

**ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE**  
Dr. James P. Eckman, President  
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska  
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**PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE**

*THE 1960s GENERATION AND THE FUTURE*

It is my judgment that the decade of the 1960s was one of the most significant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was a decade that challenged every dimension of American civilization in the name of absolute freedom. That generation challenged capitalism but America remained a capitalist economy, albeit one heavily regulated. That generation challenged our democratic republic but America chose to remain a democratic republic, albeit one that embraced autonomy and an absolute view of freedom. But the social agenda of the 1960s—sexual freedom, personal autonomy and freedom—are now mainstreamed and acceptable. The radicals of the 1960s are now in power in the corporations, the government and the social welfare agencies of this nation. They are the boomers who are nearing retirement.

In a recent essay, historian Victor Davis Hanson comments that this generation of leaders pursues the solution of our nation's problems within this scenario—"consume, don't produce and complain." He offers several examples:

1. The housing boom: For the past five years, we complained as a nation about a "housing boom" that had priced an entire generation out of the market. Therefore, the government and lending agencies relaxed standards that permitted first time borrowers to purchase a high-priced home. "Flipping houses" and buying "no-down payment" properties became common. But the bubble has burst and now we are complaining that greedy lenders and incompetent regulators have foreclosed! Perhaps the real reason, Hanson argues, is that the 1960s boomers have caused this "speculation" problem themselves.
2. More than 70% of the American people and a majority of Democratic senators wanted to remove Saddam Hussein, and in the early stages of the war, that majority increased. But when a messy insurgency exploded, the language was changed from brilliant victory to "their stupid occupation."
3. Social Security is in trouble, but the boomers are unwilling to sacrifice to fix the crisis and the entire nation now follows boomer pattern of "consume, don't produce and complain."

Hanson writes:

"What are the baby boomers' collective traits? Like all perpetual adolescents who suffer arrested development, we always want things both ways: Don't drill or explore for more energy, but nevertheless demand ever more fuel from other suppliers. . . Housing not only has to stay affordable for buyers, but also must appreciate in value to give instant equity to those who have just become owners. When things don't go well, we always blame someone else. Why drill off

Santa Barbara or Alaska when we can sue those terrible Saudis for not putting more oil platforms in their Persian Gulf?” He concludes: “Perhaps the greatest trademark of the 1960s cohort was self-congratulation. Baby boomers alone claimed to have brought about changes in civil rights, women’s liberation and environmental awareness—as if these were not prior concerns of earlier generations. We apparently created all of our wealth rather than having inherited our roads, schools and bountiful infrastructure from someone else. And in our self-absorption, no one accepted that our notorious appetites created more problems than our supposed ‘caring’ solved. . . . The fault of this age, dear baby boomers, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.” “Boomers’ Choices go Ka-boom,” Victor Davis Hanson (1 June 2008).

Permit me two final comments about the boomer generation currently in power:

- First, the effect all of this is having on the Democratic Party. The 1960s produced the surge of political and social radicalism that I mentioned above. This is what produced the catastrophe of George McGovern in 1972. With the triumph of Reagan in the 1980s, a group of Democratic leaders formed the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), which proclaimed a foreign policy of military strength, a cultural conservatism to some extent and an economic centrism. This is what produced the free trade of NAFTA, the reform of welfare and the military engagement against Serbia—all during the administration of Bill Clinton, the poster boy of the DLC. Clinton even announced that “the era of big government is over.” But now the Democratic Party is clearly in the hands of a new resurgent left. On foreign policy, the unpopular war in Iraq has emboldened the Party to embrace a new antiwar stance. Obama thus calls for an immediate pullout of troops, despite any consequences that might ensue. Accommodation will replace confrontation toward America’s enemies. On the economy, Obama and the Party are hawking an anti-free trade policy. Further, Obama wants to further tax income, payroll, capital gains, dividends and death. He articulates a philosophy of economic redistribution of wealth through taxation. Finally, Obama has stated that he will repeal the Defense of Marriage Act and has severely criticized the partial-birth abortion ban. The Party is now firmly in the hands of the political and social left. The new Democratic Party is really the old left embracing the ideas and policies of the 1960s. It is difficult to be optimistic about this development. See Kimberley Strassel, *Wall Street Journal* (20 June 2008).
- Second, let’s examine two of my heroes who recently died. Both, it seems to me, challenged the self-absorption of the boomers and challenged the political, social and economic radicalism of the 1960s.
  1. NBC Washington Bureau chief, **Tim Russert**. The eulogies and programming about Russert were appropriately endless, so it seemed. But Russert epitomized devotion to family and to his faith. A devout Catholic, Russert believed very strongly in God, in prayer and in an ethical value system that reflected historic Christianity. His love and devotion for his father, “Big Russ,” were legendary. His father was a sanitation worker from Buffalo, and Russert loved him and shared that devotion publicly. He was also a devoted father whose love for his son Luke was equally legendary. He was faithful to his wife of decades and never neglected his love for her. Peggy Noonan summarizes Russert’s life: “. . . taking care of those you love and letting them know they’re loved,

which involves self-sacrifice; holding firm to God, to your religious faith, no matter how high you rise or low you fall. This involves guts, and self-discipline, and active attention to developing and refining a conscience to whose promptings you can respond. Honoring your calling or profession by trying to do within it honorable work, which takes hard effort, and a willingness to master the ethics of your field. And enjoying life.” He was open to a whole range of ideas, and always gave the conservative viewpoint a hearing. I had the most profound respect for Russert—he will be missed. See Noonan’s essay in the *Wall Street Journal* (21-22 June 2008).

2. The actor **Charlton Heston**. A major Hollywood actor, Heston portrayed many religious figures in various movie roles—Moses in *The Ten Commandments*, Michelangelo in *The Agony and the Ecstasy*, John the Baptist in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, and, of course, Judah Ben-Hur in *Ben-Hur*. A life-long and faithful churchgoer, Heston immersed himself in the stories of Scripture. He presented a four-part documentary entitled, *Charlton Heston Presents the Bible*, shot on location in the Holy Land as he read Scripture and discussed the historical context of Scripture. In 1956, Heston gave an interview in which he revealed the transformational nature of a spiritually attuned life: “It is interesting to note that once Moses climbs Mt. Sinai and talks to God there is never contentment for him again. That is the way it is with us. Once we talk to God, once we get his commission to us for our lives we cannot be again content. We are happier. We are busier. But we are not content because then we have a mission—a commission, rather.” Charlton Heston—a rare breed for Hollywood! He challenged the self-absorption of the boomers. He will be missed. See Steve Beard in *Breakpoint Worldview Magazine* (June 2008).

## PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

### *ISRAEL AND THE TRUCE WITH HAMAS*

Last week, Israel, Hamas and Egypt announced a six-month truce (or cease-fire). Negotiated by Egypt, this truce is part of a wide array of negotiations between Israel and its neighbors: Palestinian-Israeli talks are continuing at various levels, opening long-closed issues; there are Turkish-mediated Israeli negotiations with Syria; and Israel made a new call for direct talks with Lebanon. One would think that most Israelis would consider these positive developments. They do not!

There is a widely shared gloom among Israelis that the nation is facing alarming threats from both within and without. Negotiating with Hamas, many believe, is an admission of national failure, for Hamas’s radicalism is vicious and bent on Israel’s destruction. Further, to even think of returning the Golan Heights to Syria is to admit another defeat, for Syria had regularly bombarded Israel with artillery when it owned the Golan. Why would they do differently if Israel returns that track of land? As Ethan Bronner comments, “The backdrop for all of this is the fear of Iran’s growing power and the world’s inability so far to stop it from working on atomic weaponry. But it is not only foreign relations that so depresses the Israeli public. It is also that their political system is in crisis with the leaders under investigation and feuding among themselves.” On top of these anxieties are the missing Israeli soldiers—one captured by Hamas and two by Hezbollah—that remain a source of national anxiety and shame. Israel is small and it

really functions almost like family. When one family suffers (as the families of these missing soldiers do) then the entire nation suffers. Israelis relate to one another like members of a large family.

But perhaps even more importantly is to focus again on the role of Iran and its relationship to Israel. The historian, Michael Oren, comments that the roots of this national anxiety go back to “the summer of 2005 and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The evacuation, intended to free Israel of Gaza’s political and strategic burden, was hailed as a victory by Palestinian terrorist groups, above all Hamas.” Therefore, Hamas began to fire some 1,000 rockets and mortar shells on Israel. Hezbollah was equally emboldened to do the same from southern Lebanon, culminating in the 2006 war between Lebanon (really Hezbollah) and Israel, where Israel was once again humbled. This led to Hamas overthrowing Gaza’s Fatah-led government and it began launching thousands more rockets on Israel. As with Hezbollah in 2006, Hamas has won by not losing to Israel. “Its leaders still walked Gaza’s streets freely while children in Sderot and other Israeli border towns cowered in bomb shelters. Like Hezbollah, which recently wrested unprecedented powers from the Lebanese parliament, Hamas parlayed its military success into political capital.” As a result of the truce negotiated by Egypt, Hamas has gained greater benefits than if it had engaged in direct negotiations. In exchange for giving its word to halt rocket attacks and arms smuggling, Hamas receives the right to monitor the main border crossings into Gaza and to enforce a truce in the West Bank, where Fatah retains formal control. Hamas now has the chance to regroup and rearm. Oren comments: “Hamas initiated a vicious war against Israel, destroyed and disrupted myriad Israeli lives, and has been rewarded with economic salvation and international prestige.” He concludes that “Iran is the cease-fire’s ultimate beneficiary. Having already surrounded Israel on three of its borders—Gaza, Lebanon, Syria—Iran is poised to penetrate the West Bank. By activating these fronts, Tehran can divert attention from its nuclear program and block any diplomatic effort.” The cost of this truce and any dealings with Hamas or Hezbollah may very well be war for Israel. It is for this reason that so many Israelis are profoundly anxious. There is a national dread about its future, for its enemies, more powerful and more radical than ever, are poised on its borders. Israel cannot negotiate out of this challenge. And war with these enemies will be more ferocious and more devastating for its population than ever. Israel remains a nation fighting for its very survival.

For these reasons, the next US president will need to declare very early that the US will stand with Israel. To be blunt and very honest, I am very concerned about this presidential election, for the US must be adamant that it will never tolerate the destruction of Israel. Will Barack Obama make that clear? Will he declare unequivocally that he will support Israel’s survival at any cost? Will he try to negotiate with Iran, even though it has never given any indication that it will keep its word? The next president of the United States cannot equivocate when it comes to the survival of Israel. I am not certain that Obama, the current front runner, will maintain that incontrovertible and unbreakable pledge of commitment to Israel. Since 1948, the US has stood with Israel. Had that commitment not been solid, it is doubtful that Israel would have survived. Our next president must renew that kind of commitment. We will not tolerate Iran’s attempts to destroy Israel and we will stand with Israel in its battle with both Hamas and Hezbollah.

See Oren’s essay in the *Wall Street Journal* (19 June 2008) and Bronner’s essay in the *New York Times* (22 June 2008).