

Crisis of the President

by **NB Armstrong** (December 2013)

Former President Sam W. Marsh looks back on the events of “The Crisis,” which began with the hijacking of a Russian nuclear bomber. The president’s commentary has been excerpted from an interview he gave with Paul C. Rubin on the nearly eighth anniversary of those events. Sometimes the president’s unusual pronunciation of certain words has been retained in spelling to heighten his folksiness. The abbreviation **PSFTRP** signals those moments in which the president **Paused and Searched For The Right Phrase**.

“If anyone ever has any information about a possible attack on America, I want them to call the homeland.”

– Sam W. Marsh

The Crisis Interview

I started the day off as I always did. By getting up. It’s important for the president, any president to get up. Especially a wartime president. History tells us –repeatedly, over many documentaries- that a wartime president who doesn’t get up (**PSFTRP**) *cannot be the most effectual leader of groups of men*. Then, just as I do every day, I took my morning segway ride around the grounds of the White House. The segway helps me to relax, to put things into perspex. And I prefer it if nobody’s watching. I really do.

And it’s still a little dusky that morning, very quiet. Just myself, and the owls. They’re still howling in the trees. They’re a nighttime bird, you see. Were the crickets up? I don’t recall. I could have my staffers check. I don’t recall whether the crickets were up because my mind was on other things, like direction and speed. So there’s just myself, the owls, possibly some crickets, and eight or nine secret service buddies, and we were going around and around the White House lawn on our segways, doing what the French call circuits. One thing I do remember seeing that day was a little old lady. She was walking her chihuahua dog along Pennsylvania Avenue, out there all alone, with her lapdog, at dawn, this dawn she had, as if it was the most normal thing in the world. And my heart went out to her. But perhaps I should have taken chihuahua woman as a sign that this day was to be different. Of course that's easy to

say with the benefits of hindsight. *What I mean is there was something strange about this folk.* The chiwawa, too. Though I'm sure they were both nothing to do with a terrorist organization. But I rolled back to the White House for my morning breakfast a little more questing, a little more presidential than usual, and hoping America would be kept safe from her middle eastern enemies. And her west European frenemies.

The morning National Security Briefing went just swell. I mean, it really did. I received as I do every day a digest of relevant report materials from our stations around the world. They all said America was still winning. Then I had a meeting with my chief secretary to confirm the day's events. And he confirmed that the day had events. Every day has a different schedule of events, some more different than others. But basically all different. Then I had to sign off on a few things, all on cream colored paper. Only the president can authorize these documents. I recall the first time I signed my name across the presidential seal. It was the first time I knew, the first time I really grasped, that the president had a seal. Every day the president has to ink his signature on documents that only the president can sign, or in some cases even see, or touch. Fortunately, others may think about them. So that morning, like every other, was full of the usual delegating that a peacetime president has to do, the usual humdrum. When I say humdrum I mean sanctioning of murder. But it has to be done, all of it. *The president is a very busy office.* Then I sat down to watch three movies. Well, it was a Monday.

The White House has its own screening room, built into a huge nook that I believe was where Abraham Lincoln composed the Lindenberg address. Our decorators figured another such address was unlikely, and so my wife Jessie gave the go ahead for them to replace spent history with a modern theater complex. That morning, the morning of the Crisis, Jessie and I were half way through A Man for All Seasons, which is a great movie starring (PSFTRP) some fine Americans. And we hadn't got very far into the movie -I believe we had just got up to late spring- when the electronic door to the screening room burst open. And just for a moment I raised a finger to pause whoever it was behind me, because I wanted to see what happened when Sir Thomas More met the Israelites, as I believe he was going to, as I believe we are all going to, and together they would cross the Sea of Galilee. But before that great sea parted and all those ecstatic Jews swarmed across the, this sudden middle east causeway, my national security advisor informed me a Russian nuclear bomber had been hijacked by Chechen rebels and was headed to America. "Who'd want to do that to America?" I asked. That was my first thought. And my adviser repeated that he believed they were Chechens. And then my second first thought was for my three daughters. Because I knew that if the Hamptons got hit by nuclear weapons they would no longer have a summer cottage to go to. And I knew how that would bother them. Morgan,

in particular. And then my thoughts turned to Jessie, the woman of my wife. And her people.

And I also thought of those recent immigrants to our shores, both those of European heritage and (PSFTRP) the hordes. I was sure immigrants to this great nation would be disappointed if a nuclear exchange began so soon after their arrival. Though I'm certain we could replace them. That's what this great country does best. Replace old immigrants with newer, dynamic ones. And I thought about our great cities being incinerated in the explosions. And of skin hanging off. And you know I just thought the whole thing was a shame. Then my advisor said, "America is under attack," and I was momentarily outraged, outraged. Because he forgot to add "sir".

But the drama of events quickly took over and I knew everything had changed in that moment and that the world had changed and the America within it. Throughout our history, Americans have taken wings to contest and fought the despair that comes with great cheer. As a people we have always had our priorities in sand. And that's as true of the American consumer today as it was before the last election cycle. These were just some of the thoughts I had, as I sat and watched the movie play out to its splendidly acted end. Though the Jews never did show up. Which was probably wise. Now some people may ask, "Why did you stay and watch the movie? Why didn't you jump up immediately?" Well, I didn't want to rattle Steve, the handyman, who used to set up movies in the Abraham Lincoln Screening Room. I wanted to project a sense of calm. I didn't want Steve to let the world's media think their president was unduly spooked at this moment of (PSFTRP) nuclear. Though I admit, A Man for All Seasons is a movie with very long closing credits.

Eventually I was escorted out of the theater and started making calls to world leaders, like everyone else in DC that day. A lot of numbers were busy and I just thought that was counterproductive, you know. Typical of wasteful bureaucracy. I looked up to see footage on the news channels of the bomber, this plane, flying under the sky, all wings to the pump. I was just horrified by the sight of this thing on its way to end the world. It was potentially a real issue, you know. Although I was raised in a desert, I don't necessarily want to see everywhere become one. Not without planning. Not without hope.

Now I can be a peaceable man when pressed hard, but I would not be peaceable in the face of this, of this non peace in the sky. There was a clear choice to be made between giving in to the terrorists and all the other option. Everyone else could just stand by and watch as this plane brought its nuclear payload to our shores but I was the president. I didn't have that liberty, that pleasure. I had to act. Or at least give the impression that I was acting, so as to put folks' mind at ease. So the first thing I did was to pen a brief statement objecting to Armageddon. Makes me laugh to think of it now, but all I had at that moment was a simple biro

and an old fashioned sheet of paper. You can imagine my amazement when both worked. And besides no one seemed to care that morning. America was too busy with terror that morning to care.

(statement:)

“Ladies and gentlemen of the oval garden, this morning, at approximately 8:29 Wall Street time, a strategic bomber on a routine flight over Russian skies was breached command by hostile folk. Its cargo of nuclear attack weapons was taken into custody by enemies of access to central Asian oilfields. That plane is at this moment headed across radar screens everywhere in the direction of the United States, in order, we believe, to totally obliterate, and potentially harm this terrific homeland. I would ask folk at this time to note how I your president am projecting calm. God Bless America and stay tuned for further updates. Please continue to shop.”

(Reporter shouts:)

“Sir, is the plane being intercepted?”

“That is what we hope to accommodate, Tom. But I don’t want to drag out this whole oval garden process.”

“Sir, what do the Russians-“

“I’m sorry, Bill. The commander in chief must be free.”

And I rushed off the daisy. I shook fewer hands than usual when I left the White House lawn that morning. It wasn’t that I was against those people as individuals, I just didn’t want the watching world to mistake my amity for weakness. Sometimes the president has to hurt people’s feelings in order to save millions of folk. Immediately the secret service took leverage of the situation and put me completely in the back of an armed limo and we literally took off. Back in the White House the West Wing bunker was crowded with folk like the Vice President and folk like my national security advisor and folk like the Presidential spokesman, regular folk, ordinary folk going about their daily highly secret national business, but in these new mankind circumstances. There was an agent stationed on the door of the underground bunker with a pair of smart binoculars. He also had a cell phone, I believe, like many people did that day. That was one side effect of the whole event –to popularize cell phones in the minds of the public. AT&T later described it as the Armageddon dividend, and I just thought that was typical of the spirit of our nation’s boardrooms.

I communicated with my bunker people on the road, and I reassured them in every phone call that their president was projecting calm. Eventually they got so reassured they stopped calling. But before they could hang up they said there was a lot of activity going on down there in the bunker, a lot of commotion, as photographers jostled to get the still shots that would serve history. And my heart went out to them. As it did to all Americans. And I called East Texas to commiserate, and to ask East Texas to pass on my commiserations to the rest of the country. And I believe they did that. Then, as so often is the case with terrible events, we got a piece of bad news from a foreign country.

We heard another plane had been taken hijacked with on board nukes. And by this stage I knew the situation was, the situation was gallivanting. And my concerns were now twofold. One, to get our people to safety. Two *(PSFTRP) nuclear weapons are a very important panel on the peace checkerboard*. Suddenly America's rooks and bishops were under threat. Nor was time on our side. Time was an enemy of the homeland that day. *I just thought it was awfully unfeeling of the terrorists to choose a Monday morning to launch a nuclear attack, you know?* Monday mornings are when folks are going to school and then getting up. Monday mornings are when the average family is trying to sell itself. Monday morning is the cornerstone of this great country and I have always been a strong proponent of it, and always was be. So we were especially determined not to be nuked on a Monday.

The first hand at task was to lead. I'd been involved in enough situations in Major League Baseball to know that in any crisis you must take a faith-based position. That's what I'm telling you. You must not rush to panic. There must be an orderly flee. So we immediately scrambled aboard Air Force One, in order not to panic. As president of the country, Air Force One is a journey I had taken many times, so I knew in advance I was going to enjoy it. But it was different that day. The stewardess's manner of greeting was not what you would expect from a successful airline. The eyes in her expressions showed concern. They were twitchy, her irises were, were elated. She was obviously worried that an airborne nuclear blast might suck up the plane. I told her not to fear it. What would be would be. But even these words didn't heal her situation, and so I decided to leave her alone with her fright and prayers. I didn't request any presidential snacks during the flight. Usually I go through a few sachets of pretzel, but that morning I thought upturning the packet into my mouth to get those last few crumbs an inappropriate thing to do.

Everyone was on code red behavior. Or code orange behavior. The colors changed but they were all bright. They were, they were vivid. *Point is folks' behavior was color coded*. The plane drivers, who we call pilots, they seemed to crank up the engines a little quicker than usual. I remember thinking these pilots recognize that evading a nuclear holocaust requires extra

propulsion. It needed more urgency than taking folk to a pro-am 9 holer featuring the me. When we took off, I had the sudden insight that it was either going to be a flight of hope or a flight of End Times activity. I'm a Christian so either was fine with me. But there was still work to do in the economy so I hoped for the former. No, I *did* ask for a burrito. Just the one. Jessie's always watching my weight! No, seriously. Jessie's always watching my weight.

After a little while in the air I decided to find out where we were going. So I called over the head of the secret service and asked him straight. I'm the president. I need to be told where I am. He said sir, Washington is not safe right now. We have to go elsewhere. I didn't like it but I had to respect his points of view because he had been trained to deal with a president projecting calm. By now events were moving so fast that I felt it just wasn't fair. We got news that the second Russian bomber was in fact supersonic, and now things got a lot more curveball. Supersonic was the last word any of us wanted to deal with. So I banned it from in-flight conversation. Supersonic meant the attack was happening in real time, in 3D. It meant CNN, FOX, and other government channels, couldn't keep up with the situation. So I said just turn the television off. The media can't help us now. We're on our own. I now realized that the whole focus of this conflict was to be the enemy, that there was no slam dunks to be had concentrating on the wide world web.

After no thought at all, I made a decision. I decided to hit every airplane around the world still in the skies. Only by killing everything can you prevent everything. I have made my position very clear on that. I declared all airborne aircraft as hostile to the United States, so you either put down your aircraft or we put it down for you. It was at that moment, as I declared the entire world a no-fly zone, that I knew we were entering the Crisis. And a great wave of (PSFTRP) procedure came across everyone aboard that plane. It reminded me of an exchange I had with a journalist out of Omaha.

President Marsh: Are you getting questions fed to you through that ear piece?

Matt Jenneson of the Omaha Times: No questions. But it helps.

Marsh: I'm curious about the ear piece, really.

Matt: I just need it for-

Marsh: I guess the viewers and I will just have to do without one.

Matt: Some of our viewers need one.

Marsh: *Touché.*

And though later on I discovered that journalist was legally deaf and needed a powerful hearing aid, I felt militated in my questioning. It was the same now in Air Force One. The best way to protect our country was to shoot down everything not on the ground. So that we the United States could go on giving hope as she has done over so many millennia. Quite a debate followed. There were some that wanted to shoot up every plane in the world sitting on the tarmac as well, but I just thought that wouldn't go down well with some of our allies. Except Britain. I took the view that there was unlikely to be any people aboard those grounded planes and so there was no point blowin em up. Now was not the time for high jinks lightin em up. When a supersonic plane loaded with nucular weapons is mid flight you have to focus your efforts on the plane at hand. Later on we could kill folks on the ground. There was a lot of nodding when I spoke. There always is.

We were facing a new kind of bad guy. This kind of terrorist act was a thing never seen in the world before, though it had featured in at least a dozen Hollywood movies. Imagine, imagine Diesel Vin as an enemy of the United States, but with an Eastern Europe accent and City of London friends. Then throw in Moss Cow and supersonic and nucular weapons and segways and chiwawas and whaddya got? You got yourself a man duelling with history. This wasn't to be the old slow kind of war with bedtime radio addresses and sailors in uniform tastefully necking in Times Square. This wasn't to be a war shaped by men in Generals. It was the war of the new next century decade. And I deeply felt that. I felt a large gravity come down upon myself. Even though I didn't run as a wartime president I had wanted to. I had first made that known in a stump speech to my party (**PSFTRP**) ants. Now wasn't the time to get out the calculator to draw up the consequences. I was the enforcer. I had to enforce. It had been given to me to enforce. Unlike everybody else *I had a job to do at that moment*. And I resented that.

Some people will live their whole lives without knowing what it feels like to be a wartime president. I just pray to God all those people are Democrat. Now wasn't the time to be a Democrat. Now was the time for the whole country to come together as one Republican. And not only folk. The executive, the legislative, and the judicative, all the trees of government. *It was when we say their duty I mean it*. Now was the time to find out who these Chechens were and to go to Check and get em. It was not the time to consult maps or sat navs or allies. These people are hot dang killers for crying out loud. I was going to rally the forces of good and do everything I could to stop them.

We had a bunch of problems early on in the crisis. On the whole they were negative. They threatened to hamper our ability to (**PSFTRP**) torture back. I was angry that we'd lost radar coverage, I was angry that communications weren't working well, I was angry that we couldn't land in Washington. But I took hold of that anger and I turned it into something positive,

into hate. We headed for Barksdale Air Force Base in Duizy outside of Louisport, Kennedale, by Camp Davis in South Lankstree, Tettstead, Virginia. We thought it was as nuclear safe as a place could possibly be. Those layers of names would give the evil folk navigational problems. And none of those names ended in 'shima' or 'saki,' which was a good sign, a New American Century sign. Also Virginia is a very uneven shaped state, meaning the terrorists could easily get lost. When we finally landed at Barksdale Air Force Base in Duizy outside of Louisport, Kennedale, by Camp Davis in South Lankstree, Tettstead, Virginia, it was a great relief for the aviation industry, to name but one. The United States Air Force was actually simulating that day a breach of American Air Space by rogue nuclear armed bombers. I just thought that was a heck of a coincidence. But we had no time to stop and think about it and it was never talked about, mentioned, or googled again. By responsible citizens. In any case, I'd rather learn new facts than remember old ones. Amen.

The situation was now fast happening into super crisis. You got to remember that by this time the American people were paralyzed with fear by images of nuclear explosions and slow motion preview shots of buildings being vaporized. They were in shock. And I thought that was just a wonderful opportunity for us. For the few to protect and control the many. I knew what Americans would be thinking as they watched those images of mushrooms. I knew that the uppermost thought in folks' minds would be the president's safety. And the power of the government. So we evacuated the West Wing of the White House, the capitol building, and the pentagon in a show of defiance to the terrorists. You aint gonna get the United States of America. Not on my stopwatch. Meanwhile people rushed to their homes, as best they could, after shopping. And we let them. We refueled Air Force One. That turned a lot of people on *(PSFTRP) to the dangers we face but take for granted*. Before we left for Dicksford Air Force Base I made a brief statement for broadcast later on, at a more peak time.

(statement:)

"Goodness itself was violated this morning by an enemy hiding behind two cockpits. I can assure you all that the full resources of the federal government will be deployed in goodness's defense. Our military around the globe is on combat-ready status and will seek out and destroy anything it deems not to be good. We will not allow America to be victim of these attacks which are due to arrive in a couple of hours. I see those upcoming hours as a test to pass. We will return with the results, just as soon as we have them."

When we landed in Dicksford I decided to salute for just a fraction of a second longer than usual, so as not to seem *(PSFTRP) you can't have strength unless you're power*. Without further do, we assembled in the conference room. We had at our use these modern American video

conferencing tools, and it was then I realized that the terrorists could never win. Because we're just so awfully clever. We began the conference and I was told the terrorists could win. One of my defense staffers, a young woman by the name of (PSFTRP) just a fine young American, told me that the terrorists were targeting me, the president. It was personal. And I was angry, enraged. I thought about firing that staffer. If this was personal, I thought logically, why did my country have to be involved? They could just have easily waited until I was no longer president. Then tried to smoke me out of mah cave. But that the whole thing happened while I was president was a stroke of luck for me personally, since I had the resources of the United States to hit back at them with.

I had just one question for the head of the CIA. Why would anyone want to hurt America? I didn't really need him to answer to know it was because they hate our freedom. That didn't need saying. And in fact he didn't say that, he said something else. We both knew it didn't need saying, so I said, "I've had it. I'm going back to Washington. I need to be near my troop. I will not let this acorn become a Giant Redwood." Well my staff knew exactly what I was getting at. And they all objected. Even the women folk. I just didn't want the terrorists to have the psychological victory of a president of the United States dealing with this crisis from inside a military base. A command room in an air force facility is not the place to deal with armed threat. I didn't conduct my literacy campaign from a school, for pete's sake. No president ever did. Policy cannot simply be crafted by experts in conference at moments of great need. Good government is not to be found in the administration. It is made by people being the heartland. And I repeat them. You cannot manage men with a stick. At the very least you need a (PSFTRP) bayonet. So my team prepared the helicopter quickly and, once we'd got the go ahead to leave during a prayer circle, we took off, like a new soar. Back to the Washington DC, back to the Oval Office. Back to Steve the handyman.

As we left Dicksford, I heard the first troop news of the Crisis. One of the Chech planes had gone down. We didn't know whether it had been shot down or crashed down. I hoped it was neither. Because either would be a victory for the terrorists. On the other hand it would be one less nuclear weapon to deal with. That could be a good, depending on who you are at that moment. I'm thinking of the vice president. But it might also lead to a decrease in fear and vigilance. And that would be a bad. These are some of the dilemmas a wartime president faces, and turns away from. I asked the stewardess for a sachet of snacks and a moment to think. She brought me both, and I realized we were now in a war zone, a zone of war. Either way you say it, it still amounts to the same thing. A limited area of land in which conflict shall rage. I looked out of the window at the blueness of space and wished man could break through its frontiers. Surely the day will come when we can send others to live on different planets. In

large numbers, so we can eliminate, once and for all, the problem of religious competition. Let other planets be balkanized, let other planets pray war. We have enough problems on earth without the environment.

Suddenly we got news one of the nuclear planes had gone down in the Atlantic Ocean, which is a big sea, a major sea. Fortunately it has plenty of room for the consequences of a split atom to be (PSFTRP) contained by water. Of course my heart went out to the fish. They were as innocent as the average American tax payer. I'm speaking for the tax payers only here, you understand. There were a few concerns about a possible tidal wave. I asked if there was any way we could force it toward Europe or, ideally, Asia. But there were no meteorologists on board, it was all guesswork on my part. And that made my staff nervous. But my stewardess didn't seem unduly concerned. She was doing a heck of a job. And I took that as a sign of the continuing strength of the pursuit of happiness.

As we came in to land in DC I could see the city from above, which actually makes it look smaller. This time it just served to magnificate the difference between right and un-American. Where once there was vibrancy now there was relaxation. Where once there was hope now I could only see calm. And where once there was activity let there be light. I could see from the sky all the horrors of a city not shopping. It was eerie, in a very TV way. Fifties sci fi, before cussing. We landed on the White House lawn directly behind one of those obelisks from out of Egypt and I made a note to have it white washed. Its heirographics were all smudged. Even in times of crisis the president must derogate. I headed straight down to PEOK, the Presidential Operations Center, where my wife Jessie was waiting under the flag. It was a great relief for me, that sight, to see that. To see that in my absence the flag hadn't changed. Not one star was missing. In PEOK a debate broke out over what to do about the second plane, which was headed for America armed to the back teeth with mushroom clouds. For all we knew it might pose a threat. I said that just because one of these suckers has gone down in the sea we can no longer say that America is protected by oceans. And I recall there was some disagreement about whether just to leave the whole thing up to the oceans. Let them defend America. In the end, we decided to go after the terrorists with a declaration of war. By President Sam W. Marsh.

(television statement from the oval office)

"Good evening. Today our freedom, our way of East Texas life, the pies we bake, our very citizen has come under threat from over there. Make no mistake, the hijacking of these planes was not an accident. Terrorists don't accident. And I, as your president, promise to fight mass destruction with mass destruction."

It was important that I find the happy medium between providing comfort to the people of America and to the terrorists.

"The hunt is on for a group to be held responsible for the theft of these planes. I will not let the American skies of the world be a playground for pure, blind, aviatational evil. And so our military has been ordered to make no distinction between the terrorists and anybody else."

That speech was as close to a third world war as we could get without fulfilling prophecy.

"America has faced off her enemies before and she shall do so again and again and again and again."

And my heart went out to the networks. All I could do at that moment was hope they follow it up with some tasteful advertising.

The plane was still off the radar and I said, aint it about time we got some new radars? Apparently, the terrorists had landed and refueled somewhere and were circling around and around, making the threat more and more (PSFTRP) circular. I knew what they were doing. I'd seen this before. *To understand evil you've got to be evil.* All in all, I said to Jessie, it was time for bed. I thought, if the president doesn't sleep how the heck is the rest of the country going to sleep. The relationship between the president's sleep pattern and the country's sleep pattern is one between individuals. Then an agent came running up behind and he was breathing hard, just as he's been trained to do, and he said, "President, you've gotta come. The White House is under attack," and I thought hot damnit, not again, and I just rolled my eyes at him and said, ok, where to this time. By now I was projecting disinterest. I hoped by doing so I could generate disinterest in others and gradually people would relax and go out and shop. Even so, I grabbed Irish, our Irish Wolfhound, and Scottish, our Scottish terrier, and German, our English Sheepdog, and this agent is hustling Jessie and I down to the PEOK when an air force commander arrives and says don't worry, it's a code green, a false alarm. And I just thought that was the sweetest thing for him to say. I was later told it was an F16 getting a few final snaps of the day, one final flyover by a patriotic pilot. And my heart went out to him. And later he was court martialed.

On the following day, the second day of the crisis, we as Americans could begin to take stock. And those that didn't have stock could still share in the feeling that one day they might have stock to lose. You know, in the past it was America's geographical destiny to be safe from war because they happened overseas, thank god, and others died in the horrors, thank god. We were protected from wars by our thirteen colonies. Not anymore. People were afraid to go to work, and for people working three jobs to pay the bills that was a dilemma, you know, to wish for

the country to be nuked so as they could avoid responsibility. People were also afraid to leave their homes in case something happened on TV while they were out. People were even afraid to avoid banks. Our society had in many regards come to a complete semi-stop. And this, remember, was all caused by a little iddy-biddy nuclear weapon. I had to get the American people back to being the servants of America again. My job was to create beyond the box.

But our first concern was for sleeper cells loose within the borders. Any nuclear attack within the country by enemies unknown would horribly scar the wheatfields of the basket bread. It could do reparable harm to the morale of Main Street. And, we supposed, kill millions. A second wave of attacks had the potential to kill us all, and take us deep into a recession. And you know I just felt the people of America didn't deserve that. Not this generation. This wasn't the sixties. We had fewer internal enemies than at any time that I could remember since the draft. Generally speaking, at this time, I was comfortable shaking more or less any American's hand. Even bloggers.

At the cabinet meeting that morning we discussed the terrorists. It soon became apparent we didn't have enough information on this group, let alone an Arabic name for them. So we decided to use the title "them" when referring to them. I didn't want to grant "them" the dignity of a real title. This wasn't a Hollywood production. This was a White House production. Next I wanted answers. I *wanted* answers. And there was a silence around the cabinet table for a while. Then mah Minister of Agriculture spoke up. "Sir?" And I knew he expected a question. *Because question answer is the usual procedure to you can't make solutions.* But now was not the time to point fingers of despair at faces of great administration. My immediate job was to stop folk with bombs. We had to kill them, and then bring them to justice. So I wanted our intelligence community to make large business owners optimistic. Only that attitude could weaken their defenses, and ours too.

From the outset, there was a lot of speculation about whether Russia was involved with the attacks. We dismissed that out of hand because most Russians are not from the Middle East. And then attention turned to Iran, as I wished it would. But we decided to concentrate on business before pleasure. We could hammer Iran at a later date. Dealing with the countries of the Middle East -if I may use an analogy appropriate to crisis- is like a permanent game of whack-a-mole. You smash one and another pops up and you smash that one and another pops up and you smash that one and another pops up. *Point is you can't smash a mole without good intelligence.* But one thing I didn't want to make it was a war between Muslims on the one hand and ordinary good people on the other. This series of countries, this places that play host to Muslims -I mean places that are series- it's not just a question of religion. I made myself very clear on that. Folk from the oil countries can be like the west, too. They can have the things we have.

And I want to help them achieve that. At a time of our choosing.

It was on the second day that I used the blunt phrase, "Send them home in body bags." I took some criticism off of Jessie, my wife, for that. And she was right. The body bags should be sent to a morgue or a final place of rest. Not a home. Homes are where hope piles up, where the hearth builds bridges. I didn't mean or wish to upset the whole Czech congregation. But America was angry at that time. And I was America's anger. I had to send a very strong message to our allies, and to France. I had to send the message that the United States would be relentless, would stop at nothing in its pursuit of the media. And if a few ill chosen blunt threats were needed, then so be them. America is at her strongest when the president is at his strongest, and this crisis was in all but name a corner turned on scripture.

The threat of nuclear attack really defined my presidency. I mean, it definitely shaped that week. I had to make a lot of decisions that in peacetime circumstances might have been said to be wrong. But in wartime they were anything goes. Blunders came across as essential policy. On the Monday morning I had been a peacetime president which was beneficial but uneventful and then on the Tuesday I was a wartime president which was iron-clad. I spoke with our allies in the Middle East. King Abdullah of (PSFTRP) Abdullah was shocked. Totally shocked. "Why are you calling me?" he asked. And my heart went out to him. A lot of people were confused, not just citizens but Empire States. I recalled the old East Texas saying we had growing up there. If the quail's still squawking, it's time to start talking -to stop talking. To walk and talk. *The point is the quail's not univocal.*

Now the crisis was dragging on. Events that last longer than a single twenty four hour news cycle are very difficult to structure in memoirs. So I just wanted to wrap this thing up. And continue the fight over several more generations. To give troop to battle. So I gave the order to bring down the plane. I didn't want any more harm to come to our rescue workers, who'd been on standby since they were hired. I went downtown and shook every hand of every rescue worker I could validate. Regardless of hat or immigration papers. And I looked in those men's eyes and I could see the bloodshot features of no sleep. Perhaps some had drunk, it didn't matter. So long as they had drunk less than America's enemies. These workers were flat out, exhausted by the demands of tabloid press photographers. And having to wear a heavy hard hat all that time. But they were resolute. There was a very definite bloodlust off of which I could feed. Somebody handed me a megaphone and although I didn't have a speech prepared I did need one. I wanted to comfort them, yes, but I also wanted to arouse them, like a man does when he's alone with a woman or a (PSFTRP) party donor.

[president's speech]

"The people of this country are today fallen in gratitude for what you will do. In every state, even California, folk know that these might be your last few hours. Though the folk in Alaska are sittin real pretty now. We thank you for doing what no one else would on these flexible contracts. And we pray for those among you who have family, and then, and only then, for those of you who don't."

But apparently the megaphone wasn't loud enough and this one folk at the back was screaming, "I can't hear you. I can't hear you." The next thing I said got a very big cheer.

"Well, I can hear you. And if I can hear you, and your just using your voice, how can you not hear me, when I'm using a megaphone?"

That just got a tremendous cheer. And what didn't happened next got an even bigger sigh of relief.

The plane with the terrorists and the nuclear weapon never surfaced. The tidal wave surge from the other plane that landed in the Atlantic never happened. It was as if they had never existed. Sometimes I wish they had, so that the terrorists could have learned the lesson we intended to teach them that day. But a lesson was learned by United States citizens right across the mid west and most of the south. *Never yield to TV images*. You smoke em out. During the crisis not one American citizen lost his or their life, and I vowed that wasn't going to happen again. The vast majority of people want to live in a free country. And we will bring them to justice for it. Whether they be Christian or Jew or Muslim or the Indian one. Or members of the other second tier religions. In the end the terrorists will lose the step up to the plate. This world needs a pix Americana. The history books speak of it for crying out loud. When the Crisis finally passed, I could now look Mount Rushmore in the faces, and say to those comparable leaders, "Surely I'm ahead of Reagan now."

NB Armstrong is a writer and translator. His latest books, [*This Gangster is One of Your Own*](#) and