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Gerald Steinberg

Dear President Ahmadinejad...

If President Moshe Katsav were to send a letter to the president of Iran, this is what he might write:

Permit me to go directly to the heart of the matter without a long introduction or roundabout language. We have reached the edge of the cliff, and the situation that both of our peoples face is very dangerous.

While not diminishing the importance of the United States, Israel and Iran must also find the path to a less confrontational relationship. Unless we begin to communicate directly, with civility and mutual respect, we will soon be in a conflict which will cause unimaginable destruction. As leaders, it is our responsibility to prevent this.

Some of my advisers have suggested that I explain the virtues of Jewish tradition, in the spirit of the defense of Islam in your letter to President George W. Bush. And they want me to try and convince you to change your rejectionist rhetoric and policies on Israel. But I will not do so now - this would take years of theological disputation, and we do not have the time.

With great difficulty, I will also resist the need to present the excruciating details of the Nazi Holocaust - for reasons that are best known to you, I realize that you are not open to this discussion.

Therefore, for now, my only objective is to prevent the dangerous miscalculations on either side that would result in our mutual destruction. As Israelis listen to your rhetoric and watch your actions, we see many of the danger signals that have preceded the catastrophic wars that have been waged against us. These attacks have only resulted in unconscionable deaths and injuries.

Your declarations regarding Israel and the Jewish people repeat the dangerous myths and distortions that have led other leaders who sought Israel's destruction - Palestinian, Egyptian, Syrian and others - to underestimate our determination to take the actions necessary to survive. The wars and terror campaigns they waged did not weaken Israel or force us to abandon our homeland of 4,000 years; and this will not change.

After painfully regaining our sovereignty and independence, the Jewish people is not going into exile again. In the many wars and confrontations that have been forced on us, we have fought with all of our strength to survive as a people and a nation, and we will continue to do so now.

More threats and violence will not result in the outcome that you seek, and it would be a tragic mistake for you, as Iran's leader, to believe otherwise.

HOW CAN we convey this reality to you when you hold your hands over your eyes and ears and will not listen or see? We do not share a border and have no reason to fight, but Iran's direct support for terrorists



in Lebanon and among Palestinians is the fuse that can easily set off an explosion that will reach Teheran.

And unless we understand each others' traumas and fears, we will soon find ourselves in the situation of a nuclear crisis, like the United States and Soviet Union during October 1962, but without a way to avoid disaster.

In that complex crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev found a difficult path away from mutual destruction, as did the leaders of India and Pakistan just a few years ago - but they had ambassadors, embassies, and intermediaries. We have no means to speak to each other, and no one to guide us in such a situation.

If we continue down this road, there is no turning back.

The language that you use obsessively to refer to Israel and the Jewish people is disturbing, but we have never gone to war or risked sacred lives because of insults, and have no intention of doing so now. However, if you understood Jewish and Israeli history you would also realize that we have no choice but to consider the day when these words threatening our annihilation can be backed by the missiles and nuclear weapons you are acquiring. Since you claim to deny the reality of the Holocaust, you may also not know whether or where to stop in pressing this hostility.

Israel's recent history has taught us other lessons, of which your country's decision makers apparently know nothing. If you are unaware of the trauma resulting from our failure in 1973 to preempt the Egyptian and Syrian attacks, can you know how our leaders will act when faced with growing threats of destruction from Iran?

We Israelis are ready to talk to our Iranian counterparts, to listen to your threat perceptions regarding us, and to cooperate in order to avoid mutual catastrophe.

Let us communicate, Mr. President. Failure to do so could lead to unilateral action.

The writer is the director of the Program on Conflict Management at Bar-Ilan University and the editor of NGO Monitor.