

The Historian, the Diplomat, and the Spy

Iran is not our enemy. The regime that enriches itself while murdering, oppressing, and impoverishing ordinary Iranians; the regime that incites genocide against Israel, threatens its neighbors in the Persian Gulf, and vows to bring about a “world without America” – that is our enemy. This was one of the key points driven home by a trio of extraordinary individuals gathered for a dinner in Tel Aviv last week.

At the table were Bernard Lewis, for my money the greatest living historian of the Middle East; Uri Lubrani, Israel’s envoy to Iran prior to the fall of the Shah and an advisor to leaders of the Jewish state ever since; and Meir Dagan, a retired paratrooper, commando, and general who was recruited in 2002 by then-prime minister Ariel Sharon to rebuild the Mossad as an intelligence agency “with a knife in its teeth.” (Dagan stepped down from that post in 2010 and has been increasingly outspoken ever since.) A small group of young American national-security professionals – from the Hill, the Defense Department, Homeland Security, even the D.C. police department – broke pita with them. None of the three minimizes how dire will be the consequences should Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s finger come to rest on a nuclear trigger. The Iranian president subscribes to an extremist school of Shia theology that, General Dagan explained, looks forward to an apocalyptic war that would “hasten the arrival of the Mahdi,” mankind’s ultimate savior. But he thinks Ahmadinejad and his associates are not as close as many analysts believe to acquiring a nuclear capability. “Two years to have such a weapon, in my estimation,” he said.

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