

# What Will Be

by

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Andy clicked his keys, one by one, as he slid them around the split wire loop hanging from his belt. Then he pulled the spring loaded cable out about an inch and let it slap back into the holder. Click, click, click, zzzzip, pop.

It was a nervous habit, but one he only indulged in when dealing with troublesome tenants or when he was feeling a little anxious about a task, such as changing the light bulbs in the big chandelier in the entry foyer.

Today, it was the insistent way Mrs. Johnson was badgering him about her neighbors down the hall.

She was a nice enough old lady, not as intrusive in others' business as some lonely widows in their Rodgers Park building. But today, she would stand for nothing less than Andy opening the door to 345 and checking on Mike, the tenant that she had adopted during his six months in the building. Andy stared down at his steel-toed boots, the leather laces knotted together where they had broken so many times.

"I'm telling you, Andy, it's just not right. Out for his run at 5:45 in the morning, checks his mail at 2 exactly. He's as regular as clockwork, and I haven't seen hide nor hair of him for a week, just after he came down with that terrible cough."

Click, click, click, Zzzzip, pop. Andy shuffled his feet under his government surplus gray metal desk in the tiny corner of the subbasement he called his office. He hated doing apartment entries without checking with the building manager, but Mr. Burglesman was out of town.

Andy ran his finger around the edge of his green Dickies pants pocket. The seam, worn and frayed, was soft under his fingers. With another couple of paychecks he'd be able to afford a new set of work clothes, his once a year replacement, as long as he could get it on sale. He knew he'd never be rich enough to buy things at regular price. He knew he was one of the invisible ones, the people that kept everything running. The ones that regular people never heard about, cared about, or talked to unless one of the things everyone took for granted suddenly ceased running clean water, cooking their food or lighting their rooms.

"Kate, I really need to fix that sticky toilet handle in 402." Andy pleaded, knowing that his resistance was beginning to crumble.

He really liked Kate. She was one of the good tenants. She kept up her place, and didn't complain about every little thing that comes part-in-parcel with living in an older, albeit spacious, apartment building. She remembered his name for all the right reasons, not like some, who just wanted to make their tirades more effective by being personal. She even brought him home baked cookies every year on his birthday. In exchange, Andy said nothing about the bird feeder she kept on her windowsill.

"Andy, we need to make sure he's all right. He could be terribly ill and need to see a doctor."

Mrs. Katherine Johnson, Kate to all who knew her, felt obligated to look after Mike since shortly after he moved in. He helped her carry a heavy package, and in their ensuing conversation, she'd learned that he had no family in the area, and his only friends were the De Paul students in his study group who stopped by occasionally.

"And Lord knows," she told Andy, "those young men wouldn't know the first thing about taking care of themselves. Last week, they were all sick, coughing so loudly I could hear them down the hall, and now, poof, they're as quiet as church mice."

She paused, tilted her head down and looked at Andy over the top of her reading glasses. "Andy, I'm worried. What will happen to us if they are terribly ill and we've done nothing?"

Andy thought back to the hell he'd lived through after Mrs. Crocker had passed away and nobody had found her for three days. What a mess that had been. Coroners, questions, and a cleanup job that he didn't want to repeat.

The keys clicked, clicked, then stopped. Andy looked up at her, his right eyebrow higher than the left, in that asynchronous way he had of twisting up his face. He decided that it would be better to take a look now, and ask forgiveness later, than to deal with the aftermath if there really was a problem, and he'd ignored her pleas.

"OK Kate," he said quietly, "let's go take a look."

"Oh, Andy, I knew you'd come around, you're such a dear. Just let me stop by my place and pick up the bowl of soup I've got ready for him." She scurried out of Andy's office and headed for the elevator.

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Andy rapped on the door a second time, this time using his key ring for emphasis. "Hello, Mike? It's Andy and Kate. Are you OK in there?" Silence was his only reply. "OK, Mike, we're coming in to see if you're OK." Andy turned the master key in the lock, slowly opened the door, took a few cautious steps, and looked around, his eyes sluggishly adjusting to the dim light.

Kate made a beeline for the kitchen around the corner and turned on the light.

"Oh, these poor boys," she exclaimed. "They just don't know how to keep a home." The kitchen sink was filled with take out boxes from Mr. Wong's Chinese place down the block, the trash overflowed with Evian bottles and Welch's juice containers.

Andy flipped on the exhaust fan in the kitchen, as the funk of the apartment started to overcome him. It was the pervasive, heavy, clawing sourness of unkept bachelor pads the world over.

Kate turned to Andy, then her eyes grew wide. "Mike," she gasped, "are you OK? Where have you been?"

Andy turned, and there was Mike, staggering into the apartment, steadying himself against the wall. He looked haggard, his skin gray, but his eyes were bright with intensity.

Mike coughed into his right hand, a long, deep, devastating cough. "Hello Kate, hello Andy." His voice was scratchy, and caught halfway through Andy's name. He shook their hands in turn.

"Is everything OK?" he asked in a soft and weakened rendition of his slightly tilted English.

Andy stiffened, immediately on the defensive. He was in a tenant's apartment with no mechanical failure to justify his presence. He braced himself for the inevitable righteously indignant verbal assault. Kate sensed his apprehension and leapt into the breach.

"Mike, it's wonderful to see you. I was so worried. I haven't seen you for a week. The last I saw you, remember last Thursday, you had such a terrible cough. And the rest of the boys did too. We just stopped in to check on you. Are you all right? Are the boys all right?"

Mike smiled wanly. "Yes, Kate, I'm fine, it's just a little chest cold." He coughed deeply, without fully covering his mouth. He paused, gathered his strength, and stood up to his full height. "I'll be fine," he said firmly.

Kate fought the urge to put Mike to bed, clean the apartment, and sit up half the night with him. She could see that would not be appropriate for someone so private as Mike, and besides, Andy was getting more uncomfortable by the minute. She could see that Mike was ambulatory, and was relieved that her worst fears had been unfounded.

She pushed the hot bowl of soup into his hands. "Well, I'm worried about you. Now sit down and eat this homemade chicken soup. Keep yourself warm, and drink lots of liquids. I'll be just down the hall, and you knock on my door or call me if there is anything, and I mean anything, I can do for you."

Mike coughed again, shook both their hands, and thanked them profusely for being such good neighbors as he ushered them out into the hallway.

As he closed the door, he glanced at his watch.

Based on their tests in the Sudan, he had 12 more hours of viability for transmission. It was enough time for one more round trip flight out of O'Hare, this one to Seattle and back.

He paused for another long, racking cough. It was getting harder to breathe, and his strength was ebbing.

He'd been much stronger earlier in the week at the Radiological Society of North America convention at the massive McCormick Place convention center. He'd had no trouble walking the miles of aisles on the trade show floor, carefully coughing into his fist to activate his hand before every handshake. His legs had carried him easily up the stairs of the three-story GE Medical Systems exhibit, a complete reproduction of a diagnostic imaging center. He'd had plenty of strength to sit through hours of lectures in rooms tightly packed with thought leaders, scientists and practitioners from across the United States.

He knew that by now they would all be back at their hospitals, meeting with senior staff, their mild, but highly contagious cough just beginning. The thousands of manufacturers' sales representatives would be back on their routes, spreading the sickness to X-Ray, Ultrasound, MR, CT and PET technicians. The technicians formed the backbone of diagnostic imaging, a primary component of the American medical system, and were critical to identifying and controlling any widespread outbreak of disease.

Mike put the bowl of soup on the kitchen table, then walked down the hall to check on the others. He was glad he was coming up on his last round trip flight. He'd been at the convention all day, and on round trip flights all night, for a week. He checked his face in the hallway mirror. His reflection told him he couldn't take much more.

He checked the first bedroom. Abdul and his brother were already gone. They had spread hemorrhagic fever. Everyone knew they would die first. The others were in the final stages of their diseases, except for Mohammed, who was strong and fresh in his isolation room.

"Have you stayed away from everyone?" Mike asked him through the door.

"Yes, I am still OK." Mohammed replied.

"Good. It is time for you to infect the California dairy herds. They will be easy for you; they have tens of thousands of cattle in concentrated areas. Don't return. We are all terminal, and our bodies will soon be discovered."

"Yes, it is Allah's will," said Mohammed.

Mohammed had been concentrating on the dairy cattle and feeder lots of beef cows in the Southeast up to now. He'd spent a few days among the herds in the Midwest, but they knew that the freezing temperatures of the coming Winter would soon stunt that outbreak. Nonetheless, the team felt it was a worthwhile diversionary tactic to confuse and overwhelm the small stores of antidote and even smaller levels of nationwide veterinary resources. He only had a few days to expose the California herds before the highly contagious outbreak would begin wiping out the beef and dairy herds behind him, like a creeping arc of death, from Florida through Iowa and down to Southern California.

"I must go to O'Hare now, it is my final round trip," said Abdul-Abbas, known as Mike to the neighbors.

Their calculations projected that due to the highly mobile and interactive nature of the population, over three quarters of the people in the United States would be exposed to the diseases in another four to five days. Based on their tests, they expected a 40 to 70% fatality rate, depending on age, health, and which pathogen, or combination of pathogens, the subject contracted. Coupled with the disruption of the food supply caused by Mohammed, the ensuing panic and social disorder would provide a perfect prelude to what was to follow.

Though it was often said that terrorism is the nuclear weapon of the poor, Abdul-Abbas was in Chicago to deliver an even more powerful form of destruction. While nuclear weapons could kill millions, his weapons could kill entire countries, even entire cultures. With his weapons, they would cleanse the earth of the scourge of the infidels. He and his team took great pride in being the first step in Allah's final revenge on a world that had held Islam in abeyance and ridicule for so long.

Being well educated at American universities, his team knew the Islamic civilization had once led the world in medicine, science, astronomy, math, philosophy, government and military power. They also knew that excluding oil exports, the entire Arab world of 280 million people currently produced as much value in annual exports as Finland, with only three million people. The Islamic world had seen nothing but decline into irrelevance since the age of the Western Renaissance. The Arab world had become economic colonies of the West, replete with puppet governments awash in corruption.

He knew Western propagandists claimed Islam's decline was due to internal, structural and cultural factors such as subjugation of women, lack of a separation between church and state, lack of a religious reformation, lack of a single overall Islamic spokesman or leader, rejection of the scientific method, internecine warfare, and even lack of embracing democracy. Abdul-Abbas and his team knew these were all lies. Every true believer knew the failure of the Islamic societies was due solely to the treachery of the enemies of the Prophet. It had been a grand conspiracy against Islam since the moment the Prophet Mohammed received the final, full, perfect revelation of Allah's word, superceding the earlier incomplete, flawed revelations to the Jews and the Christians.

They would right these wrongs. They would restore the glory of Islam. Abdul-Abbas and his fellow warriors were the tip of the sword in the Jihad to reverse these centuries of injustices.

The borders, governments and societies imposed on his world by the British and the French carving up the Islamic Ottoman Empire after WWI had failed his people. Abdul-Abbas' team would restore the Islamic Empire that once stretched from Spain to India. Unlike the Ottomans, they would not be stopped at the gates of Vienna. They would use their great weapons to wipe out the infidels, sweep away the false governments of the Middle East, and bring the majesty and righteousness of true Islam to all of the Empire, all of Europe and all of the world.

They had learned the lessons of history. They were not weak like their forefathers. Unlike Saladin, the great Muslim leader who had provided safe passage for Christian pilgrims to the holy sites during the crusades; and the great empire of the Ottoman Turks, which tolerated and protected minority communities of Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews; they would offer a simple choice: accept Allah as the one true God, or die.

First, they would exterminate the crusader Franks of Europe and America, in all their decadence. Next, they would purge the pagan Africans, Catholic Latin America, and the Orthodox Russians. Then they would eliminate the multi-theistic, heathen Hindus. At last they would have the godless Confucians surrounded.

"The enemy of my enemy is my friend," was the old Arab proverb. Once all the common enemies were gone, they would cleanse the last civilization that opposed Allah. Although the Confucians had been of great assistance to their cause, Mike took special pleasure at the thought of their smug smiles being wiped away by onrushing waves of holy warriors. They had a special surprise in store for the Confucians.

Then, at last, all of the world would be dar-al-Islam, the world of Islam, the world of peace. The remainder without Islam, dar-al-harb, the world of war, would be eliminated forever.

"Allahu Akbar," Mohammed said proudly.

"Allahu Akbar," agreed Abdul-Abbas. Yes, it's true. He and his team were living proof of Allahu Akbar: Allah is more powerful than the enemy. He turned and walked out of the apartment.

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Five days later, Skip Tanner propped his \$400 Ray Ban Predator sunglasses up on his \$100 haircut. He scanned the parking lot and checked his \$14,000 Rolex Daytona watch again. Exactly two minutes had passed since his last check of the time. He flipped his glasses back down and dug the toe of his \$400 Bruno Magli loafers into the end of the dock.

"These friggin' doctors," he muttered. "They always make you wait. Why is their time the only time that matters?" he steamed.

He was waiting for Dr. Sampson, a big shot radiologist from Scripps Hospital.

He'd just sold Sampson a beautiful 45-foot Bayliner last month, but now he was hot to buy something bigger and more expensive. It seems Dr. Sampson had been showing off his new toy when another doctor had pulled alongside with a 55-foot SeaRay.

"These idiots never seem to learn that there will always be a bigger boat," mused Skip. "But, after all," he thought, "that's what keeps me in business, my butt in Ferraris, my luscious Cindy in all those haute couture threads, and my special hot tamale, Christina, waiting for me at the beach house down at Baja Mar."

He turned his gaze out over the bay and spotted a familiar boat.

"Hi ya sucker," Skip said under his breath, as he raised his hand in a laconic wave.

The captain of the 40-foot cruiser motoring past barely looked his way.

"Doesn't look like the guy I sold the boat to. Probably doesn't recognize me." Skip thought.

"Strange dude," he reflected. "Didn't worry much about cost or condition, just wanted something with twin screws and an extra large diving platform on the back."

As the cruiser moved past him into San Diego Bay, Skip saw that the diving platform sticking off the stern of the boat was filled with a large chest of some type. Skip figured it must be a giant electric beer cooler, judging by the cables running from the chest into the boat. "Must be setting up for a helluva party, you could put 30 cases in that thing," he thought.

Just over the top of the chest, he could see they'd renamed the boat. It was the Bottoms Up III when Skip had sold it. Now it was named the "al-Saffah."

"Wonder what al-Saffah means?" pondered Skip.

The boat moved into the harbor and turned to starboard, putting it on a course directly between the John C. Stennis and the Nimitz, two of the Navy's nuclear powered aircraft carriers that were moored across the bay from San Diego, America's seventh largest city.

The Carl Vinson and the Reagan were moored behind the Nimitz. It was the first time since September of 2002 that all four carriers were in their home port at the same time.

With the carriers, cruisers, destroyers, Marine assault ships, logistics support ships, office buildings, and the only shipbuilding and repair facilities on the West coast, a huge portion of the Pacific fleet's capabilities lined the shores of the bay. Very few civilians realized how strategically vital San Diego's assets were to the Navy and the nation. Without them, the U.S. was incapable of projecting influence over the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf.

Skip noticed a small, black, inflatable boat near one of the carriers move toward the al-Saffah.

"Probably SEALs," Skip thought. Their headquarters was on the other side of Coronado Island, a couple of miles from the carriers. He'd met a few of those guys before, tough sons-a-bitches. He didn't doubt the stories he'd heard of their exploits. All those Special Forces types creeped Skip out. He didn't like anybody who had a secret he didn't know about.

At that moment, an Asian guy come up from the forward cabin of the boat, reached into the chest mounted at the rear, then stood up and turned toward the city skyline. Right behind him appeared some dude in a robe.

Skip swore to himself, "looks like the friggin' Ayatollah." Skip had never seen anyone with a full beard and turban in person before.

The turban wearer turned toward the carriers, and started screaming. Skip couldn't make it out, but all the words sounded like they started with A. Two words, over and over.

Then everything went white.

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At the same time, about 100 miles North in Long Beach harbor, Benny Stevenson was spinning up his South Korean manufactured crane loaded with another stack of 40-foot cargo containers just in from Shanghai. Benny, due to his seniority, was operating one of the two new cranes, the biggest in the harbor. They'd had a contest in the local schools to name them; Benny's was "The Big Dipper." It could offload the 6,000 shipping containers on this 400-foot ship in a couple of days.

Benny was thinking about his jerk of a supervisor, Brian Peterson, and how he'd denied half of the sick time the crew had submitted the previous pay period. As union steward, Benny hated management, but he particularly hated Peterson. Ever since the strike, Peterson had memorized the contract, knew it better than the union's lawyers, and enforced it ruthlessly.

Benny spent almost all day, every day, trying to think of a way to set up Peterson and get him eliminated. If there was just some way they could lure him out into the stacks of the 4.5 million containers that passed through America's busiest port every year, they could make it happen. It would be just another accident, identical to the ones that happened out here every day, and made the longshoreman's work among the most dangerous of trades.

As he lifted the stack of containers over into the receiving line, something bright off to the North caught his eye. From his perch up on the crane, some 200 feet above the docks, he had a good view of Long Beach. On some crisp, clear Winter days, he could see the mountains to the North, East and South that ringed the Los Angeles Basin. The mountains trapped the air, the soup of pollution it contained, and the 13 million people who breathed it, in the big bowl of LA's geography.

As he looked North, he saw a plume of black smoke rise up. "Close to Santa Monica," he thought.

The stack he was moving touched the ground. The top container suddenly exploded with the force of tens thousand tons of TNT. The center of the container was a solid mass of simple conventional explosive, but the outer layer, the payoff, was a mixture of radioactive materials.

The payoff included 400 ounces of strontium-90 and plutonium-238 salvaged from abandoned Soviet era generators used to power remote lighthouses and communication towers. These two elements were the most deadly, requiring the victim to breathe only one-third of a millionth of an ounce per lethal cancer-causing dose. Added to this was cesium-137 sourced from a British pharmaceutical firm. The cesium emitted highly penetrating gamma rays, which only concrete or lead could stop. More importantly, it was highly reactive. It instantly bonded with soil, wood and concrete and would resist any and all cleanup efforts. The last ingredient was one ton of radioactive waste procured in Turkey, primarily cobalt-60 from scrapped medical devices, a source of intense gamma radiation. With half-lives ranging from 5 years for the cobalt to 87 years for the plutonium, the payoff provided high lethality, extreme resistance to removal, and enough longevity to prevent use of the area for decades.

The conventional explosives vaporized the layer of lead lining the interior of the shipping container that prevented detection during shipment. The radioactive material, blasted into the air and mixed with the dust from the explosion, was carried aloft with the expanding plume of smoke. Reliable West winds that blew in off the ocean carried it eastward, with gusts fanning it out over the Southern half of the Los Angeles area.

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Ariel Sharon pounded the podium again, rattling the microphone taped to its top.

"We will restore Greater Israel!" he thundered, driving his clenched fist into the polished wood, nearly splitting it from the force of the blow.

"Your settlement is another step along this journey, the journey that will restore Judea and Samaria to our children and our grandchildren."

He paused for the raucous applause from the crowd of Gush Emunim, a small sect of ultra-orthodox Jews who were the vanguard of the settlement movement here in the West Bank. Sharon knew they believed that no Israel existed without the ancient Holy Lands. To them, an Israel without Hebron, seat of the ancient Israeli kingdom, along with Jerusalem, Jericho, Nablus and the Jordan River, was an empty, meaningless shell. Politically, it would be as soulless as a United States without the original 13 colonies. Spiritually, it would be as hollow as Catholicism without the Vatican. They would restore the Holy Lands, seized by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Six Day war, to the house of Israel. It was their birthright.

"No person, no terrorist, no leader and no nation will stop us!" he concluded with his trademark phrase, guaranteed to bring waves of applause and shouts of approval from the 500 residents of this new settlement. Each new village of settlers became a fact on the ground, and was another statement of defiance to the outside world. A world that was unanimous in demanding the cessation of settlement establishment, and the dismantlement of the villages that had been built on confiscated Palestinian land.

Every Arab knew peace was not possible as long as Israeli villages festered like open wounds in the Palestinian territories, thus Sharon's endless efforts to build and sustain them. Only through the settlements, the ceaseless conflict they engendered, and his consequential ascension to and retention of power, could he guarantee that the West Bank would remain in its rightful place as the heart of Greater Israel.

The Gush Emunim and Sharon ignored the fact that the Gaza strip and the West Bank were assigned to the Palestinians, both native dwellers and those uprooted from the rest of Palestine, when the U.N. created Israel in 1948; just as the leaders of the terrorist groups Hamas and the Hezbollah chose to ignore Israel's right to exist granted under the same charter.

Sharon waved as he stepped down from the podium into his phalanx of bodyguards.

As the applause continued, they walked through the corridor of 50 Israeli Army guards, a small percentage of the thousands of troops required to safeguard the settlements that formed the cornerstone of Sharon's policy of a slow, steady reclaiming of Greater Israel.

It was one of the great ironies of Israeli life that not a single one of the soldiers guarding the settlements was an ultra-orthodox Jew, a Haredim. The Haredim forbade their men and women from serving in the Israeli military or participating in the Israeli secular state. None of the men worked. Instead, they spent their time studying the holy laws. The Haredim had used their disproportionate political influence in the fragmented Israeli political system to create government subsidies that supported their schools and their lifestyles.

The Haredim, and especially the fanatical Gush Emunim, were key to Sharon's ability to govern. He had a long history of using them, and their political aims, to retain power, as they used him to achieve the steps their Rabbis told them were necessary to enable the coming of the messiah and achieve redemption. Sharon knew he needed them, probably more than they needed him.

Michael, one of the premier's top aides, suddenly rushed to his side. Simultaneously, his security detail drew their weapons and formed a tighter perimeter as they rushed, pushed and pulled the premier into his armored limousine.

"Sir," Michael half shouted, "Sir, we've got a situation."

"What is it? Another bus? How many dead?" Sharon asked. They all knew that by the number of dead, he was asking strictly for the number of Israelis Jews. He never wanted Israeli Arabs or even foreign tourists, Jew or Christian, included in these body counts.

"No sir, not a bus. It's bigger than a bus." Michael said, with an edge to his voice that brought Sharon up in his seat.

"The Mossad reports that Washington, New York and San Diego have each experienced 10 to 15 megaton events. Los Angeles had two dirty bombs detonated that irradiated the metropolitan area." Michael looked directly into Sharon's eyes as he delivered this news. There was no discernable reaction.

Sharon was thinking "San Diego, why the hell did they do San Diego? The Arabs don't care about San Diego. What the hell is there but perfect weather and... ah, the Pacific carrier fleet. But that's a strategic military target. Why would the Arabs want to take out the carriers?"

"Well, those stupid goyin bastards have finally learned what these Arabs are all about." Sharon replied, not a blink to betray his thoughts. "I warned them the biologicals were just a prelude."

Another aide picked up the alert phone that suddenly jangled to life and handed it to Sharon. This must be our turn, thought Michael, as that line was for strategic alerts only.

Sharon's face went gray, and Michael knew it was going to be bad. He clenched his gut, as he had learned to do as a fighter pilot to prevent blackouts in high G turns. He felt a high G maneuver coming, although the car was moving no faster than 170 kilometers per hour as it hurtled toward the helicopter pad.

"Wrath of David. Alpha, Niner, Foxtrot, Tango, Alpha." Sharon said quickly, reading the code from the card his aide displayed for him, then handed back the phone.

"Tel Aviv is gone." He said, and then stared out window.

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Li's pen tapped against the briefing book. Tap, tap, tap. It hadn't even been opened. The other committee members, knowing when to follow a lead, had kept theirs closed as well.

Colonel Xang, the briefing officer, feeling the full weight of the presentation upon him, was sweating profusely in response to the undiluted focus of the committee, and especially Li, with those famous piercing eyes.

"Go on." Li prompted.

"The Israeli response effectively decapitated or neutralized all Arab governments and militaries in the region. Islamabad, Cairo, Riyadh, Istanbul, Damascus, Amman, Tehran, even Baghdad, which we are assuming was due to old targeting data that had not been updated. From what we can tell so far, coupled with the effects of the American targets and India's blanketing of Pakistan, only a handful of ministers and nothing larger than a battalion exists anywhere in the Islamic area.

## What Will Be

The strategic petroleum assets are mostly intact, although it will take some time to rebuild the infrastructure sabotaged by the opposition forces in Iraq.

We are estimating that New Delhi is at 90% and Bombay at 75% of target effectiveness. The Pakistani weapons had good yield, but they suffered second stage failure on one launch and had target radius of probability errors on another. Social chaos between the surviving 80 million Muslims and 600 million Hindus is projected to result in another 100-200 million reduction in India's population. We don't consider her a significant strategic threat for 5 to 10 years, but we have plan Xau ready in case she recovers more quickly.

The Americans' ability to tie the nuclear signature of the Washington, New York and San Diego devices to our Korean program has led to the complete annihilation of the area above the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The targeting and execution was very effective. We don't feel there will be a significant refugee infiltration of our sealed border; especially after the biologicals we have in effect there run their course.

The remaining American forces pulled back to defend what is left of their homeland. There will be no force projection from them for the lifetimes of their major weapon systems. They will be in Russian mode, watching their fleets, armor and missiles rust away. They will not be able to afford to maintain what they've got or replace anything of significance.

Mexico's repudiation of the treaty of 1848 and declaration of sovereignty over their illegally seized Northwest territories has been endorsed by our block in the new Federation of Nations. The military parade in Mexico City including our medium and long-range mobile nuclear missiles has effectively frozen the Americans. The widespread availability of firearms in the U.S. enabled the majority of the Hispanic residents to be a very effective guerilla force supporting the return of the territories. We expect the restoration of the Northwestern territories to Mexico within the next 12 months. The addition of the former Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and what remains of California will make our friends in Mexico one of our largest trading partners.

Between social and economic chaos, military asset degradation and the Hispanic civil war, America is finished as a strategic player.

Japan and the Western European populations who survived the biologicals have all fallen into line in exchange for a guarantee of oil supplies from our new holdings in the Middle East.

Russia has so far shown compliance with our mutual non-aggression pact. We do not believe she is a short-term threat to us and will instead focus on consolidating her influence over the former Soviet Union. We believe she will stay on course for economic recovery. The staff consensus is that we will need to move against her in 15 to 20 years.

On the economic front, we expect a 40% to 50% dip in total exports in the next two to three years, but our growth projections for the Asian, Russian and Latin American markets will quickly recover that, and more, within 10 years. Longer term, we show Africa recovering from the loss of two generations to AIDS and becoming one of our largest export markets in 50 to 75 years."

Xang paused, then advanced to the next slide on the laptop computer, the image projected on a giant screen that dominated the dark paneled room.

"In conclusion, we have effectively overcome our two greatest challenges.

First, we have burst the demographic bubble in the Islamic population that proved to be the West's undoing. We project the percentage of the Islamic population between the ages of 15 and 30 will be down from the previous 50% for a span of three decades to under 30% for the same period. We have also arrested the explosion in the overall growth of the Islamic population, with projections for 2020 down from 460 million to about 200 million.

Second, and most importantly, we have found an effective way to employ and export the 100 million un-marryable surplus young men in our population as a rebuilding and occupying force in our new Middle East territories. Net of mortality and inter-marriage with foreigners, we estimate no more than 20 million of this troublesome demographic segment will remain.”

Xang clicked on the remote and the last slide wiped onto the projection screen. He took a final breath, not quite believing that he’d made it through the entire presentation without a career limiting stumble or one of Li’s infamous barbecues.

“The Demographic Adjustment Program, aside from a few minor details of flawed or inadequate execution by our foreign partners, has been a complete success.”

Xang flushed briefly, then waited, the sweat dripping from the back of his neck forming a small, meandering rivulet running down between his shoulder blades.

After what seemed an eternity, Li blinked and said “Excellent, thank you Colonel Xang, you may go.”

Xang bowed, saluted smartly, rotated on the ball of his left foot, and marched toward the exit.

He was just reaching for the door, and the sweet freedom that lay beyond it, when Li said, ever so softly, “Colonel, one last question.”

Xang pivoted and snapped to attention. “Yes sir.”

Xang knew this was it, the famous Li barbeque. He’d heard so many different types described, he had no way to prepare himself. Direct frontal attack; a long series of coldly logical questions leading up to a damning conclusion; a few tangential inquiries, seemingly innocuous, then the full heat of the flame; Li was famous for them all. No one’s career had ever survived a Li barbeque. It was why the entire staff called Li “The Cook.”

Li’s pen counted out its rhythm, tap, tap, tap. “Colonel, to what does the general staff attribute our success?”

Xang began to speak, but before he got the first syllable out, Li cut him off.

“And you can forgo us the traditional recitation of the glory of the Central Committee on Demographic Adjustment and its leader.”

Xang stopped. He was in big trouble now, as he was planning to use the time he took to recite the glories of the committee and Li’s brilliance to form his thoughts for the inevitable follow on questions. He found it hard to form words. He began to imagine he couldn’t get them out around the barbeque spit being slowly inserted down his throat.

“Colonel,” Li prompted gently.

Xang caught his breath. He felt he would be all right if he could just get a few words out. “Yes, well, the staff considered the following primary factors for our success.”

That was enough to break the ice, he had some momentum now, and perhaps he could survive this after all.

“First, the historical blindness and global cultural imperialism of the Americans and the Europeans. They assumed that their culture was the ultimate manifestation of human development, and all other peoples would gladly give up everything they had known for millennia for the chance to have an elected government, a Mercedes in the garage, and a McDonalds on every corner. They were blind to the power of loyalties to family, tribe, religion, and ancient traditions.

Second, the hubris of the right. Their bluster and conceit blinded them to the power and influence of competing political entities and viewpoints. To the depths of their souls, they believed that the purity and superiority of their political and religious perspectives gave them the divine right to dominate and determine the fate of others. This prevented them from forming and sustaining effective coalitions, and from recognizing and understanding the values, capabilities, mores and motives of competing stakeholders, governments and civilizations.

Third, the pacifism of the left. Their brief half-century of peace, enabled by American military power, seduced them into a Chamberlain perspective that any appeasement, any accommodation, was worth exchanging for any amount of peace. This enabled our Korean and the Russian’s Iranian nuclear programs to bear fruit, and the biological and chemical programs of Korea, Iran, Sudan, Syria, and the rest, to reach full capability and lethality. The pacifists’ lack of perspective and will doomed non-proliferation and peace. They assumed all societies were content with peaceful means of evolution and with living under the yoke of the irrelevant international political relics of WWII such as the U.N. Most importantly, they wanted peace, but lacked the political will to enforce it, and in so doing, created the very ingredients of their own destruction.

Fourth, the combination of the Islamic demographic bubble of millions of young, unemployed men and the slow water torture of nightly news coverage of Israelis killing Palestinians. The fundamentalist Islamists...”

“Colonel,” Li interrupted.

Xang didn’t move, speak or breathe.

Tap, tap, tap. Li continued to set a tempo, as steady as a metronome.

Suddenly the tapping stopped.

“Colonel,” Li intoned, “I believe you and your staff missed the most important factor in our success.”

“Yes sir, what would that be sir?” Xang asked, trying not to sound too much like a prisoner with his head on the chopping block, pleading for mercy.

Li bored holes through Xang with those laser spot eyes and replied, “Ours is the superior race.”

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## What Will Be

Suggested discussion points for *What Will Be*:

1. The contrast of compassion and ruthlessness, trust and treachery. Is it better to trust others or to remain suspicious, isolated and remote?
2. What are the expectations of everyday life, i.e. lights, water, heat, etc.? How does it feel when these fail?
3. The asymmetric nature of terrorist warfare. Can a modern nation state defeat terrorism?
4. Potential delivery methods and targets of weapons of mass destruction. How can we reduce the vulnerabilities?
5. What are the differences in American and European cultures and worldviews? What are the similarities?
6. What are the primary differences between Western and other world cultures? How many of these differences are known by each culture? Which cause conflict?
7. The relative cultural isolation and ethnocentricity of average Americans. Is that good or bad? Is that different than average citizens in other societies?
8. What are the primary values of modern Western cultures? How are these different from the primary values of other cultures? Which values are likely to lead to conflict?
9. The similarities and differences between the restoration of the Palestinian lands seized in the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six Day war and the lands seized from Mexico in the U.S. victory in 1848. If the Palestinians get their land back, why shouldn't Mexico?
10. The influence of small Israeli political parties on Israeli and U.S. foreign policy. Can Israel form an effective, independent government capable of implementing policies unpopular with small, powerful groups? Can the U.S. have an independent foreign policy in the Middle East, or will it be irreversibly tied to Israel?
11. The change in relative power between the United States and other emerging countries, cultures and civilizations. Can the U.S. adapt to its diminishing power relative to rising civilizations like the Chinese?
12. The future evolution of American civilization relative to European civilization, specifically the demographic and cultural influence of the Hispanic community. Will America become more Hispanic or will Hispanics become more American?
13. Will America remain part of European Western civilization, or will it become its own, unique civilization as part of a merged South, Central and North American civilization?
14. Could the U.S. ever experience civil war again? Who would be the combatants?
15. Political platitudes versus political realities. What do nations really do behind the scenes to arrange and break agreements? Is there any trust between nations? How much should there be?
16. The "Great Game," and whether it is still played at a global level by the major geopolitical powers. If so, who are the players? Who is likely to win?
17. The forcing function of demographics on societies, specifically the effects of large numbers of unemployed or unmarried (due to lack of women) young men. What has happened in history when there has been a surplus of young men in a population?
18. Appeasement versus hegemony. What examples throughout history are relevant to today?
19. The universality of democracy. It is always best? For all societies? At all stages of development?
20. Is Israel doomed? Is the Israeli / Arab conflict beyond salvation?
21. Is non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction doomed? If so, what should we do?
22. The transient nature of civilizations, and the number that have come and gone over time. How many can you name? Why did they fall? Why don't they last forever?
23. The rapid and cataclysmic fall of once dominant civilizations. Could ours be the next one?
24. Is geopolitical change always unexpected? Are there always clues? Are the clues only obvious in retrospect?
25. Disease versus war, which causes more deaths? Were there more deaths from WWI or the influenza pandemic of 1918? Were there more deaths from bullets or disease in the U.S. civil war?
26. What factors drove the decline of the Islamic world relative to Western civilization? Were they primarily secular, cultural or religious?
27. Is a war of civilizations inevitable? Who will the combatants be? Are we already in one?

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