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The Seventh Level

Americans appeasing evil.

By Michael Ledeen

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Sorry to say, I haven't reread Dante's "Inferno" for some years, but I still remember his description of a very low and extremely unpleasant level of hell that houses traitors. Surely abject appeasers of evil qualify for the same treatment, and we must note grimly that three prime candidates have recently come forward to swell the ranks of that overheated realm: Senator Joe Biden of Delaware (D.), Senator Arlen Specter (R.), of Pennsylvania, and Congressman Bob Ney of Ohio (R.).

All have undertaken to "improve relations" between the United States and the theocratic fascist regime of Iran. Specter announced over the weekend that congressional staffers would soon go to Tehran in the first stage of the appeasement program. After supping in Washington with the Iranian ambassador to the U.N. at a dinner helpfully facilitated by the State Department, Specter proclaimed that Iran had "helped us in the fight against al Qaeda and in the Afghanistan situation. I don't think we have given them sufficient credit. They deserve credit." And since "They are showing some signs of wanting to improve relations. Now is a good time."

One must wonder what elixir was served at the dinner, or if these remarks are the result of a more durable mental disorder. The recent wave of terror attacks against our Coalition in Afghanistan famously include the Iranian-supported forces of Gulbadin Hekhmatar, and the whole world now takes it for granted that top al Qaeda figures, including Osama and his number-one son, along with the likes of Zawahiri and Zarkawi, have been operating out of Iran for some time.

Senator Specter has long labored for better American relations with Middle Eastern tyrannical regimes, three times traveling to Damascus for meetings with Syrian dictators: kicking off a short-lived love-fest with Syria's Hafez al Assad in January, 1990 with a sortie to Damascus; again in December, 1998, when he witnessed a mob storm the U.S. embassy following Clinton's missile attack on Baghdad; and then in January, 2003, when he met with Bashar Assad as part of a holiday junket to Europe and the Middle East. On that occasion, Specter warned of massive Arab uprisings against the United States if we attempted a military liberation of Iraq, and reiterated his insistence that we ask for further U.N. resolutions before moving forward.

Ney and Biden have reportedly received campaign contributions from pro-Tehran Iranian-American groups, and Biden has been outspokenly critical of President Bush's

repeated criticism of the mullahcracy. He vigorously rejected the inclusion of Iran in the Axis of Evil — even though Iran is always number one on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism — and recently met with the Iranian foreign minister at the big party in Davos, Switzerland.

Ney, who lived in Iran 30 years ago, has been the most cautious of the three, endorsing the Iran-trip idea by warning that "I don't think it is set in stone." Ney's first-hand experiences may have made him more perspicacious than Specter, because, within hours of the "announcement" of the trip, an Iranian foreign-ministry spokesman said that he knew of no such plans.

This is part of a longstanding pattern, part of the Iranians' policy of deception, aimed simultaneously at us and at their own people. It is not unusual for conflicting statements to emerge from different offices and different leaders. Over and over again for the past several months, some of our most celebrated officials, from Secretary of State Colin Powell and his loyal deputy Richard Armitage, to State Department spokesmen, have enthusiastically gushed over vague hints that the Iranians were prepared to hand over al Qaeda terrorists who, it was said, were "being held in Iran. The Iranians officially announced their desire to cooperate with the United States, then quickly attacked America as a satanic force. The same has happened with regard to "better relations;" some leaders speak as if they welcome it, others declare it out of the question. The same, again, happens with regard to Iran's "promise" to "suspend uranium enrichment;" one day, one leader says it's a whole new policy, and the next day another leader says it's only temporary, it depends on what "suspend" means, and it's going to be resumed right away.

This is baffling to our diplomats, who love to parse language and to believe that words have the same significance to our enemies as to us. But with the mullahs, it's important to reason from first principles. No terrorist of any importance was, or will be, released, for the simple reason that Iran is a major supporter of al Qaeda, and could no more enable us to strike a major blow at Osama and his henchmen than they could provide us with Imad Mughniyah, the top killer of Hezbollah, or any of the others who receive all manner of support from the Islamic regime.

Did Specter, Ney, and Biden — and the deep thinkers at State who sponsored the appeasement — happen to notice that, at the very moment they were kissing up to the mullahs, the leaders of some 30-plus terrorist organizations were converging on Tehran for their annual powwow? Is this the sort of helpfulness of which Senator Specter oozed enthusiastic?

If the Specter/Ney/Biden efforts to "improve relations" were simply acts of folly by men who don't know better, one might laugh them off. But they have serious consequences, as our diplomats — who actively encouraged the representatives' acts of appeasement — must realize. The Iranian people overwhelmingly hate the regime, and look to Washington for encouragement and support to carry out a democratic revolution, and therefore the mullahs try to create opportunities to convince the people that the Bush administration in fact approves of the regime itself. Any warm statement from a famous

American is a body blow to the democratic opposition, and a balm to the mullahs, just as every critical word from President Bush has encouraged the people, and weakened the tyrants.

Appeasers are sent deep into the Inferno, because their acts are truly wicked, shoring up our would-be killers and discouraging our would-be allies inside the country. And they are doing it at a potentially explosive moment, as can be learned by listening to the instructions given to Iranian interpreters, assigned to the foreign journalists flying in for the 25th-anniversary celebrations starting this week (of which the terror jamboree is a part). The words came from Mohammad-Hossein Khoshvaght, head of Iran's international press bureau. He reminded them that lying or mistranslating Iranians' words is mandatory, if the truth would give a bad image of the country. "If a woman starts saying that her lipstick is a sign of revolution, just don't translate it. Say it's nonsense."

If any foreign journalist tries to cover politically sensitive matters (like student protests) or if they ask to work on their own, the interpreters should immediately report them to the regime. Furthermore, foreign journalists are not to enter Iranians' homes, and the interpreters should remember that the journalists' phone calls will be monitored by security officers.

"These days are very tough days," he told the translators. "The security of the regime is threatened. You shouldn't do anything that threatens the security of the system."

And almost anything can be judged to threaten the mullahcracy nowadays. Ask poor Ali Akabar Najafi, a 27-year-old taxi driver who was arrested in south Tehran for an imaginative bumper sticker: "The era of arrogant rulers is over." He was held blindfolded, in solitary confinement, for 53 days, and now, according to Reuters, "faces a possible lengthy prison term or even the death penalty."

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Someone should tell them about the January 24 executions of several commanders and senior officers of the Revolutionary Guards, the elite security force of the regime. The most distinguished of the men was Brigadier General Mohammed-Mehdi Dozdoozani, one of the founders of the RG and a hero in the Iran-Iraq War. His crime was to have exposed government corruption, especially the massive trafficking in young Iranian girls, sold for prostitution to Arab countries. Dozdoozani and his comrades had written an open letter, entitled "We the Warriors," threatening rebellion against these evils.

If they want to know more, they can read "[Sex Slave Jihad](#)" by Donna M. Hughes (read her on NRO today, too, [here](#)), which speaks of a 635-percent increase in teenage prostitution, and trafficking of girls as young as 8 and 10 years old. There are 25,000 street children in Tehran alone, and the trafficking network feeds on them, often in cahoots with authorities, including judges and Justice Department officials. As Hughes

concludes, "only the end of the Iranian regime will free women and girls from all the forms of slavery they suffer.

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It would be nice to think that they will be held accountable for their acts of appeasement — Ney and Specter are up for reelection — but the odds are that justice will be delayed until their final judgment.

Faster, please.

— Michael Ledeen, an NRO contributing editor, is most recently the author of The War Against the Terror Masters. Ledeen is Resident Scholar in the Freedom Chair at the American Enterprise Institute.

Website: WWW.OYICM.ORG