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This novel is written exclusively for Right Truth Blog (www.righttruth.typepad.com) and its readers.

In loving memory of my precious
Sara (7/25/1951 to 12/13/2003) who always
encouraged me to write from the heart and was
at once both my greatest critic and my most
loyal fan.

In love with you always!

And...

To the greatest dad anyone like me could ever
have hoped for: Joseph Stanley Godlewski
(11/29/1918 to 04/14/2008).

You gave me life. Thank you!

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Chapter Fifty-Five

April, 20xx
Aeroporto Leonardo da Vinci di Fiumicino
Rome, Italy

Seth Carmassi cautiously scrutinized his El Al tickets as his peripheral vision caught sight of the white Boeing 737 with the large blue stripe curving through its midsection. *Flight 386, departs at approximately 10:05 A.M. and arrives in Tel Aviv at 2:30 P.M. weather permitting.* His thoughts turned back towards the two Arabs sitting across from him traveling under the guise of Italian diplomats.

He called in nearly every favor that he had to gain diplomatic passports for the three of them, a request that unnerved both friend and foe alike. Seth was now operating within dangerous territory. Familiar, yes, but decidedly perilous for not only was he disobeying Washington's direct orders, but he was using outright deceit to transport two international fugitives into Israel.

In Seth's favor was his contacts with Israeli authorities who could, perhaps, be counted upon to overlook the arrival of one terrorist and one wannabe in exchange for the prospect of nabbing an entire organization. They trusted Seth Carmassi and if the American had a plan up his sleeve then it was a well thought out plan and one undoubtedly critical to Western security. At least that's what he was banking on.

Nothing could be assured anymore, not with the new administration in Washington forsaking decades of alliance on the slippery prospect of unobtainable peace. Seth knew that the 'two-state' people were decidedly in control of his government even if he himself rebuked all such efforts. Such bilateral

solutions never worked when one group was overwhelmingly hostile and tribal. In America, the Native Indians were soundly defeated and left to mature within numerous reservations set up by the government. They were assimilated into American culture, not sliced off as a separate sovereignty.

The “Palestine Solution” had to be considered in a similar manner. As a separate entity, it would exist eternally in strife and economic hardship. An isolated people corrupted by the “mass rule” that figured heavily in the decline of America’s own urban centers. Israel, on the other hand, offered a security umbrella, something that could benefit the Arabs as much as the U.S. government did with the Native Americans. Security brought peace, peace brought opportunity, and opportunity separated the law-abiding from the lawless.

Seth lowered his ticket envelope and glanced at the two Arabs again, conversing with one another, each decked out in Western-style khakis and polo shirts. Aside from their decidedly casual attire, the American knew his thoughts were nothing but a pipe dream. The progressive world would not accept the status quo even if peace were guaranteed. Satisfying the Palestinians represented the political Holy Grail and there weren’t many politicians around who sought anything else.

It soured his stomach, knowing that a solution wasn’t what the world wanted; it wanted perfection. A plan that would keep *everyone* happy even if after sixty-odd years of death upon death it hadn’t produce a soul who smiled. From a Western perspective, it was an unwinnable battle – not that the West ever engaged within winnable battles since Israel first emerged onto the modern scene.

Seth’s war, his now and mostly ever was, private battle against terrorism remained a tiny facet of this overall struggle. Only a handful of others fully understood what the conflict truly represented. Not quite like the attrition wars of the past, this conflict nonetheless was clearly an accountant’s war. Each side would fight on until all the combatants were silenced and the victor would be determined by who had the most appealing balance sheet in the end.

It would be a bloody crusade to silence radical Islam; no war was ever sanitary no matter what the politicians and

technologists claimed as being the future. The advent of nuclear weapons, pinpoint accuracy, and network-centric command centers did very little to tarnish the barbarian inherent in all humans. Towards this end, the terrorists were a bit more in tune with their primal condition than were the legions of uniformed techno-commandos arranged against them.

The West had the capability to win – to win *all* wars nonetheless. It just lacked the will and the patience to do so.

Seth spied a pair of American sailors walking across the terminal in the distance. No, he thought to himself. It was the American government and people who lacked the patience and resolve to defeat an enemy. Its military could defeat *anyone* if effectively applied.

Americans, as he always knew, tried to remain sporting and fair in every endeavor. This was made more prominent by the new government that tried to square the imbalance between the haves and the have-nots. The government simply tried to tip the balance in favor of those who applied not, sacrificing the struggles and drive of the more resourceful.

He'd seen it all too many times, particularly within major league sports where championship caliber teams collapsed at the hands of less capable and less experienced opponents. He understood that such devices as salary caps, recruiting restrictions, and bureaucratic officiating conspired to turn competition into mere "sport".

Seth's own grandfather once played on an American pro football team back in the 1920s and endured an entire game with a broken leg because he was too afraid that by telling his coach he would be sidelined for the duration. Today, he knew, a multi-million dollar player could be placed on the injury list for nothing more than anxiety. Had Americans simply gone soft? Or was it merely that convenience overrode the desire for victory at all costs?

Leaning forward upon his knees, adjusting his spine into a snap, Seth examined the two Arabs talking quietly to one another. Mahmoud, he knew, was a fat slob of a despot elevated into the ranks of deified terrorists much like the former Carlos

the Jackal. A few freak attacks and significant media exposure fabricated him into something sinister and unapproachable.

It took Seth and his partner Jonas Prinkler a matter of a few hours to destroy his persona, to turn the infamous assassin into someone who now looked like a shell-shocked grandfather to the youthful medical student next to him.

The two Arabs were just out of reach for Seth's hearing to detect what words were spoken, but it did not matter. Mahmoud's skin appeared damp and clammy and his eyes darted around nervously as his head vibrated in low, deep contortions. Seth did not like seeing the reaction out of the elder Arab for he knew that it would arouse suspicion from airport security.

Twice, uniformed security personnel approached the pair but Seth defused any errant thoughts by making it more visible that he was part of the group and that he possessed a diplomatic passport. That, combined with a choice word or two about the safety of modern aviation seemed to detour the professionals.

It was all a sham, though, and Seth understood it. Even with the makeover, Mahmoud al-Walid was a known commodity and it wouldn't take long for facial recognition software to plaster his kisser all around the planet. Haytham al-Ashab was an unknown suspect himself, but it would not remain that way as long as he was paired with the older Mahmoud.

The debts that Seth called due would enable the three of them into Israel from where they would skip over into Lebanon allowing easy access to Syria. They would cross the length of Syria, a known adversary of the United States, and connect with some private contacts Seth maintained in northern Iraq. From there, it was hoped; the American could convince either Mahmoud or Haytham to give up the details of the Iranian cell of their terror network.

Seth smiled as he leaned back deeply into his chair. *Seth, you bastard, you're just making this up on the fly.*