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By Dow Marmur, Columnist



You don't have to be Jewish to fear Iran, but it helps. Whereas some enemies of my people dress up their venom in the language of opposition to Israel, the Iranian leaders go much further. That's why they target Jewish institutions everywhere, including the Jewish Centre in Buenos Aires where, in 1994, 85 people were killed and hundreds injured.

Whereas even the Nazis were circumspect and used euphemisms like "the final solution" for their plans to annihilate the Jewish people, the Iranians are usually quite blunt. Thus, for example, a website close to their supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, urges the indiscriminate killing of Jews and the destruction of Israel.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad persistently describes the Holocaust as a Jewish ploy and speaks of Jews as "the most detested people in all humanity." His annual antics at the UN General Assembly are ominous illustrations.

Iran's Vice-President Mohammad Reza Rahimi, speaking recently at an international antidrug conference in Tehran, invented the scandalous accusation that Jewish sacred texts promote the spread of illicit drugs in the world. And a state-sponsored Iranian newspaper has concluded that Jews are financing the spread of homosexuality.

Iranian arms are, of course, the source of the barrage of sophisticated missiles that were fired by Hamas and Islamic Jihad causing disruption in Israel and havoc in Gaza, thus further exacerbating the crisis in the region. It's a function of Iran's repeatedly declared intention to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth.

Hezbollah, like Bashar Assad's murderous Syrian army equipped and financed by Iran, is waiting on Israel's border with Lebanon for opportunities to match the belligerence of fellow terrorists in the south. And all that even before Iran has completed its in-your-face widely publicized accelerated atomic weapons program with the ambition, typical of totalitarian regimes, to extend its might beyond its borders.

Sober analysts tell us that neither the refusal by Russia and China to join in the efforts to curb the sinister intentions of Iran, nor the firm stance by the government of Israel — seemingly with an odd mixture of support and call for restraint by the United States — will deter Iran from its ambition to dominate the Middle East in ways reminiscent of the Nazi aim of taking over Europe as a prelude to further conquests. What's needed, these analysts say, is a revolution, perhaps an implosion, from within.

Nima Sharif, an Iranian-American human rights and political activist, suggests that this may indeed be on the cards. Writing in the online journal Open Democracy, Sharif points to recent

protests in Iran over the collapse of its currency when young people chanted, "We do not want a nuclear program, do something about our situation."

He writes: "The current internal disputes, coupled by more economic hardship, public discontent and increasing international sanctions has made the Iranian regime more vulnerable than before." There's hope, according to Sharif, that the result will be a different government that revises its dangerous agenda in favour of concern for its own people.

Pointing to next year's presidential election, Sharif speculates: "While elections in Iran have never been a genuine opportunity for the people to decide about their own destiny . . . the next election could once again pave the way for another public outburst. Tehran must fear that in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and possible downfall of Assad, it would be much more difficult this time to suppress a movement for regime change."

Jewish history has taught me to fear the worst, but Jewish theology, this time supported by political analysis, urges me never to lose hope.

Dow Marmur is rabbi emeritus at Toronto's Holy Blossom Temple. His column appears every other week.