

Is Tehran Burning? A Story of International Intrigue

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“[A] nuclear missile attack on Israel is imminent as is a dirty bomb attack on this country. If and I underline if the information is valid beyond doubt it calls for no it demands a preemptive strike against Iran’s nuclear and missile facilities...” says Ben Wallin a senior assistant to the National Security Advisor in Potter’s first novel.

After a flood of information is sorted out by intelligence experts and other influential figures the president of the United States will make a grave decision with tremendous repercussions. The State Department figure at the center of this political thriller Anderson Wyeth knows better than most what is really going on after he rescues a would-be suicide bomber from the baking heat of the Sonoran desert near Nogales Arizona. Rather than turn her in to Homeland Security Wyeth elicits her life story and considers a highly unorthodox romance.

Potter illustrates the ways intelligence is manipulated and national loyalties are subverted or confused. The central question is whether Wyeth and his handler Benjamin Franklin Pierce (who is never once called Hawkeye here) can prevail with facts over an Israeli-American super-lobbyist who has his own manipulative agenda and a Rapture-craving fundamentalist preacher with the ear of the executive. Rev. Saxon is almost cartoonish in his flesh/money/power triangle of corruption. A key American asset in the Middle East is at least feigning allegiance to a terrorist-training outfit with suitcase nukes aimed Stateside. His possible ties to the Iranians Israelis and the Taliban cloud the situation to maximum opacity.

Timely issues and notable characterization anchor this so-so story written with uneven technique and apparently rushed to publication without benefit of an independent edit in order to reach readers while the Bush Administration is still in office. Shifts between first person and third are a bit jarring and attribution marks are sometimes missing during dialogue. Early sections are weighted more heavily toward backstory than action. One character from a privileged background is traced back to a scene during infancy wherein he has an actual silver spoon in his mouth.

This book’s strength is the realistic insider’s assessment of how world-shaking decisions are made and how convoluted the tangle of multiple allegiances has become especially when mixed with religions bent on speeding the arrival of the end times. Is Iran really planning to vaporize Israel? Will any commander-in-chief let the fate of the world ride on superstitions rumors or ulterior purposes? The author commendably doesn’t tip his hand until the last moment. *Is Tehran Burning* shows us that reason is in very serious trouble. The concerns laid out here transcend the fictional format—they will remain relevant well into the future.

Before embarking on a career in banking and insurance including work with the African Development Bank Potter served the State Department through USAID in South America. His direct experience overseas reinforces the content but doesn’t completely balance out the unpolished prose.

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