

»» *THERE IS A CHINESE CURSE WHICH SAYS, "MAY
HE LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES." LIKE IT OR NOT,
WE LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES. THEY ARE TIMES
OF DANGER AND UNCERTAINTY.*

»» *SENATOR ROBERT F. KENNEDY*

»» *JUNE 6, 1966*



JOEL C. ROSENBERG

EPICENTER

2.0 VERSION: UPDATED & EXPANDED



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Epicenter: Why the Current Rumbles in the Middle East Will Change Your Future

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*To our dear friends
Dr. T. E. Kosby and Dr. Indira Kosby,
thank you so much for your love,
your friendship, and your example.*

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EPICENTER 2.0: INTRODUCTION TO THE SOFTCOVER EDITION

The attack came hard, fast, and without warning.

At 8:07 a.m. on July 12, 2006, in broad daylight, forces of the Iranian- and Syrian-backed terrorist organization known as Hezbollah (“the party of God”) launched a brazen, unprovoked raid against an Israeli patrol on the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon. Within minutes, Islamic guerrillas had killed three Jewish soldiers and captured two more: First Sergeant Eldad Regev, twenty-seven, and Master Sergeant Ehud “Udi” Goldwasser, thirty-one, who had just gotten married ten months earlier.

The attack caught 7 million Israelis just starting the new day completely off guard. What’s more, it came on the heels of an unprovoked Hamas terror raid on the Israeli side of Israel’s southern border with the Gaza Strip just weeks before.

At precisely 5:40 a.m. local time on June 25, “eight armed Palestinians infiltrated Israel through a tunnel leading from the Strip into Israel’s territory, and split into three teams once they came out,” reported *Yediot Aharonot*, a leading Israeli daily newspaper. “One team approached an armored personnel carrier stationed at the place and fired at it. The APC was empty and no injuries were reported in that attack. Another group simultaneously fired a missile and hurled grenades

at a tank standing nearby. The missile hit the tank's rear, hurting the four soldiers that were inside. Two were immediately killed, a third soldier sustained injuries and the fourth was initially reported missing. As the incident developed, security officials came to believe that the soldier has been kidnapped. During the attack, a third terrorist team moved in the direction of a desert patrol army post and engaged in a shooting battle with the soldiers."¹

The abducted Israeli soldier, Corporal Gilad Schalit, was only nineteen.

Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert was suddenly faced with a two-front war. He quickly and defiantly rejected negotiations with the radical jihadist groups to get back Schalit, Goldwasser, and Regev. Instead, he ordered the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) to launch massive military operations on both fronts aimed at recovering Israel's men and crippling the Hezbollah and Hamas organizations. Israeli fighter jets bombed runways at Beirut International Airport. Israeli tanks and troops stormed into Gaza and southern Lebanon. But just as the initial attacks by the terror groups had caught Israel and the world by surprise, so, too, did their response.

Rather than finding quick and easy success, the most powerful military in the history of the Middle East found itself strangely outfoxed and outmaneuvered. Over the course of thirty-three days, Hezbollah launched more than four thousand missiles at civilian Israeli targets as far south as Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, terrifying the Jewish population and causing tens of millions of dollars worth of property damage. More than one million Israelis living along the northern border with Lebanon were forced to flee their homes or live underground in bomb shelters. Meanwhile, the half-million Israelis living near the southern border with Gaza found themselves subjected to thousands more missiles, rockets, and mortars. Many of the weapons fired by the jihadists were launched from inside private homes, local schools and hospitals, and even mosques, making it extremely difficult for the Israeli air force to retaliate without risking enormous civilian casualties and collateral damage.

I had completed the manuscript for the original hardcover edition

of *Epicenter* just a month earlier, making the case that Israel was destined to become the center of global events and interest in the last days of human history. Now a new and devastating geopolitical earthquake was traumatizing the people of the Middle East. Once again, the eyes of the world were riveted on Israel and her neighbors, the epicenter of the momentous events shaking our world and shaping our future. What would the future hold?

The war dominated headlines for weeks. Newspapers, magazines, Web sites, and cable news networks provided almost nonstop coverage of the conflict, even asking whether the war had prophetic implications. In a *USA Today* article entitled “**In the Headlines, Glimpses of the Apocalypse,**” columnist Chuck Raasch raised a question on the minds of many around the world: “Are these the end of times? . . . You can’t look at the headlines these days and not conjure up apocalyptic visions. . . . With the war in Iraq persisting, with fresh fighting in Afghanistan, with missiles raining down on even Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus Christ, the world’s most powerful governments and the United Nations appear unable or unwilling to stop a chain of events that may be spinning out of earthly control.”

Raasch was not alone in his analysis. CNN, FOX, and MSNBC devoted numerous segments of their Middle East coverage to asking whether current events suggest we are living in the last days before the return of Christ, as did other networks. A headline in the *Waco Tribune-Herald* at the time asked, “**Are We Living in the Final Days?**” A *Columbus Dispatch* headline asked, “**Is the Mideast Rupture a Sign of the Rapture?**” Salon.com declared, “**The Apocalypse Is Drawing Closer!**” Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House, merely added fuel to the fire when he said he believes we are living in “the early stages of World War III.”²

When the shooting stopped and the smoke cleared, attention shifted quickly from prophecy to realpolitik. In just a month, it had become painfully clear to most observers that unlike previous Arab-Israeli wars, this one had not ended with a decisive Israeli victory. To the contrary, Prime Minister Olmert’s military and political strategy had failed badly. Israel’s three soldiers had not been recovered (and still have not been

as of this writing). The military machines of Hezbollah and Hamas had not been crushed. Indeed, they were celebrating their “success” against the “Zionist enemy.” Their allies in Tehran and Damascus were suddenly emboldened. Israel no longer looked invincible. Allah, the clerics argued, was preparing to annihilate the Jewish state once and for all.

“The occupying regime of Palestine has actually pushed the button of its own destruction by launching a new round of invasion and barbaric onslaught on Lebanon,” declared Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, triumphantly, echoing the mood of the moment.³

Olmert’s approval ratings plunged into the single digits as Israelis blamed the prime minister for effectively losing the war and severely damaging Israel’s deterrence against other possible aggressors in the region. A government commission would later describe this “Second Lebanon War” (the first being Israel’s war against the Palestine Liberation Organization in the early 1980s) as a “serious missed opportunity” and conclude that the IDF “did not provide an effective response” to the Hezbollah missiles. The commission blasted Olmert and his advisors for “serious failings and shortcomings in the decision-making processes and staff-work in the political and the military echelons and their interface” and found “serious failings and flaws in the lack of strategic thinking and planning, in both the political and the military echelons.”⁴

It was clear that the cease-fire between Israel, Hezbollah, and Hamas was temporary at best. No one knew when the next major round of hostilities would break out. Nor did anyone know whether the next war would be prophetic in nature or merely another devastating regional conflict. But there was no question that all sides were rearming, recruiting, refueling, and readjusting to the new realities on the ground. Nor was there any question that the leaders of Iran, in particular, were more determined than ever to wipe the Jewish state off the map and more convinced than ever that such a feat was truly possible. They had been probing for Israeli weaknesses and found many. They were preparing to strike again, and much harder the next time. They had a set of deeply held religious beliefs compelling them. They

had a military plan guiding them. They had a sense of destiny driving them. And the clock was ticking.

Into that environment, we launched the *Epicenter* book tour on Tuesday, September 18, 2006. Not surprisingly, perhaps, there was a great deal of interest in a new nonfiction book that examined current events in the Middle East, ancient Bible prophecies, and the possible convergence of the two. C-SPAN covered our first event—an address to some 2,500 people at a Bible prophecy conference near Los Angeles—just hours after covering Iranian president Ahmadinejad’s address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Interest just seemed to grow from there, from interview and speaking requests, to thousands of e-mailed questions from all over the world, to invitations to meet privately with Jewish leaders, Islamic leaders, foreign ambassadors, military and intelligence officials, high-ranking current and former administration officials, and members of Congress. To be sure, not all of them agreed with my conclusions, but their interest in the subject—and at times even intense curiosity—was, I thought, noteworthy.

But let’s be clear: much of the interest at high levels of the U.S. government and within numerous foreign governments has been generated not by the quality of my prose, but by key events that have played out around the world over the past several years. The significance of such events will become clearer as you read further.

That said, there are several points I should like to make up front.

First, nothing in the following original chapters or appendices has been added to, deleted, or changed in any way. If there are any errors of fact or judgment from the first edition of *Epicenter*, they remain so that you will have a baseline of my original thoughts and conclusions to compare to your own thoughts and conclusions with the benefit of more time and consideration. This softcover edition merely adds this new introduction; a new afterword, examining some of the events and trends since the hardcover publication; a new appendix revealing the results of an exclusive new national survey we commissioned on the attitude of American Christians toward Israel, Iran, and the Middle East; and a new appendix with transcripts of interviews I conducted for

the *Epicenter* documentary film released in June of 2007 for the fortieth anniversary of the Six Days' War.

Second, as with the original edition, my intent with *Epicenter* is not to persuade anyone of what is coming or what these events mean. Rather it is to explain how I came to write novels that seem to have come at least partially true; to explain various Bible prophecies that have not been given enough attention in the past; to answer many questions that have flowed from the novels and the prophecies upon which they were based; to update readers on new events that are relevant to the prophecies described herein; and to update readers on the work of the Joshua Fund (www.joshuafund.net), our humanitarian relief work in the Middle East. Clearly I have strong beliefs or I would not have written this book. But I do not seek to impose my beliefs. To the contrary, I deeply respect the reader's right to draw his or her own informed conclusions.

Third, even an updated and expanded edition such as this cannot possibly do justice to the fast-moving developments in Russia and the Middle East. I would encourage readers who would like to know more to visit my weblog (www.joelrosenberg.com). There I track and analyze such events on a daily and weekly basis. Those readers so inclined may also sign up for "Flash Traffic," weekly and biweekly e-mail updates (free of charge) in which I discuss the most important events and trends from the epicenter.

Thank you so much for your interest in this new edition of *Epicenter*. It is my sincerest hope that you find it helpful and thought-provoking, come what may.

Joel C. Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, DC

APRIL 2008

INTRODUCTION

ALL EYES ON THE EPICENTER

When Saddam Hussein ordered the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and threatened to use chemical weapons to destroy half of Israel, the *Washington Post* described the event as a “political earthquake” whose aftershocks “will be apocalyptic for the Arab world.”¹

When U.S. and coalition forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 and vowed to build the first democracies in the region aside from Israel, the Associated Press called such developments a “political earthquake” that “shook the political foundations of the Middle East,” an assessment echoed around the globe.²

When in the summer of 2005 Iranians elected a new president who vowed to accelerate Tehran’s nuclear program and provoke a direct confrontation with the United States (the “Great Satan”) and Israel (the “Little Satan”), Agence France-Presse characterized the election as a “political earthquake.”³

These were not isolated examples. Yasser Arafat’s death was described by the media as a “political earthquake.” So was Ariel Sharon’s stroke and sudden fall from power, together with the rapid rise of Hamas to power in the West Bank and Gaza shortly thereafter. Indeed, a search of a leading news database found 729 news stories published or

broadcast over the past decade that described tumultuous events in the Middle East as “political earthquakes.”⁴ And these do not even begin to include coverage of the first Palestinian uprising (*intifada*) in 1987–88, the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, the overthrow of the shah of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Arab oil embargoes of the 1970s, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Six Days’ War in 1967, the rebirth of the State of Israel in 1948, or any of the terrorist attacks or peace talks that have occurred over the past several decades.

To be sure, much about the politics of the region is murky and confusing to Western minds. But one thing is increasingly certain: the eyes of the nations are riveted upon Israel and the Middle East, the epicenter of the momentous events shaking our world and shaping our future. And now a new crisis is brewing.

IRAN GOES NUCLEAR

The man Iranians elected to be their president in the summer of 2005 was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who until then had been the mayor of Tehran. Few outside the capital city knew much about him at the time. Even those inside may not have fully appreciated what they were getting themselves into. But with each passing day, the picture became clearer—and more troubling.

Upon taking office, Ahmadinejad undertook a series of moves that sent shock waves through world capitals, rattled global markets, and drove up the international price of oil. He told associates that he believed the end of the world was just two or three years away. He said he believed he had been chosen by Allah to become Iran’s leader at this critical hour to hasten the coming of the Islamic messiah known as the Twelfth Imam or the Mahdi by launching a final holy war against Christians and Jews. He publicly vowed to annihilate the United States. He vowed to wipe Israel “off the map.” He also dramatically accelerated Iran’s effort to build, buy, or steal the nuclear weapons necessary to bring about the end of days, in accordance with his Shiite Muslim theology.

The first public hint of just how central Islamic eschatology would be to Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy came during his first address to the

United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2005. Ahmadinejad stunned the audience of world leaders and diplomats by ending his speech with this prayer: “O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the Promised One, that perfect and pure human being, the One that will fill this world with justice and peace.”⁵

Back in Iran, Ahmadinejad then stunned a group of Islamic clerics by claiming that during his UN speech he was “surrounded by a light until the end” and that “all of a sudden the atmosphere changed there, and for 27 or 28 minutes all the leaders [in the audience] did not blink. . . . I am not exaggerating when I say they did not blink; it’s not an exaggeration, because I was looking. They were astonished, as if a hand held them there and made them sit. It had opened their eyes and ears for the message of the Islamic Republic.”⁶

The following month, Ahmadinejad gave a speech in Tehran in which he further clarified his objectives. “Is it possible for us to witness a world without America and Zionism?” he asked a gathering of terrorist leaders from such groups as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. “You had best know that this slogan and this goal are attainable, and surely can be achieved.” He then urged Muslims around the world to prepare for the day when “our holy hatred expands” and “strikes like a wave.”⁷

Six months later, Ahmadinejad upped the ante yet again, declaring in a nationally televised address that Iran had successfully enriched uranium and joined the “nuclear club,” leading a number of Western intelligence agencies and experts to predict that Iran could have operational nuclear weapons in the next two or three years—just in time for the Bush administration to leave office and, presumably, for the end of the world to begin.⁸

“TIME IS NOT ON OUR SIDE”

With Iran’s countdown to the apocalypse running, the stakes could not be higher.

Were Iran to smuggle nuclear bombs into the United States (across the Mexican border, for instance), entire American cities would be

vulnerable to cataclysmic terrorist attacks with little or no warning. Experts say the blast from a single ten-kiloton nuclear bomb in Washington, DC, for example, would destroy everything within a half mile of ground zero, contaminate 3,000 to 5,000 square miles with toxic levels of radiation, and kill 300,000 people within a matter of minutes.⁹

Were a similar bomb detonated in the heart of Times Square in New York City, a leading expert on nuclear terrorism says, “The blast would generate temperatures reaching into the tens of millions of degrees Fahrenheit. The resulting fireball and blast wave would instantaneously destroy the theater district, the *New York Times* building, Grand Central Terminal, and every other structure within a third of a mile of the point of detonation. . . . On a normal workday, more than half a million people crowd the area within a half-mile radius of Times Square. A noon detonation in midtown Manhattan could kill them all. Hundreds of thousands of others would die from collapsing buildings, fire, and fallout in the ensuing hours. The electromagnetic pulse generated by the blast would fry cell phones, radios, and other electronic communications. Hospitals, doctors, and emergency services would be overwhelmed by the wounded. Firefighters would be battling an uncontrolled ring of fires for many days thereafter.”¹⁰

Israel is even more vulnerable, given its small size and closer proximity to Iran. Were Iran, for example, able to equip high-speed ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad would suddenly be in position to accomplish in about six minutes what it took Adolf Hitler nearly six years to do—kill more than 6 million Jews. This appears to be just what Ahmadinejad has in mind when he says that Israel is “heading toward annihilation” and “one day will vanish.”¹¹

President Bush has warned that Iran is part of an “axis of evil” whose weapons of mass destruction pose “a grave and growing danger” to world peace and security. He cautions that the mullahs, or religious leaders, “could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. . . . Time is not on our side.”¹² The president insists that the U.S. will defend Israel militarily should an Iranian attack

come.¹³ What's more, he has pointedly refused to rule out preemptive nuclear strikes, insisting that in a worst-case scenario, "all options are on the table."¹⁴

Nor is President Bush alone in his concern over this gathering storm. Leading Democrats have also expressed grave concerns about the emerging Iranian nuclear threat, despite their misgivings about the administration's handling of the Iraq war.¹⁵ New York Democratic senator Hillary Rodham Clinton has warned that "a nuclear-armed Iran would shake the foundation of global security to its very core."¹⁶

Americans increasingly agree. Two out of three American adults view Iran as a security threat to the United States. Nearly nine out of ten Americans view Iran as a threat to Israel, while six in ten see the regime in Tehran as a threat to Europe. Moreover, nearly six in ten Americans believe it is inevitable that "Iran will use nuclear weapons against its enemies if it acquires the technology."¹⁷

"I THINK WE COULD HAVE ARMAGEDDON"

Stopping Iran from fulfilling its cataclysmic plans will not be easy.

Americans are deeply divided over whether the U.S. should take preemptive military action against Iran. What's more, even if the American president was to do so, Iranian leaders say "any invader will find Iran to be a burning Hell for them."¹⁸

If attacked, Iran has vowed to retaliate by unleashing a wave of 40,000 suicide bombers against American, Israeli, and European targets and into Iraq. The plan, which includes activating some fifty terrorist sleeper cells allegedly pre-positioned in the U.S., Canada, and Europe to use chemical and biological warfare against civilian and industrial targets, is ominously code-named Judgment Day.¹⁹

Also increasingly worrisome is the fact that Iran is steadily building an alliance with another nuclear power: Russia. Despite Ahmadinejad's incendiary rhetoric and provocative actions, Russian president Vladimir Putin has done little to stop Iran from going nuclear. To the contrary, Moscow has aggressively pursued ever-closer political, economic, and military ties to Tehran, in defiance of U.S. and European

protests. Putin and his team have systematically stymied international efforts to sanction the radical Islamic regime. They have also authorized the sale of nuclear technology to Iran, permitted the training of more than 1,000 Iranian nuclear scientists, and approved a billion-dollar arms deal to provide Ahmadinejad and the mullahs with the latest high-tech weaponry and air-defense systems, making the prospects for a preemptive attack by the West far more difficult.²⁰

In light of such developments, a number of world leaders are talking about the Iranian nuclear crisis in increasingly apocalyptic language.

British prime minister Tony Blair says he has been both stunned and sickened by the unprecedented nature of the threats emanating from Tehran. He has also strongly hinted that the West may eventually have to resort to the use of military force against Iran if diplomacy fails. Blair told leaders of a European summit that he felt a “real sense of revulsion” from Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric and said, “I have never come across a situation of the president of a country saying they want to wipe out—not that they’ve got a problem with, or an issue with, but want to wipe out another country. . . . Can you imagine a state like that with an attitude like that having nuclear weapons?”²¹

Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert has been more specific, saying Ahmadinejad “talks like Hitler” and is “a psychopath of the worst kind.” Olmert and his advisors are believed to be drawing up plans for a possible preemptive strike against Iran, saying, “God forbid that this man ever gets his hands on nuclear weapons.”²²

Israeli vice premier Shimon Peres, winner of the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize, has ratcheted up the rhetoric even further, saying that not only does Iran represent “the greatest danger” to world peace and security since the Nazis, but that “Ahmadinejad represents Satan” himself.²³

Still, it was Senator John McCain, the Arizona Republican widely touted as a possible future president of the United States, who may have been the most blunt about the implications of the developing crisis in the Middle East. Appearing on NBC’s *Meet the Press* in April of 2006, McCain warned that “there’s only one thing worse than using the option of military action, and that is the Iranians acquiring nuclear weapons.” If Iran gets the bomb, he says, “I think we could have Armageddon.”²⁴

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Senator McCain is well-known for straight talk and is highly respected for his experience on national-security and foreign-policy issues. He is not, however, known for alluding to the book of Revelation on national television, much less linking Middle East crises to biblical end-times prophecies. So when he did, heads naturally began to turn, and questions began to mount.

Soon after McCain's comments, I happened to have dinner with a high-ranking Arab government official visiting Washington. He knew I had worked for a number of U.S. and Israeli political leaders over the years. He also knew that I had written a series of political thrillers about the Middle East whose plotlines have had an eerie way of coming true. Someone had recently given him a copy of my book *The Ezekiel Option*, in which a dictator rises to power in Russia, Iran builds nuclear weapons, and then Russia and Iran form a military alliance—a nuclear alliance—vowing that Israel will be “wiped off the face of the map forever.”

“You wrote this all before Ahmadinejad came to power?” he asked me.

“Yes, sir.”

“And you based all this on a Bible prophecy?” he pressed, knowing, too, that I am an evangelical Christian from an Orthodox Jewish heritage.

“Yes, sir.”

“Which one?” he asked.

“It comes from the Jewish Scriptures, the book of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39,” I replied. “It’s what many refer to as the War of Gog and Magog.”

“And this prophecy says that in the end times, Russia and Iran will attack Israel?”

“Among other things, yes, it does,” I confirmed.

The leader, a Sunni Muslim, sat back and sighed. “Our world is threatening to destroy itself,” he said, openly worrying about the apocalyptic language of the Shiites coming out of Tehran. “Perhaps God has

given you the key to understanding what the future holds.” And then, to my surprise, he asked me to explain the story behind my novels, the prophecies that informed them, and the biblical view of what will happen in the Middle East in the last days.

I must confess I was hesitant at first. I certainly did not want to offend my new Muslim friend or the regime he so ably serves. But when he persisted, I proceeded to give him an executive summary of the book you now hold in your hands. He was not, after all, the only one who has raised questions about current events in the Middle East and how, if at all, they may relate to biblical prophecy. Indeed, in recent years, I have been invited to speak about such matters at the White House, on Capitol Hill, with U.S. and foreign ambassadors, and with high-ranking military and intelligence officials in the U.S. government and in a number of Middle Eastern governments, in addition to numerous media interviews.

My intent with *Epicenter* is not to persuade anyone of what is coming. Rather it is to explain how I came to write *The Last Jihad*, *The Last Days*, *The Ezekiel Option*, and *The Copper Scroll* and to answer the questions that have flowed from the novels and the prophecies upon which they were based.

Among them:

- Just how serious is the current nuclear crisis with Iran? Is there any way to avoid a direct military confrontation? Or is another cataclysmic Middle East war just around the corner? And if so, how will such a war change our world?
- Why is Russia selling arms and nuclear technology to Iran, given the seriousness of the present situation? Is there any way to encourage Moscow to use its influence to move Iran back from the brink? Have Russian leaders in the post-Soviet era given up their dreams of dominating the world, thus ensuring that the twenty-first century will be a time of global stability and security? Or is the Kremlin destined to lurch back to totalitarianism, rebuild its military, and once

again set its eye on the oil-rich nations of the Middle East, as it has so many times in the past?

- What is the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the post-Arafat world? What should we make of recent Israeli efforts to withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank? What effect will the rise of Hamas have on the peace process? Is there any hope for real peace and reconciliation between Israel and her neighbors in our lifetime?
- What is the future of Iraq in the post-Saddam world? Will the violence there simply go from bad to worse? Will our troops be bogged down there forever? Will Americans continue to sacrifice their lives there? Will regional instabilities continue to drive up the price of oil, threatening both the health and vitality of our own economy as well as the global economy? Or is there any real hope for peace and prosperity in Iraq, where the West has invested so much blood, sweat, and financial resources?
- Will a resurgent and increasingly radicalized Islamic movement establish the worldwide caliphate, or global empire, of which its leaders dream and for which they pray and fight? Is Islam really the world's fastest-growing religion, and will it soon overcome Christianity as the world's largest religion? Or can Christianity make a comeback, particularly in the Middle East—the land of its birth?

In the pages ahead, you will find answers to these and similar questions. Indeed, it is the premise of this book that the earthshaking events that lie ahead can actually be forecast with a surprising degree of accuracy.

In writing *Epicenter*, I have pored over previously classified intelligence documents, internal White House and State Department memos, thousands of U.S. and foreign news articles, scores of books and research studies by a wide array of government officials and private citizens, and the sacred writings of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the ancient Middle East. I have traveled to Israel, Egypt, Jordan,

Turkey, Morocco, and Russia. I have also interviewed political, military, intelligence, business, and religious leaders who live and work in the epicenter and are helping shape its future, including

- **Benjamin Netanyahu**, former Israeli prime minister
- **Shimon Peres**, former Israeli prime minister
- **Natan Sharansky**, former Israeli deputy prime minister
- **Ali Abdul Ameer Alawi**, Iraqi minister of finance
- **Sinan Al-Shabibi**, governor of Iraq's Central Bank
- **General Georges Sada**, senior advisor to Iraqi president Jalal Talabani and former senior military advisor to Saddam Hussein
- **Saeb Erekat**, chief Palestinian negotiator and senior advisor to Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas
- **General Nasser Youssef**, national security advisor to Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas
- **Abdul Salam al-Majali**, former Jordanian prime minister
- **Ahmed Abaddi**, advisor to Morocco's King Mohammed VI
- **Serge Berdugo**, advisor to Morocco's King Mohammed VI
- **Alexei Mitrofanov**, member of the Russian State Duma and chief political strategist for Russian ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy
- **Caspar Weinberger**, former secretary of defense under President Reagan
- Western and Middle Eastern intelligence officials, active and retired
- Western and Middle Eastern diplomats, active and retired
- Western oil executives working in the Middle East
- Russian government officials and political analysts
- Arab and Iranian political dissidents
- Arab and Iranian Christian leaders
- Messianic Jewish leaders in the U.S. and Israel.

Some of these spoke to me specifically for this book. Others spoke to me for other books and articles I have written over the years. Such

sources will not all agree with the analysis found in these pages, but I am exceedingly grateful for their valuable time and helpful insights. I have no doubt this book is richer for the assistance they provided.

Robert Kennedy was right. Like it or not, we live in interesting times. May you find this book as interesting to read as I have found to research and write.

Joel C. Rosenberg

WASHINGTON, DC

JUNE 2006









CHAPTER ONE: **PREDICTING THE FUTURE**

Few Americans will ever forget what they were doing on September 11, 2001, when they first heard the news that the United States was under attack by radical Islamic jihadists using jet planes on kamikaze missions. I certainly never will.

On that beautiful, sunny, crystal clear Tuesday morning, I was putting the finishing touches on my first novel, a political thriller called *The Last Jihad*, which opens with radical Islamic terrorists hijacking a jet plane and flying an attack mission into an American city. What's more, I was doing so in a town house barely fifteen minutes away from Washington Dulles International Airport, where American Airlines Flight 77 had just taken off. At that very moment, the plane was being seized and flown right over our home toward the Pentagon.

At the time, I had no idea anything unusual was under way. A literary agent in Manhattan had read the first three chapters of *Jihad* six months earlier. He was convinced that he could get it published and urged me to finish it as quickly as possible. Given that he worked for the agent who had discovered Tom Clancy back in the early 1980s, I took the advice seriously, working feverishly to get the book done before my savings account ran dry.

As had become my morning ritual, I had breakfast with my wife, Lynn, and our kids, threw on jeans and a T-shirt, and settled down to work on the novel's second-to-last chapter. I didn't have radio or television on. I was simply typing away on my laptop when, about an hour later, Lynn burst into the house and turned on the news. She quickly explained that after dropping off two of our kids at school, she had turned on the radio and heard that the World Trade Center had been hit by two planes. We turned on FOX News and saw the horror begin to unfold for ourselves.

We saw the smoke pouring out of the North Tower. We saw the constant replays of United Airlines Flight 175 plowing into the South Tower and erupting into a massive ball of fire. And then, before we could fully process it all, we saw the World Trade Center towers collapse.

People ask me what my first reaction was, but I don't recall thinking that my novel was coming true. I simply remember the feeling of shock. I had been to the top of the World Trade Center as a kid with my father, an architect who had grown up in Brooklyn and loved to show me the architectural landmarks of the city he loved. I had been at the top of the North Tower just a few weeks earlier for lunch at the Windows on the World restaurant. Now, before my eyes, these two testaments to man's engineering genius were gone, as were the lives of those trapped inside.

Then came the news that the Pentagon had been hit and word that the White House and the Capitol were being evacuated and rumors that *Air Force One* might be a target. Washington, the city that had become home for Lynn and me since our marriage in June of 1990, was suddenly under siege. Not a single commercial jet was in the air. Instead, fighter jets flew combat air patrols over the city. Troops were being deployed on the streets, along with armored personnel carriers, Avenger anti-aircraft missiles, and all kinds of military assets.

I remember calling friends at the White House and on Capitol Hill and my agent in New York, hoping for word that they were safe but unable to get through with so many phone lines jammed. I remember calling Steve Forbes at his office in Greenwich Village to see if he was

okay. Steve and I had worked together from 1996 through the 2000 Republican primaries and had traveled together to nearly forty states on almost every kind of plane imaginable, from a twin-engine prop over rural Georgia to a gleaming Gulfstream IV en route from Dallas to Newark to a series of jam-packed Southwest flights to who knows where. Was he on a commercial flight that morning? After repeated attempts to get through, I finally got his executive assistant on the line. Steve was safe, she said. He had been coming over one of the bridges into Manhattan when he actually saw the second plane hit. At that moment, his driver slammed on the brakes, spun the car around, and headed back to Steve's home.

Lynn and I got our boys back from school. Several friends came over to spend the day. We tracked events on television, e-mailed friends around the country and around the world with updates from Washington, and prayed for those directly affected by the crisis. We prayed for our president to have the wisdom to know what to do next. Were more attacks coming? Would there be a 9/12, a 9/13, a 9/14? Would there be a series of terrorist attacks, one after another, as Israel experienced for so many years?

It was not until sometime in late November or early December, I believe, that events began to settle enough for my thoughts to turn back to *The Last Jihad*. What was I supposed to do with it? My agent, Scott Miller at Trident Media Group in Manhattan, agreed that we could not very well send it to a New York-based publisher. We couldn't send it to *any* publisher. No one wanted a novel that opened with a kamikaze attack against an American city. It was no longer entertainment. It was too raw, too real. I stuck it in a drawer and tried to forget about it while I sought out new clients and tried to rebuild the communications-strategy company I had largely neglected for most of 2001.

And then something curious happened. My wife and I were watching the State of the Union address in January of 2002 when President Bush delivered his now-famous "axis of evil" line and warned Americans that the next war we might have to face could be with Saddam Hussein over terrorism and weapons of mass destruction:

Our second goal [after shutting down terrorist camps and bringing terrorists to justice] is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the eleventh. But we know their true nature. . . . Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens—leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. . . . States like these [including Iran and North Korea], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. . . . We'll be deliberate, yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events, while dangers gather.¹

Lynn and I looked at each other as if we were living in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. It was one thing to write a novel that opened with a kamikaze attack against America that essentially comes to pass. But until that moment, few people had been talking publicly about the possible necessity of going to war with Iraq. Except me. You see, as the plot of *The Last Jihad* unfolds, the FBI and CIA trace the trail of terror back to Baghdad, and suddenly the president of the United States and his senior advisors find themselves in a showdown with Saddam Hussein over terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Scott Miller called me the next day. “Do you work for the CIA?” he asked.

“No, of course not,” I assured him.

“Sure, sure,” he replied. “That’s what you’d have to say if you *did* work for the CIA and just couldn’t tell me.”

Scott was convinced that the dynamic had just changed dramatically. He believed publishers would now be very interested in *The Last Jihad*. The country had largely recovered from the initial shock of the 9/11 attacks. We were now on offense in Afghanistan against the Taliban, Osama bin Laden, and the forces of Al-Qaeda. People were reading everything they could get their hands on regarding the threat of radical Islam. Audiences were responding positively to the new movie *Black Hawk Down*, which took them inside the incredibly brave lives of U.S. special forces units operating in radical Islamic environments. And there were no other novels in print or on the horizon that could take readers inside the Oval Office and White House Situation Room as an American president and his war council wrestled over the morality of going to war against the regime of Saddam Hussein. As such, Scott wanted to move quickly.

I have to admit I was surprised at first. By then I had largely written off any hope of ever publishing *Jihad*. But Scott had a point. Even the most established and successful thriller writers were wrestling through what this new War on Terror might look like and how their fiction should reflect the new geopolitical realities in which radical Islam—not Communism—had suddenly become the new enemy. And even if they had begun writing entirely new novels based on post-9/11 scenarios on September 12, Scott noted that it would still take well over eighteen months before their novels would hit the market. Mine was already done. Almost, anyway.

Jihad needed a few tweaks. For one thing, I needed to acknowledge that 9/11 had already happened. Why? Well, imagine yourself as an aspiring young writer in the spring of 1941 who wakes up one day thinking, *What if I write my first novel about a Japanese surprise attack on the United States that leads to a nuclear war between Washington and Tokyo?* Then imagine that on the very day you are finishing your novel, you hear the horrifying news about the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, followed by the president of the United States describing December 7 as “a day that will live in infamy.” No matter how prescient your book might seem, it would be a little odd to publish your novel without at least letting your readers know that you were not

sleepwalking through history, that you understood that real life had suddenly become stranger than fiction.

This was essentially the scenario I found myself facing. I added a few lines into the first chapter explaining that the 9/11 attacks had happened during President Bush's tenure in office and the Taliban had been obliterated, but Iraq had not been dealt with directly (which at the time, of course, was true). I gave President Bush two terms in office and noted that Vice President Dick Cheney had no interest in running, thus positioning my fictional President James MacPherson to succeed Mr. Bush in 2009, just as America was beginning to catch its collective breath from the War on Terror. That, I hoped, would give readers a bit of real-world context as I invited them to slip into my fictional world—a world, as it turned out, that was about to be overtaken by actual events.

By February, Scott had a deal in place with Tor/Forge Books, a thriller imprint connected to St. Martin's Press, which scheduled *Jihad* for an April 2003 release. 2003? I should have been elated. After all, I had been dreaming about writing novels and screenplays since I was eight years old, and now I had my first book deal. But to be honest, I was more than a little concerned about getting the novel out before more of its story actually came to pass in the real world. A year is a lifetime in domestic politics and an eternity in geopolitics. A war with Iraq could be over by then. What interest would there be in a novel like mine *after* Saddam had been toppled from power?

Even after signing the contract, I continually had to remind myself that the New York publishing industry was a vastly different animal from the Washington political world I was so immersed in, that my editors were smart and capable people who knew what they were doing, that everything was going to be fine, and that patience was a virtue. It was all true, but irrelevant. By August of 2002, every molecule in my body was shaking with the conviction that regime change in Iraq would be complete before *Jihad* ever saw the light of day.

Reading between the lines of speeches and comments made by President Bush and senior administration officials and listening carefully to the nuanced comments made by my friends in the White

House and on Capitol Hill, I became convinced that President Bush was going to use his September 12 speech to the fall session of the United Nations General Assembly to lay down the gauntlet vis-à-vis Iraq. Nothing had been made public yet, and the sources I was using for my weekly column in *World* magazine steadfastly refused to confirm my instincts. But if I was right, I knew that a vote authorizing the use of force against Iraq could well come before Christmas.

The timing would be eerily similar to the chain of events in the fall of 1990 that had led President Bush 41 to begin major combat operations in Iraq and Kuwait on January 16, 1991. Could Bush 43 be looking at a January or February strike date? If he was, a ferocious national and international debate was imminent. The entire world would soon be wrestling with the morality of going to war with Iraq. The debate would likely reach a fever pitch by November and December, and fighting could break out soon thereafter.

On vacation with my family in Colorado, I called Scott back in New York and explained my sense of the geopolitical landscape. I asked if there was any way he could persuade our publisher to move up the release date. He was sympathetic and said he would take a run at it, but warned me not to get my hopes up. After all, the novel hadn't been printed yet. It hadn't even been edited. Or put in the publisher's catalog. The sales team wasn't yet aware it existed. No bookstores had committed to stocking it, nor had they even been approached. And that was just the beginning of hurdles that lay ahead.

A few days later Scott called me back. To his surprise, the publisher's top executives were intrigued with my analysis of the Iraq situation. They understood the stakes and were willing to do whatever was necessary to get the book to market, but it was not their decision alone to make. Even if they could physically produce books by November at the earliest, if they could not persuade at least one major book chain to stock it, the issue was moot.

What happened next could be a book in itself. But three quick points are important for our story: First, President Bush did, in fact, use his September 12 speech to lay down the gauntlet for Saddam and the international community. Second, my friend Sean Hannity graciously

agreed to have me on his radio and television show on the day of *The Last Jihad*'s release. And third, Barnes & Noble quickly agreed to stock the book for the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Hanukkah seasons.

They were taking a risk, to be sure. No one had ever heard of me or my book. And though I had helped a number of business, media, and political leaders with their books over the years, I had no sales record of my own. Still, with its "ripped from the headlines" feel and the promise of Sean Hannity's massive audience (some 10 million people) hearing about the book, *The Last Jihad* at least had a chance of finding an audience. Once B&N placed an order, other major stores and chains did too.

The publisher's decision to get the book out before the U.S. went to war with Iraq paid off. When *The Last Jihad* was released on November 23, 2002, the book caught fire. It sold out in most stores in less than twenty-four hours and prompted nine reprintings before Christmas. In less than sixty days, I was interviewed on more than 160 radio and TV talk shows, including Rush Limbaugh's. The questions were less about the novel itself than the story behind the novel. How could I possibly have written a novel that seemed to foreshadow coming events? Did I work for the CIA? Did I have friends at the Pentagon slipping me inside information? And far more important, what did my mysterious crystal ball say would happen next?

As media coverage surged, so did sales. *Jihad* quickly hit #1 on Amazon.com, #4 on the *Wall Street Journal* hardcover fiction best-seller list, and #7 on the *New York Times* list. It stayed on the *Times* list for eleven weeks. Was it a fluke? Did I get lucky? Or was there something else going on?

"MODERN NOSTRADAMUS"

In January 2003, my publisher asked if I would like to write another book.

Sure, I thought, *it beats working*. But I felt compelled to caution them that I could not guarantee a second novel would have the same "ripped from the headlines" feel as *Jihad*. After all, I would most likely be writing about events set *after* a U.S.-led war in Iraq, *after* the collapse

of Saddam Hussein's regime, and *after* the emergence of a democratic and pro-Western provisional government in Iraq. None of this had actually happened yet, nor was there any guarantee that any of it would ever happen. There were numerous diplomatic initiatives under way in Europe and the Arab world trying desperately to prevent a war, and President Bush himself was saying he hoped hostilities could be avoided.

Apparently unconcerned, the publisher gave me a green light to move forward with my second book.

On March 19, 2003, the U.S. did, in fact, launch a war against Iraq.

I turned in the manuscript of *The Last Days* in late July. When it was released on October 21, 2003, it quickly became a national best seller. But what intrigued people most was not the prose or the characters. It was the sense that *The Last Days*, like *The Last Jihad* before it, was somehow telegraphing future events.

The novel opens with the death of Yasser Arafat and an American president pushing for peace and democracy in the Middle East in the messy aftermath of a brutal war in Iraq. The first pages put readers inside a U.S. convoy filled with diplomats and CIA officials heading into Gaza as part of the peace process when it is suddenly attacked in a massive explosion.

On October 15, 2003, fiction seemed to morph into reality.

"U.S. Convoy in Gaza Bombed" read the *Haaretz* headline.

"Explosion Targets CIA Convoy in Gaza" read the *Jerusalem Post* headline.

"A massive explosion ripped apart a U.S. diplomatic vehicle Wednesday, killing three Americans and wounding one in the first attack on a U.S. target in three years of Israel-Palestinian fighting," reported the Associated Press. "The attack was condemned by Palestinian officials who said those killed were members of a U.S. monitoring team sent to the region to supervise implementation of a U.S.-backed peace plan."²

There was no way the terrorists could have used my book as a blueprint for their murderous plans. It did not hit bookstores for another six days. But the event triggered an avalanche of media interest.

Over the next few weeks, I did hundreds of radio, TV, and print interviews, including *CNN Headline News*, MSNBC, CBN, and the *New York Times*. *U.S. News & World Report* published a story describing me as a “modern Nostradamus.” Paul Bedard, the magazine’s political columnist, wrote:

It’s getting a little weird being Joel Rosenberg, the *New York Times* bestseller of terrorism thrillers and speechwriter in Steve Forbes’s 2000 presidential campaign. First, he wrote *The Last Jihad* about a terrorist’s kamikaze attack on a U.S. city and the subsequent hunt for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. That was well before 9/11. Now he has written *The Last Days*, which opens with a Palestinian attack on a U.S. convoy, just like what happened a few weeks back. And look out, Yasser Arafat: Rosenberg offs you on Page 28.³

A year later, Arafat was dead.

It happened November 11, 2004. I remember it distinctly, as I was in Turkey doing research for my next novel when I got a call from my publicist back in Washington. No sooner had news of Arafat’s death hit the wires than he had a stack of interview requests from radio talk-show hosts who had interviewed me when *The Last Days* was published. They were convinced the book was coming true and were curious to know what I thought would happen next.

What would the post-Arafat world look like? Could a moderate, pro-democratic, pro-Western leader now emerge, someone able and willing to make peace with Israel? Or would radical Islamic jihadists seize control of the West Bank and Gaza? Or were the Palestinians doomed to suffer a bloody civil war as various factions battled it out for supremacy?

I spent the rest of the day doing U.S. radio interviews from the phone in my hotel room, noting that any one of those scenarios was possible, but that the first thing to watch for was the outbreak of internecine violence and the emergence of an atmosphere of chaos.

In *The Last Days*, a fictional CIA expert sends a top-secret e-mail enti-

tled “Possible Palestinian civil war erupting” to the president. He warns that the “battle to succeed Arafat could be brutal” and urges top administration officials to “watch for PLO factions to mobilize” against one another. As the novel unfolds, the warnings come to pass, top Palestinian officials are assassinated, and the West Bank and Gaza sink into anarchy.

Once again, fiction soon became fact. On November 14, the Associated Press reported that “militants firing assault rifles burst into a mourning tent for Yasser Arafat . . . just moments after the arrival of the Palestinian leader’s temporary successor, Mahmoud Abbas, forcing security guards to whisk him away to safety. The shooting, which killed two security guards and wounded six other people, raised grave concerns about a violent power struggle in the post-Arafat era.”⁴

The next day an Asian news service ran this headline: “**Civil War Looms over Palestine after Arafat’s Death.**” An Israeli news service ran a headline that read “**Rival Gangs Violently Vie for Control in PA**” [Palestinian Authority].⁵

By the end of the week, Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qorei was demanding that “armed chaos must cease. Armed demonstrations must cease. Everybody must respect law and order.”⁶ But few were listening.

In the end, several years of chaos played into the hands of Hamas, which took over the Palestinian Authority in January 2006, not long after President Bush decided to make democracy in the Middle East the centerpiece of his second-term agenda.⁷

“A LITTLE EERIE”

My third political thriller was *The Ezekiel Option*.

Picking up where *The Last Days* left off, it centered on a dictator rising to power in post-Soviet Russia. Iran is feverishly trying to acquire nuclear weapons. Then Russia and Iran begin to form a military alliance—a nuclear alliance—with a coalition of Islamic countries who unleash an apocalyptic attack against Israel, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war.

The Ezekiel Option was set for release on June 27, 2005, this time

from Tyndale House Publishers. But Sean Hannity, who had asked me to be on his radio program the day it launched, as he had for both of my other novels, was leaving for vacation that week. He asked if I could reschedule the interview for Friday, June 24. Grateful for his continuing support, I readily agreed and we set the interview for 5:30 p.m. eastern. My public-relations team quickly booked additional radio interviews for me following Hannity, and Tyndale made June 24 the new official launch date. What caught everyone off guard, however, was the series of events that would unfold that particular day.

“It’s a little eerie, Joel,” Sean said as the interview began, noting that my past two novels had “run parallel with modern events” and that I was scaring him with the plotline of this new one. “So Saddam’s gone. Arafat’s dead. An American president and his advisors are pushing hard for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. All hell is breaking loose around the world, and a dictatorship begins rising out of Russia. Well, what’s the news about Vladimir Putin today?”⁸

Sure enough, just before we went on the air, Matt Drudge posted a link to a breaking Associated Press story out of Moscow: **“Putin Amendment May Allow Third Term.”**

According to the story, legislative allies of the Russian president were “considering an electoral amendment next week that could open the way for [Putin] to run for a third term, prompting the opposition to accuse his supporters of trying to cling to power.” The article went on to say that “speculation has been rife that Putin would seek to stay in power beyond 2008” and noted that “during his time in power, Putin has placed national television under effective state control, abolished the direct election of regional governors to make them virtual Kremlin appointees, and eliminated the right of independent lawmakers to run for parliament.”⁹

I summarized the AP story for the listening audience, then said, “You know, Sean, I was in Moscow last fall doing research for this novel, and I met with top Russian officials, U.S. Embassy officials, and Russian political analysts, and I asked them, ‘Do you believe that Putin is going to leave office in 2008?’ Every single one of them said yes—yet each of them had just spent the last hour convincing me of all the differ-

ent things Putin was doing to consolidate power. Now, my character [in *Option*] is not Putin. But he feels like Putin, and I think there's an interesting question whether Putin is really a friend of the United States. I know that President Bush has looked into his soul [and found him trustworthy]. I think, though, the president—to be fair—is reevaluating that right now because Putin has been allowing nuclear technology to be sold to Iran, the worst terror state on the planet.”

“Well, that’s part of your book, too,” Sean pointed out. “You write about a dictatorship rising in Russia and Iran feverishly pursuing nuclear weapons. . . . I don’t know where you get all this from. You’ve got, like, a blessing over your head because every time you write a book it just seems to fit in with modern events, and that happened with your last two novels and now it’s happening here.”

He was referring to the fact that on the exact same day, a radical Islamic hard-liner named Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had just won a landslide victory to become president of Iran, vowing to build a “powerful Islamic society,” defy Israel and the United States, and accelerate Iran’s bid to become a nuclear power.¹⁰ Western government officials and political analysts were both stunned and alarmed by Ahmadinejad’s rapid rise to power and the implications of his victory for regional security.¹¹

But not the Kremlin. Putin immediately congratulated the new Iranian president-elect and said Moscow was eager to continue selling nuclear technology and research facilities to Tehran. “The construction of the Bushehr nuclear plant [in Iran] is near an end, and we are ready to continue cooperation with Iran in the nuclear energy sphere,” Putin said in a letter to Ahmadinejad released by the Kremlin, adding that the development of Russian-Iranian nuclear ties “contributes to global peace and stability.”¹²

SADDAM’S NOVEL, AND MINE

If all this were not “coincidence” enough for one day, a new story out of Amman, Jordan, suddenly popped up on the Associated Press wires with a headline that read “**Novel Written by Saddam to Be Published.**”¹³ Curious, I scanned the article and was stunned to learn that

Saddam had actually finished writing a political thriller on March 18, 2003, just one day before coalition forces invaded Iraq.

To be sure, Saddam's title was punchier than mine—*Get Out, Damned One*. But the parallels between our two novels were curious, to say the least. Not only had Saddam written about an apocalyptic war in the Middle East in which a coalition of Arab Muslims square off against the Jews and the Christians, but the central character of his novel was a Jew named Ezekiel, and the novel was coming out the same week as my own. "The story is apparently a metaphor about a Zionist-Christian plot against Arabs and Muslims," noted the AP. "Ezekiel is meant to symbolize the Jews."

Michael Reagan asked me about the story when I appeared on his nationally syndicated radio show later that night. He had previously praised *The Last Days*, calling it "a gutsy new breed of political thriller—almost prophetically forecasting what you'll read in tomorrow's headlines." But this was surreal. It was one thing to release a novel about the rise of a Russian dictator forming a nuclear alliance with Iran on the very day the world was discussing Vladimir Putin's latest power grab and the election of an Iranian hard-liner vowing to go nuclear with Russian technology. But it was quite another thing to be publishing mirror-opposite novels with the likes of the Butcher of Baghdad.

FICTION OR REALITY?

I should note here that my novels do not precisely match the events that have actually unfolded in real life. While *The Last Jihad*, for example, does open with a kamikaze attack on an American city, my fictional terrorists use a private business jet rather than commercial jumbo jets, and they fly their murderous mission into Denver, not the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. Likewise, while *The Last Days* does open with the death of Yasser Arafat, in the novel he is assassinated, while in real life it is believed he died of natural causes. Moreover, in the novel, Mahmoud Abbas is assassinated as well, rather than succeeding Arafat as the head of the Palestinian Authority, as he did in real life.

That said, however, these and other differences between fact and

fiction have not seemed to dampen people's interest in my novels. To the contrary, each new political earthquake in the Middle East and Russia has spurred even more interest. By the end of 2005, I had given hundreds of media interviews. I had addressed audiences of CEOs, university students, church groups, and foreign diplomats in more than two dozen cities across the U.S., Canada, and the Middle East. I'd even delivered a talk on politics, prophecy, and the last days at the White House. And book sales soared.

When you write your first novel, you just hope your parents can find a copy at a bookstore within a hundred miles of their house. But suddenly there were more than one million copies of these novels in print. Thousands more were being printed in Holland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey, with Hebrew, Russian, and Romanian editions in development. The books had spent month after month on the *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-seller lists.

"How are you doing this?" people wanted to know. "Is there a secret formula? Do you have a crystal ball? And what do you think is going to happen next?"

The *Dallas Morning News* called me "eerily prophetic." A *Washington Times* profile said my novels felt "ripped from the headlines—tomorrow's headlines." A radio talk-show host in Las Vegas said, "Your books are amazing. They're uncanny. It's like you can predict the future. Could you come out to Vegas to do a book signing and then help people with the blackjack tables?" (I politely declined.) And nearly every radio host would begin the interview by citing the *U.S. News & World Report* story calling me a "modern Nostradamus."

The truth, of course, is that I am neither a psychic nor a clairvoyant. I do not call Miss Cleo in the middle of the night to get my plot ideas. But it isn't luck—dumb, blind, or otherwise. There is a reason these books seem to have predicted the future. There is a way to connect the dots, to anticipate future headlines, and in the chapters ahead, I will explain what is coming, how I know, and why it matters.

But first I want to share with you some background on how I was originally introduced to a 2,500-year-old prophecy that seems to be coming to fulfillment before our eyes.

EPICENTER 2.0: INTRODUCTION TO THE SOFTCOVER EDITION

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CHAPTER 2: THE GENESIS OF JIHAD

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The first page of his first novel—*The Last Jihad*—puts readers inside the cockpit of a hijacked jet, coming in on a kamikaze attack into an American city, which leads to a war with Saddam Hussein over weapons of mass destruction. Yet it was written before 9/11 and published before the actual war with Iraq. *The Last Jihad* spent eleven weeks on the *New*

York Times hardcover fiction best-seller list, reaching as high as #7. It raced up the *USA Today* and *Publishers Weekly* best-seller lists, hit #4 on the *Wall Street Journal* list, and hit #1 on Amazon.com.

His second thriller—*The Last Days*—opens with the death of Yasser Arafat and a U.S. diplomatic convoy ambushed in Gaza. Two weeks before *The Last Days* was published in hardcover, a U.S. diplomatic convoy was ambushed in Gaza. Thirteen months later, Yasser Arafat was dead. *The Last Days* spent four weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover fiction best-seller list, hit #5 on the *Denver Post* list, and hit #8 on the *Dallas Morning News* list. Both books have been optioned by a Hollywood producer.

The Ezekiel Option centers on a dictator rising in Russia who forms a military alliance with the leaders of Iran as they feverishly pursue nuclear weapons and threaten to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. On the very day it was published in June 2005, Iran elected a new leader who vowed to accelerate the country's nuclear program and later threatened to "wipe Israel off the map." Six months after it was published, Moscow signed a \$1 billion arms deal with Tehran. *The Ezekiel Option* spent four weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover fiction best-seller list and five months on the Christian Bookseller Association best-seller list, reaching as high as #4. It won the 2006 Christian Book Award for fiction.

In *The Copper Scroll*, an ancient scroll describes unimaginable treasures worth untold billions buried in the hills east of Jerusalem and under the Holy City itself—treasures that could come from the Second Temple and whose discovery could lead to the building of the Third Temple and a war of biblical proportions. One month after it was released, *Biblical Archaeology Review* published a story describing the real-life, intensified hunt for the treasures of the actual Copper Scroll. *The Copper Scroll* spent four weeks on the *New York Times* hardcover fiction best-seller list, two weeks on the *Wall Street Journal* best-seller list, two weeks on the *Publishers Weekly* hardcover fiction list, and several months on the CBA best-seller list. It won the 2007 Logos Bookstores Best Fiction Award.

In *Dead Heat*, America is in the midst of a heated presidential elec-

tion when the Secret Service learns of a catastrophic terrorist plot to assassinate one of the candidates. U.S. forces attempt to stop the terrorists before millions lose their lives, but events threaten to spin out of control. *Dead Heat* debuted at #4 on the *New York Times* hardcover best-seller list. It also became a *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and CBA hardcover best seller.

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