, the defense minister declared that we must think before we act. He has had two years to think about this problem, but has still not found the answer - which is simple, even if unpleasant: The rockets have to be moved out of range of Israeli towns by the presence of Israeli ground troops in the area.

Now the Olmert government is placing its hopes on proposing a cease-fire to the terrorists. A truce with the terrorists, meaning that Israel would cease its attacks against organizations in Gaza whose leaderships are pledged to Israel's destruction, is ludicrous and self-defeating. It has not worked with Hezbollah, it will not work with Iran, and it won't work with Hamas. Until such time as Israel adopts the only strategy that works in the war against terror - attacking the terrorists until they are soundly defeated - Israel will continue to be weakened, and its citizens will continue to be casualties of terrorist acts. (Haaretz May 20)

Unprepared For Bush's Praise By Hillel Halkin

George W. Bush's extraordinarily supportive 60th Independence Day address to the Israeli Knesset last week may not have been a rhetorical masterpiece, but it was well-crafted and had its moments of eloquence.

Above all, it was a demonstration of why Mr. Bush's feelings about Israel have been not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively, different from those of any American president before him. These feelings have to do with his Christian faith, as was already made clear in the opening paragraph of his talk, when he referred to the state of Israel's establishment as "the redemption of an ancient promise given to Abraham and Moses and David - a homeland for the chosen people in Eretz Yisrael."

These are not the kind of words that have been heard from American presidents before, starting with "Eretz Yisrael" - the traditional Hebrew name, meaning "the Land of Israel," for the country generally known in European languages as Palestine.

Nor has the "ancient promise" of this land made to the ancestors of the Jewish people ever been a part of the vocabulary of Pennsylvania Avenue, let alone of international leaders and diplomats dealing with the Israel-Arab conflict.

Indeed, it has never been part of the vocabulary of Israeli diplomats or leaders, either. International diplomacy has accustomed us to phrases like Israel's "right to security," Israel's "need for defensible borders," and Israel's "legitimate existence as a Jewish state." We are not used to hearing from it, or from an occupant of the White House, about God's promises in the Bible.

And we are certainly not used to hearing the Jews referred to by an American president as "the chosen people." Actually, this is a phrase that most Jews find acutely embarrassing. Except for the Orthodox, who don't make a habit of boasting about it, few Jews in today's world are of the opinion that they have been chosen by anything or anybody apart, perhaps, from bad luck and anti-Semites; the last thing they want non-Jews to think is that they harbor the outrageous notion that God has singled them out for some special purpose.

And that's why President Bush's support for Israel, too, is embarrassing to so many Jews. It's bad enough that as an evangelical Christian the president has all kinds of absurd beliefs, such as that stem cell research is sinful, or that homosexual marriage is an abomination, or that children deserve to have two parents, one of each sex. But that he also should also believe that the Jews are God's people? How kooky can you get?

And most embarrassingly of all, what President Bush believes about the Jews is something that nearly all Jews once believed about themselves. It's aggravating to be reminded of the you you once were and would like to forget. Remember the time back in high school when you had great ambitions and thought you had a God-given talent that the world would hear about some day? Not really, because now, decades later, you've done everything you can to banish it from your mind - which is why you cringe when you run into an old classmate who recognizes you and exclaims with a slap on the back, "Hey, it's you! I'll never forget the impression you made on me."

For many Jews, President Bush is like that classmate. They wish he hadn't recognized them.

The president, it was observed rather ruefully in Israel, gave a Zionist speech such as hasn't been heard from mainstream Israeli politicians for many years. If by that is meant that he invoked the Bible, rather than the Oslo "peace process" or his own "road map," this is certainly true. The Bible has long ceased to be bon ton in Israeli intellectual life. It has become politically incorrect for Israelis to think that just because some possibly imaginary progenitors of theirs had religious fantasies about God's pledging them a country, their contemporary thinking needs to take this into account. If an American president feels comfortable with such fairy tales, that's no reason why they should.

President Bush clearly believes the Jews are central to history in a way most Jews themselves no longer do. They find such thinking primitive. The only problem is that history itself shows signs of agreeing with the president.

This, really, is the astonishing thing about the country Mr. Bush addressed last week when he said, "Citizens of Israel: Masada shall never fall again and America will be at your side": How central to everything it is. A tiny place with a population that wouldn't fill any of the world's ten largest cities, it finds itself in the middle of all the great conflicts of our times: The battle for democracy, the war against terror, the fight against Islamic fundamentalism, the campaign against nuclear proliferation. Practically every scenario for a nuclear Armageddon, ranging from that of the most wild-eyed preacher of the Gospel to that of the most cool-headed political scientist, revolves around Israel.

Perhaps it really is primitive to believe, as President Bush does, that this has something to do with the Jews being the people of the Bible. Certainly, most Jews themselves would like to think that it has to do with other things. They would rather not be at the center of anything. It makes them nervous when someone reminds them that, despite their best efforts, that's where they still are. The role of being a chosen people is big on them.

The president of the United States disagrees. That's part of the reason why many Jews will be relieved to see him leave office next January. It's not just stem-cell research, or even the war in Iraq. The man thinks too much of us. That's something we're not prepared to put up with. (NY Sun May 20)

Bin Laden's Strategy for Dividing the West By Evelyn Gordon

Osama bin Laden released a new audio message last week in which he termed the Palestinian issue the "core reason" for al-Qaida's war against the West, and a major impetus for the 9/11 attacks. This is the second time in less than six months that he has tried to put Israel center stage: In December, he issued an audiotape threatening to "expand our jihad" to Israel in order to "liberate Palestine, the whole of Palestine, from the [Jordan] River to the [Mediterranean] Sea." Yet in reality, Israel has never been of much interest to al-Qaida. Thus it is crucial to understand what bin Laden seeks to achieve by pretending otherwise.

That Israel is in fact of only marginal interest to bin Laden is amply demonstrated by his own words and actions. Indeed, his December message implicitly acknowledged as much by vowing to "expand" his jihad to Israel: If the Palestinian cause were truly al-Qaida's chief concern, why was it "expanding" its jihad to Israel only now, after years of successfully staging attacks in almost every other quarter of the globe?

Israel, after all, is not a difficult target, as repeated attacks by Palestinian and Lebanese terrorists make clear. Its neighbors all have large Muslim populations that loathe it, and Israel itself has a large and disaffected Muslim population; thus al-Qaida would have a wide choice of potential recruits and staging grounds.

Yet to date, there has not been a single documented al-Qaida attack on Israel - even as the organization successfully staged attacks in countries as diverse as the United States, Kenya and Saudi Arabia, while helping allies stage additional attacks in countries from Indonesia to Spain. Given al-Qaida's track record, there is only one possible explanation for this failure: The group has never seriously tried to target Israel.

Experts on al-Qaida agree that Israel is far from being the organization's primary concern. David Schenker, a research fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told *The New York Times* in October 2001 that bin Laden's first call for jihad, issued in 1992, made almost no mention of Palestine; its primary target was America. His 1996 fatwa cited Palestine as merely one item in "an endless list of Muslim grievances against the United States and injustices endured by Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Somalia, Kashmir, the Philippines, Tajikistan and Eritrea, to name a few," the paper reported. His 1998 fatwa deemed Saudi Arabia his top concern, followed by Iraq; Jerusalem - which is of lesser religious importance than either Saudi Arabia, Islam's birthplace, or Iraq, seat of the last Arab-Islamic caliphate - got only third billing.

Tunisian intellectual Al-Afif al-Akhdar highlights the fact that bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, wrote a book in which he listed the movement's three main goals as "religious rule based on Shari'a [Islamic law], forging ties with believers only; and total and immediate severance from the unbelievers." In other words, Akhdar explained in a 2006 interview with *Haaretz*, al-Qaida's main goal is to reshape the Muslim world into an Islamic theocracy that maintains no ties with the West; issues such as Palestine are "second-tier."

But if Israel is not a major concern for al-Qaida - if it is in fact of so little concern that not one of al-Qaida's numerous and globe-spanning attacks has targeted it - why has it increasingly starred in the organization's rhetoric since 2001?

According to Akhdar, this is a tactic to muster support for the organization among Muslims worldwide, for whom "liberating Palestine" is a far more enticing cause than "religious rule based on Shari'a."

Yet such rhetoric almost certainly has another goal as well: to divide and weaken the West by deceiving it about al-Qaida's true intentions.

That bin Laden seeks to divide the West is obvious: Just consider the Qaida-assisted pre-election bombing in Spain in 2004, which toppled a pro-American government and replaced it with one whose first move was to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq. His interest in doing so is equally obvious: The last thing he wants is for the West to unite and wage war against al-Qaida as it did against Nazi Germany. But since most Westerners would hardly be enthusiastic about seeing the entire Muslim world become a theocracy whose sole interest in the West is waging jihad against it, dividing the West requires deceiving it about al-Qaida's true aims.

And Israel is clearly the perfect issue for this purpose. In Europe, as repeated polls have found, it is already the world's most unpopular country, and even in America, a vocal minority has long argued that US support for Israel is the main reason it has become a target for Islamist terror. Thus if bin Laden can convince Westerners that his main goal is ending Israel's

"occupation of Palestine," rather than transforming the Muslim world into a jihadist theocracy, they will view al-Qaida not as an implacable enemy that must be fought, but as an organization that can be persuaded to abandon violence by placating its legitimate grievances.

At the very least, a critical mass of such people would effectively paralyze the West: Far from being able to mobilize to combat al-Qaida and its allies effectively, the free world would be bogged down in endless arguments over whether the organization should be opposed or appeased. And if the appeasement camp were strong enough to pressure Israel into major concessions, al-Qaida would gain a double victory: Western concessions typically increase support for jihadist groups among ordinary Muslims, by enabling these groups to portray themselves as the winning side against a West in retreat.

Bin Laden has sowed his seeds of division expertly. But only the West can make his "divide and conquer" strategy succeed. If it remains focused on his true aims - which he has taken little trouble to conceal - and acts accordingly, his strategy will fail. But if too many Westerners are deceived by his claim that Palestine is the "core reason for the war between our civilization and your civilizations," al-Qaida will have racked up another major victory on its road to the theocratic Islamic superstate of its dreams. (Jerusalem Post May 21)

To Meet Or Not To Meet? By Andrew C. McCarthy
Amidst Obama's folly, can we finally pronounce Bush's Iran policy a disaster?

In late spring 2006, Condi finally got her way.

For nearly three decades, sensible American policy had dictated resisting official meetings with and overt legitimization of Iran's murderous jihadist regime. But in May 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice persuaded President Bush that direct negotiations were the way to go.

Let's ignore that back-channel talks had been ongoing since the Khomeini era . . . leading to such debacles as the Iran-Contra scandal.

Leave aside, too, that the Bush-negotiation initiative, far from a position of strength, was launched out of weakness: The mullahs were actively orchestrating the murder of American troops in Iraq, all the while defying pusillanimous efforts by the U.S. and weak-kneed Europeans to forestall Iran's development of nuclear weapons.

In fact, let's even ignore Khobar Towers. In 1996, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps had coordinated a bombing in Saudi Arabia, an act of war that killed 19 members of the United States Air Force. It is not enough to say the Clinton administration did nothing; it actually obstructed the investigation that would have brought Iran's attack on the United States to light.

The Bush administration, similarly, did nothing — even as Iran stepped up its anti-American aggression, harbored al-Qaeda fighters, and (as even the 9/11 Commission grudgingly conceded) very likely facilitated the travel of the suicide hijackers who killed nearly 3,000 Americans on September 11, 2001.

No, let's forget all those things ever happened. Let's just stick to Spring 2006.

To recount: We were dealing with an apocalyptic regime certain that radical Islam's global triumph was as imminent as the long lost Mahdi's arrival any day now. President Bush had said time and again that it was pointless to negotiate with terrorists because they are — surprise! — incorrigible. Yet, Secretary Rice convinced the president that the ball would really be advanced by [drum-roll] . . . direct U.S. negotiations with Iran.

Flash forward to 2008. The Democrats' presumptive (and increasingly less-compelling) nominee, Sen. Barack Obama, has rightly been ridiculed for his offer to meet, without preconditions, with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. His stated policy is so patently idiotic that Obama, on the cusp of the brass ring, has been reduced to lying about whether he actually stated it (he did, repeatedly), and to dissembling about whether preconditions are the same thing as preparations he now purports to have envisioned all along.

My question is: Why?

Why does Obama feel the need to lie about a suggestion that, at best, is only marginally more vapid than what has passed for the Bush Iran policy?

Back to spring 2006. Iran was being particularly obstreperous about its nuclear-technology development. The State Department proposed direct negotiations — i.e., face-to-face meetings between the president's emissaries and Ahmadinejad's subordinates.

What was the price? What stringent preconditions did Condi Rice persuade

the president that we should demand?

A commitment to forswear, or at least suspend, the development of nuclear weapons?

A commitment to refrain from abetting Iraqi insurgents in the murder of American troops?

A commitment to stop funding Hezbollah, the world's most adept terrorist organization — and the one that, prior to 9/11, had trained al-Qaeda operatives and killed more Americans than any other?

A commitment to restrain its Revolutionary Guards and Qods force from targeting Americans?

A commitment to retract its threats to wipe Israel from the face of the earth?

Well . . . not exactly.

In the midst of the war on terror, at a time when the express policy of the United States was to regard and treat as terrorists the regimes that sponsor terrorism, in circumstances where Iran was actively coddling al-Qaeda and killing American soldiers, the Bush administration insisted on . . . no preconditions for negotiating with Iran.

Sure, Bush (unlike Obama) did not offer a personal sitdown with Ahmadinejad. But does that really matter? Top-level meeting or no meeting, what happened was a disgrace.

As I've previously detailed, the United States offered Iran:

Support for a new conference to promote dialogue and cooperation on regional security issues.

Improvement of Iran's access to the international economy, markets, and capital, through practical support for full integration into international structures, including the World Trade Organization, and the creation of a framework for increased direct investment and trade.

Establishment of a long-term energy partnership between Iran and the European Union, among others.

Support for the modernization of Iran's telecommunication infrastructure and advanced Internet service, including the lifting of American export restrictions.

Support for agricultural development in Iran, including possible access to American and European agricultural products, technology, and farm equipment.

Oh, and there was one other thing. Condi offered Iran cooperation in the field of civil aviation, including the removal of export restrictions which forbade American and European manufacturers from providing the mullahs with aircraft and spare parts.

You know why the last offer is worth mentioning?

Because, as would have been effortlessly predicted by anyone who has followed Iran for the last 30 years, when the mullahs looked at the Bush administration's front-loaded, precondition-free offer, they laughed their heads off. They told us to take a \$3- (now \$4-) dollar-a-gallon hike.

So what did the Bush State Department do?

It gave Iran the civil-aviation assistance anyway. And it continued to sit down with the regime's diplomats while the regime continued to build nukes, kill Americans, and dispatch Hezbollah to kill Israelis.

That is to say, we not only demanded no preconditions for negotiations; we persisted in patently futile negotiations even as they thumbed our eyes.

So I'm delighted to hear President Bush has determined, as he told the Israeli Knesset last week, that it is irrational to "negotiate with terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along." I'm just wondering why he hasn't clued his State Department in on this obvious truth.

Just like I'm wondering why Sen. John McCain hasn't objected to the administration's precondition-free negotiations with the jihad's string-pullers.

And why Sen. Barack Obama feels like he has to lie about what he said rather than argue that it's not all that more delusional than the farce in which we've been engaged for several years running.

The writer is author of Willful Blindness: Memoir of the Jihad and director of the Center for Law and Counterterrorism at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. (National Review May 21)
