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**The Bear Is Sleeping. It Is Not Dead
(Who's Really Orchestrating the Middle East)**

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By A. Pierre Guillermin

Dr. Guillermin is President Emeritus of Liberty University.

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The politics of the Middle East can be murky and confusing. But one thing is increasingly certain, the eyes of the nations are upon the Middle East , the epicenter of the momentous events shaking our world and shaping our future.

*Just how serious is the current nuclear crisis with Iran?

*Why is Russia selling parts and nuclear technology to Iran?

*What is the future of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in the post-Arafat world?

*Will a resurgent and increasingly radicalized Islamic Movement establish the world wide caliphate or global empire?

The premise underlying my presentation this evening is found in a book entitled "EPICENTER" written by New York Times best selling author Joel C. Rosenberg. In his book the author proposes a scenario based upon exclusive interviews with top political, military, intelligence, business and religious leaders in Israel, Iran, Iraq and Russia, previously classified documents from the CIA, the Pentagon, and the White House. The scenario which the author describes is similar to events foreseen as possibilities discussed in a meeting in Israel several years ago when eleven men met in an undisclosed location to discuss world events and the Middle East. Four of those men either had served or would eventually serve as Prime Ministers of Israel.

As a guest of the Israeli Government at that time I was invited to attend this meeting.

Since that meeting I have been intrigued by the accuracy of the information discussed and the possibilities that were examined as they have unfolded over the years and seem to be evolving today.

For this reason, I have chosen to present a conspectus of the author's research and the information presented in his book. The opinions of the author are not necessarily those of tonight's speaker but do they do warrant further consideration.

Several years ago a document was penned offering an analysis specifically describing the rise of a military alliance between Russia, Iran and a group of other Islamic countries, that would eventually target the

Middle East in general and Israel in particular driving the world to the brink of global war.

The document offered no policy prescriptions for preventing such a Russian-led threat against the Middle East and U.S. interests in the region.

At first glance, the theory seemed ludicrous:

- *In the 1990's Russia was hardly a threat to the U.S. anymore, much less to Israel; nor was it likely to become one for some time.
- *The "Evil Empire" had just collapsed like a house of cards. Its military machine was being withdrawn from Eastern Europe. Its missiles were being dismantled. More than a million Jews were pouring out of the Soviet Republics and heading to Israel.
- *The Kremlin barely had important economic ties to Iran, much less a military alliance and its relations with the rest of the Arab and Islamic world were at best, on hold as it dealt with its own serious internal turmoil.

*Moreover, the United States and Washington's military and economic ties to Jerusalem were stronger than ever.

However, in their 1996 book entitled **The Next War** former defense secretary Casper Weinberger and coauthor Peter Schweizer, (a scholar at Stanford's Hoover Institute), laid out five scenarios for current and future planners and policy makers to consider in the post- Soviet world.

Among them:

1. An ultra-nationalist seizes control of Russia to reconquer the former soviet empire.
2. A nuclear-armed Iran launches a new war in the Persian Gulf and initiates a wave of radical Islamic terrorism across Europe and the United States.

A brief look at these two scenarios reveals some interesting possibilities.

The fact is extraordinary changes are under way in Russia and the former Soviet Union. There is no doubt that Russians became significantly freer after the Soviet flag was lowered over the Kremlin for the last time on Christmas day 1991. But it is becoming increasingly clear that the tide of freedom is going out. The remarkable season of political, economic and religious freedom that had begun with Boris Yeltsin has been systematically coming to an end under the reign of Yeltsin's handpicked successor Vladimir Putin. The image Putin has tried to cast is one of stability. His approach has been "elect me" and I will be tough on the terrorists, tough on the billionaire oligarches, tough on the Russian Mafia.

Personal freedoms are evaporating in Russia and Putin is centralizing all power to himself. In a recent documentary even CNN referred to Putin becoming the new Czar for a New Russia.

Putin has said:

“under current conditions, the system of executive power in the country should not just be adapted to operating in a crisis situation, but should be radically restructured in order to strengthen the unity of the country.”

An illustration of his centralizing power is Putin’s use of the pretext of the terrorists attacks to implement plans for a “radically restructured” political system. Over the past several years Putin has steadily turned the clock back on Russian democracy, centralizing power back to the Kremlin and himself.

He has nationalized Russian television networks and has essentially banned all negative stories about himself on national television.

He has thrown political opponents in prison on suspect charges, or driven them to exile or frightened them into silence.

He has all but threatened to seize and nationalize one of Russia's largest petroleum companies and announced the eighty-nine regional governors will no longer be popularly elected but rather appointed by the Kremlin. Interestingly, even former Soviet Leader Mikhail Gorbachev supports Putin. Gorbachev said in December: "President Vladimir Putin has pulled Russia out of chaos, and is assured a place in history."

Gorbachev's endorsement of Putin, who recently won broad support in parliamentary elections , comes despite Gorbachev's acknowledgment that current news media suppression and election rules in Russia run counter to the democracy he promoted.

To be sure the situation in Russia isn't nearly as bad today as it was during the cold war.

Putin has done some things right.

That said, the trends are disturbing and a growing number of Kremlin watchers (both inside and outside Russia) are beginning to connect the dots.

Let me give you an example. We have learned that our government actually had a remarkable amount of information at their finger tips prior to 9/11.

Too few in leadership actually believed that such evil was possible.

The nature of the attacks that would be carried out against the United States was beyond the ability of our intelligence agencies to imagine. They had the dots. They simply could not connect them, at least not in time.

Let us connect some of the dots of events as they are unfolding in the Middle East pertaining to Russia's involvement.

In Putin's own words he declared:

“ First and foremost, it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Ten of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory.”

When Putin looks out over the vast expanse of the twentieth century, he believes that the disintegration of the “Evil Empire” ranks as the “greatest political catastrophe of the century” and that reintegration and synchronization is a matter of “historical destiny.”

To underscore Putin’s plans he has announced a 40% increase in the Russian Military budget and the development of a new class of Russian strategic nuclear missiles.

Today, even the biggest skeptic would have to admit that a military alliance between Russia and Iran is emerging for the first time in history.

Economic and political ties between Russia and Iran began to develop steadily in the 1990's.

Over time, the nature of the relationship has become clearer as evidenced by media headlines:

- *Russia plans more nuclear power plants in Iran
(Wash. Post July 27,2002)
- *New railway to link Russia and Iran via Azerbaijan
(Agence France-Presse, May 22,2004)
- *Putin defends arms sales to Syria, Iran
(Associated Press, April 28, 2005)
- *Iran regards Russia as possible partner to build
20 Nuclear power plants
(MosNews. Com, Sept 13, 2005)
- *Russia agrees to \$1 Billion arms deal with Iran
(Associated Press, Dec 2, 2005)

What makes all this so troubling, of course, is that the Kremlin is providing arms, funds, and technological assistance to the most dangerous Islamic terrorist regime in the world.

In an October 6, 1988 address to the Islamic

Revolutionary Guards, the former President of Iran, Rafsanjani, made the country's nuclear intentions very clear. He said: "We should fully equip ourselves both in the offensive and defensive use of chemical bacteriological and radiological weapons."

In 1989 Rafsanjani was elected President of Iran where he served until 1997. Lest there be any doubt of his intentions, on December 14, 2001 the Iranian Press Service ran a story entitled: "Rafsanjani said the Muslims should use Nuclear Weapons against Israel." Rafsanjani ran for the Presidency of Iran again in 2005. He was defeated by the even more hard-line and anti-semitic Ahmadinejad, who vowed to accelerate Iran's nuclear program.

Ahmadinedjad is the person who said on October 27,

2005 that: "Israel should be wiped off the map"

One of the top Iran experts in the Mossad, Israel's primary foreign intelligence agency, (the Israeli version of the CIA) said:

"The regime in Iran first and foremost is against the United States, not Israel. Israel is just a tool to get to the U.S. Israel is the little Satan. You are the great Satan, remember the Iranians invented the chess board. They are planning three or four moves ahead."

In his book Three Cups of Tea, best selling author Greg Mortenson gives us insight into the Islamic planning for the future. He writes "In the December 2000 Saudi publication Ain-Al Yaqeen reported that one of four major proselytizing organizations (Al Haramain Foundation) had built 1,100 mosques, schools and

Islamic Centers in.... Muslim countries.”

“The International Islamic Relief Organization which the 9/11 Commission accused of directly supporting the Taliban and Al Qaeda completed the construction of three thousand eight hundred mosques, spent \$ 45 million on Islamic Education and employed six thousand teachers throughout the same period.

By 2001, a World Bank study estimated that at least twenty thousand madrassas were teaching as many as 2 million students in one Islamic country alone.

Ahmed Rashid, perhaps the leading authority on the link between madrassa education and the rise of extremist Islam, estimated that more than eighty thousand of these young madrassa students became Taliban recruits.”

“Certainly not every madrassa is a hotbed of

extremism, but the world bank concluded that 15 to 20 percent of madrassa students were receiving military training, along with a curriculum that emphasized jihad and hatred of the west. “

The key to understanding Islamic strategy is they are “churning out generation after generation of brainwashed students and thinking twenty, forty, even sixty years ahead to a time when their armies of extremism will have the numbers to swarm over the world.”(Three Cups of Tea, G. Mortenson)

A top advisor to the Iranian President recently said:

“ a clash between Islam and the West is inevitable and we must be prepared.”

Interestingly, what we do know for sure is that Russia is helping to speed up the process not slow it down.

Russia has two interests in Iran. First they want to

resurrect the supposed glory of the Soviet Union and second they want stability and economic power.

Russia wants an empire and to get one they need to establish “special relationships” with Arab and Islamic regimes in the Middle East who they can use as their agents of influence.

Should we expect Russian influence throughout the Islamic world to increase dramatically?

From 1948 to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviets were main backers of the Arab threat to Israel but they were never able to secure Iran as an ally until now.

Iran is pivotal in Russian thinking. It is a major regional power in its own right and it is a gateway into the rest of the Middle East.

Ahmadinejad has told friends that he believes the way

to hasten the arrival of the Islamic messiah is to unleash an global holy war against Christians and Jews and to annihilate the U. S. and Israel.

The best way to understand this brand of Shite thinking is to listen to an Iranian journalist Amir Taheri, who use to serve as the executive editor of Kayan, Iran's largest daily newspaper. Taheri says that President Ahmadinejad claims to have disappeared for several hours to have a secret meeting with the Islamic messiah, a figure known as the Twelfth Iman or Mahdi...according to Shia lore, the Iman is a messianic figure who although in hiding, remains the true Sovereign of the world.

“Ahmadinejad claims that the Imam gave him the presidency for a single task: “providing a clash of civilizations in which the Muslim world, led by Iran, takes on the infidel west, lead by the United States and defeats it.”

The coming of the Twelfth Imam is never mentioned in the Koran. It stems from supposed sayings of Mohammed. Not all Muslims share this brand of belief nor do the Shites. But Ahmadinejad and his close aids and advisors leave no doubt that they are driven by this belief that the Islamic messiah will appear in the near future. and by launching a war to annihilate the United States & Israel they can hasten the day to accomplish this purpose. While it is clear Iran is definitely moving in this direction Russia has its own agenda. Let's again connect some of the dots.

No sooner had Putin settled himself into office in 2000 he started to rebuild Russia's tattered alliance in the Middle East.

*In August of that year Putin welcomed Yasser Arafat to Moscow.

*By spring of 2001 Putin Welcomed the Iranian President Khatami to Moscow.

*In December of 2001 The Russian leader welcomed Ethiopian Prime Minister (Mele Zenawi) to the Kremlin.

*In September 2003 Putin welcomed Saudi Arabia's crown prince Abdul Aziz to Moscow.

*Putin traveled to Malaysia to address the Organization of Islamic Conference to call upon the OIC to accept Russia as a member given that about one in seven Russian citizens (about 20 million people) are Muslims. He noted that in 1991 Russia had only 870 mosques while today there are more than 7000.

*In October 2004 Putin accepted Iran's invitation to visit Tehran.

*In February 2005 Putin sent Russian troops to Sudan with the express purpose to support "peace keeping" efforts but Russia had been arming the radical Islamic regime in Khartoum for years as had the Iranians.

*In April 2005 Putin became the first Russian leader in more than forty years to visit Egypt. In the same April 2005 trip, Putin became the first leader of Russia or the Soviet Union ever to visit Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

*In January 2006 Putin extended an invitation to the newly elected Hamas leadership to visit Moscow for high level talks and again offered to sell the Palestinians new arms.

On and on it goes. Every week it seems new headlines appear with fresh evidence of Putin's Islamic Initiative, building alliances not only with Iran but with many other countries such as Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey.

Headlines continue to support this perception:

- *Ethiopia has saved up money for Russian Arms,
(Kommersant, January 13, 2005)
- * Russia says its ready to arm Saudi Arabia
(Moscow Times, February 10. 2005)
- * Russia sell Missiles to Syria
(London Telegraph, February 17, 2005)
- * Iranian President cements Syrian Alliance
(Associated Press, January 19, 2006)
- * Iran, Turkey Ink Security Agreement
(Islamic Republic News Agency (-Iran)
(February 22, 2006)
- *In March 2006, Putin became the first Russian leader since the collapse of the Soviet Union to visit Algeria.

There he signed a 7.5 billion deal to sell arms to the North African nation, a deal one Russian military analyst called “ the biggest military contract signed by the post- Soviet Russia.

*In an address to a conference in Moscow called the "Strategic Outlook: Russian and the Islamic World" Putin urged "close cooperation...pooling our efforts with the Muslim of the Middle East would be a top Russian priority."

What does all this mean?" There is no question at this point in time Putin has concluded it is in Russia's vital interests to build a political, military, and economic alliance with the Arab and Islamic world, regardless of the risks such an alliance poses to Moscow's relationship with London or Washington.

Considering such alliances it appears there are serious implications for the United States and the Middle East. While Putin has not yet tipped his hand about specific designs on Israel there are men around him who have.

One such leader is the current deputy speaker of the State Duma, one of the highest ranking political leaders in the Russian government and a strategic ally of Putin. In his book, written in 1993, he details his plans for expanding the Russian empire to the south:

“ The operation should be carried out using the code name ‘Final Thrust to the South’...Russia reaching the shores of the Indian ocean and the Mediterranean Sea is a task that will be the salvation of the Russian nation...”.

For years the Chairman of the Geopolitical Committee of the Duma(Alexel Mitrofanov,) roughly the equivalent of the U.S. House Foreign Relations Committee has been carefully and quietly helping Putin move in this direction.

He has said: “ We are pragmaticRussia is in danger of collapsing within ten years...Gorbachev made foolish decisions. He lost the whole empire for -nothing....Russians want a strong dictator.”

Putin in December of 2007 tapped (Dmitry Medvedev) as his successor who in turned called for the popular President to return as Prime Minister after the March 2 election- a shuffling of Kremlin duties that would keep the main levers of power in Putin’s hands.

The announcement was a major development from the Kremlin. Interestingly, If the new President should resign Prime Minister Putin would serve out his term and potentially could be elected president for another decade.

Russia must control five countries in order to have quiet borders - Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey.

Why these countries? Because he wants to rebuild the Byzantine Empire.

It should be noted that this would include a lot more land than just those five counties. It would include Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel.

Why would Russia be so interested in Israel other than its being in the way of their establishing the Byzantine Empire?

The simple fact is Israel is in the process of discovering massive reserves of oil and gas.

But oil is not the only attraction to Israel. Israel has already become enormously wealthy....far wealthier than her immediate neighbors.

Despite a population of only 6-7 million people, Israel has become an economic powerhouse, one of the world's high-tech leaders and a magnet for foreign investment.

Netanyahu (Ariel Sharon's finance minister and former Prime Minister of Israel indicated in 2005 that:

“ In ten years Israel could be one of the ten richest countries in the world”

Since the times of Czar Peter the Great, Russian leaders have had designs on central Asia and the Near East.

Previously classified documents reveal that Moscow has on more than one occasion planned direct Russian invasions of Israel.

For example, When Begin was Prime Minister of Israel he went public with a story that prior to that time had been known only to the upper echelons of Israel and U.S. intelligence.

The Israeli Defense Forces, he explained, had uncovered a secret but massive cache of Soviet weaponry in deep underground tunnels in Lebanon.

Begin said that Israeli intelligence had underestimated the Russian threat. He conceded that neither he nor his colleagues had any idea of the extent to which the Soviets were orchestrating the Middle East events from behind the scenes. Some respected historians and diplomats have disputed the notion that the Soviets have their eyes on Israel.

But is it possible that while the world's attention has been focused on the troubles in Iran, Iraq and Al Qaeda for the last several years the future of the world is being shaped by Russia?

While evidence available from declassified documents and interviews may not yet be conclusive, it is a compelling possibility and one of which we should all be aware as we connect the dots in the Middle East. The "Bear sleeping. It is not dead." The Russian Bear that is. ##

This paper is a conspectus of the book entitled **Epicenter** written by New York best -selling author, Joel C. Rosenberg. Information presented is quoted directly from the book and referenced in the author's endnotes except as identified in this document.