

# A Second Term for Emmanuel Macron while Russia Bombs and Batters Ukraine?

## A Discussion with Nidra Poller

by [Jerry Gordon](#) (April 2022)



*Israeli President Isaac Herzog with French President Emmanuel Macron, 3/20/2022*

French Presidential elections in the two stage First Round, April 10, 2022, and Second Round April 24<sup>th</sup> appear to be influenced by the European security crisis with Putin's invasion of Ukraine, impact on both domestic issues and concern over lack of active campaigning by incumbent President Macron-seeking a second term. He has earned mixed reactions

for his adroit handling of the COVID pandemic. His rotation as the current EU President, direct diplomatic efforts with Russian President Putin in Moscow over the Ukraine invasion crisis ,and 'narrow passage' handling of EU sanctions against Russia is tempered by the difficulty posed by the more than \$13 Billion investments by major French businesses there. That was cited by embattled Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky in his virtual speech before the French National Assembly and Senate when he cajoled major French automobile, energy, and retail businesses in Russia:



*Ukraine President Zelensky speaks to French National Assembly, March 23, 2022*

*“French companies must leave the Russian market ... Renault, Auchan, Leroy Merlin and others ... must cease to be sponsors of Russia’s military machine, sponsors of the killing of children and women, sponsors of rape, robbery and looting by the Russian army.*

*“All companies must remember once and for all that values are worth more than profit, especially profit on blood. We must already think about the future. About how we will live after this war.”*

Notwithstanding these remarks, Zelensky appears to be held in high regard by the French for his resolute Churchillian oratory in defense of his people and requests for military

aid. Zelensky was applauded by French political leaders, media and is held in high esteem by the majority of the French public for his resolute defense of his country against the Russian onslaught.

That paralleled similar virtual addresses to the US Congress, UK Parliament and German Bundestag.

Zelensky's virtual speech to the Israeli Knesset caused disquiet there over his reference to the Nazi Holocaust being the equivalent to the "holocaust" confronting Ukraine. This despite both Zelensky and Ukrainian PM Groysman being Jewish. Zelensky's family included relatives killed during the Nazi "holocaust by bullets" that took the lives of upwards of 1.5 million Jews. Zelensky had beseeched Israel for military assistance but applauded Israeli PM Naftali Bennett efforts at mediating the dispute directly with Russian President Putin. Israel's nuanced relations with Russia reflect the deconfliction agreement with Russia giving Israel free of action to undertake pre-emptive air attacks against Iranian targets in Syria, Iraq and more recently, Iran, itself.

Macron's promotion of European security arrangements in collaboration with NATO has gotten attention in French polling. The latest IFOP poll indicated 88% of French sampled are clearly worried about impact on Europe from Putin's war in Ukraine. 40% of those polled indicated that may influence their vote in the upcoming First and Second Round of the Presidential Elections. Our conversation will focus on the way the leading contenders are reacting to the crisis in Ukraine, and how that influences voter intentions.

There is one contender in the looming French Presidential race who may end up facing Macron in the second round. Marine Le Pen of the National Rally who in the recent past had boosted Putin, taken large loans from Russian banks, and even had campaign flyers featuring profiles of her and Russian President Putin. She has segued in her campaign to focusing on

domestic issues like the cost of living—occasioned by inflationary pressure from the European security crisis—and modest support for the EU. Currently pre- first round polling show Macron favored at 28 percent, with Le Pen trailing at 20 percent, with others across the political spectrum from far right to greens trailing at half those levels to single digits. Zemmour, who fell by four points and favors visas for Ukrainian refugees, but not asylum for other religions—meaning Muslims. Prior to entering the Presidential campaign, he fashioned himself as a “French Putin.”

French Jews have concerns over rising antisemitism, with over 85% in recent polls expressing that view. That was evident in remarks by Valerie Pécresse candidate of the center right Les Republicans party at a memorial on the 10th anniversary in Toulouse of the Al Qaeda inspired massacre by Mohammed Merah who killed a teacher and three young students at Jewish day School. It was also evident in remarks by French President Macron and visiting Israeli President Israel Herzog over the issue of French views on the emerging Iranian nuclear deal with leaked disquieting provisions on release of an estimated \$100 billion dollars of impounded oil revenues and delisting of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps from terrorist lists. Macron commented that he had “Israel’s security Interests” in mind.

Against this background we held our sixth in a series of discussions with American ex-pat in Paris, Nidra Poller in the final prelude to the French Presidential elections, First Round on April 10<sup>th</sup>, Second Round on April 24<sup>th</sup>.

Jerome Gordon: We’re here today for another stellar discussion with American ex-pat in Paris, Nidra Poller. It comes at a time of the NATO summit over Putin’s war against Ukraine. It also comes in the final strokes of the campaign for the French presidential elections, with the first round on April 10<sup>th</sup> and the second round on the 24th. There are some interesting

developments relative to the French position on Ukraine. Embattled Ukraine President, Volodymyr Zelensky, gave a virtual speech to the French National Assembly on March 23rd. What was the reaction to his criticism of billions of euros of French investment in Russia “placing profits over human lives”? Further, what is the French opinion of this Jewish President of the Ukraine?

Nidra Poller: Well, opinion is highly favorable. The majority attitude in France is recognition of what's at stake and great appreciation for President Zelensky's leadership and the courage of the Ukrainian people and army. There is a forgiving attitude to anything that might be a bit controversial. I would say, with the exception of the ultra-nationalists and some of the far left, there is very great respect and consideration. President Zelensky had a standing ovation, as every time he speaks. As for French companies, it's a mixture of understanding that some of them can pull out from one day to the next. But all of them recognize that they can't go on cooperating with Russia. The separation process is underway. As for weaning away from Russian gas and oil, there is a general recognition, with the exceptions that I mentioned, that it has to be done.

Let me put it this way, Jerry: this is a complete break with the entire European security system that has been in place since the fall of the Soviet Union. The very notion of mutual deterrence has suddenly disappeared. A small, very courageous country is being invaded, pummeled with bombs aimed at the civilian population, things that haven't happened in Europe since the Second World War. And, of course, we could all help, whether or not Ukraine is in NATO. Why aren't we doing more? If we could give them that no fly zone, they would win, instead of being tortured day and night, and hanging on by a thread. We can't do that for a simple reason: nuclear blackmail. What puzzles me, especially coming from certain conservative quarters I know very well, that we've worked with

in the past, is that they don't seem to understand that.

They don't seem to see the difference between the kind of childish Black Lives Matter consciousness raising that went on after George Floyd was killed, and the sweeping reaction to the total disruption of any system of security in Europe. For some of the reality-deniers, the solution is, "We have to sit around the table." That's very French. We'll sit around the table, and we can have good food, good wine and discuss what should be done. We have to sit around the table and put together a new European security structure. And Russia must be included. Well, I think that's preposterous.

How can Russia be included in the security plan? Russia has to be precisely excluded, and the security has to be built against Russia. This is a total paradigm shift in modern history. In the coming years, people will be judged for their ability to understand it. I'll give you some details soon about the range of positions taken here in France. But I'd like to stress, for our American audience that might or might not be concerned, this is happening around the corner from us here in Europe. We know that one false move and it hits home. The Third World War they talk about will be in Europe. Like the Second one.

Jerry Gordon: Nidra, you were on an online webinar when the subject of Zelensky's speech to the Israeli Knesset came up, which was disquieting to some Knesset members. The guest on the webinar was a famous Soviet-era Jewish Human Rights Icon, Natan Sharansky. What were his views about the Israeli criticism of Zelensky and what was the surprising comment from a relative of yours in California, who we both hold in high esteem, who participated in this very interesting episode?

Nidra Poller: That's the world of Zoom! I'm following the program here in Paris and suddenly there's a question from my cousin in California. She asked Sharansky the question that Israelis have raised—some cautiously and others with severe

criticism and, sometimes, angry comments: “He can go to hell. What is he talking about? Doesn’t he realize how vulnerable we are, and Ukraine didn’t even vote against the Anti-Zionist UN Resolutions.” Sharansky stands up for democracy in many difficult situations when others say it’s a lost cause. I always trust him on essential questions of conscience.

Sharansky said that Zelensky is admirable in leading his country, the army is admirable, the population is admirable. What is happening to them is unforgivable, and the fact that we can’t stop it is unbearable. If the president made a mistake and said something which wasn’t exactly true about the way the Ukrainians helped Jews during the Shoah—though there are a lot of righteous gentiles from Ukraine ... Sharansky was kind, forgiving, and thoughtful. He doesn’t think we absolutely have to call Zelensky on those, however valid, complaints from Israelis. But it’s better to watch the podcast and listen to Sharansky’s answer in full. It should be available soon on the [ISGAP site](#).

Jerry Gordon: Thank you for that. French President, Macron, is in a very interesting position. He showed up at the NATO Ukraine summit, supportive of certain actions that NATO wanted to entertain, but he’s also on rotation as the EU President. That raises questions of “Does he support tougher sanctions against Russia”? Moreover, “what is France doing in the context of extending humanitarian aid and possible sanctuary for Ukrainian refugees”?

Nidra Poller: We’ve already received about 20,000 refugees. They are warmly welcomed. I would say that Macron is strong on accepting refugees, strong on giving military and humanitarian aid. Strong on cutting commercial ties with Russia, strong on sanctions. It puts his political competitors in the upcoming elections in a tough position. Sometimes they express it awkwardly, saying it’s not fair. What isn’t fair? The outgoing president is playing an important role in an existential crisis. How can they compete with that? In fact, the president

does have to deal with an existential threat. And he's doing quite well. Voters, with some obvious exceptions, will ask themselves if the other candidates could do as well. Zelensky has been praising Macron for his role. Some were saying that Macron stepped up but didn't get good results. They've gone quiet now.

When the country faces an existential threat, you need national union. It's not debatable. You have to stand behind your President. On this question, I'm talking again about some of our American conservative friends. Today, they think it's more important to trash Biden than to encourage him to do the most he can do to save Ukraine. They will even lie to make their point. They claim that when Trump was president, there were no problems in Ukraine, Russia never attacked, everything was fine. Now, by the fault of the voters, or the fault of election fraud, he's no longer president. I asked a friend who is a fervent Trump supporter why, if Trump is so strong, he doesn't he call up Putin and tell him to stop? The answer was, he can't do it, he's not in a position of power anymore.

Well, if he's so strong and he doesn't do it, history will judge that.

Jerry Gordon: At the NATO summit, President Biden made a great play about the US providing natural gas to those suffering EU states now that the Nord Stream 1 and 2 Russian pipelines have been taken offline. Strategically Macron has supported—even before this Russia invasion of Ukraine—France's reliance on climate-correct nuclear power, in sharp contrast to former German Chancellors Merkel and Schroeder, who stressed renewable and clean gas energy after the 2012 Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan.

Nidra Poller: What happened is, the Greens had strong influence on national energy policy during the previous administration. President Hollande gave in to their demands that we get weaned from nuclear power, reducing it to half of



the total, then a quarter, etc. Macron inherited that. He closed one nuclear plant that had already been halfway shut down. Then, he reversed the policy. Now he's very happy that we have nuclear power and are only dependent on a small amount of Russian gas and oil. The same is true for the United States, though I see that the US was importing Russian oil. The EU had previously supported the Mid-East gas pipeline, involving Israel, Cyprus, and Greece. that Biden opposes.

If I look at the general direction in the most responsible places, I would say they're going to work on all of these things. It took time and a shock, but they suddenly face up to something they had been denying for so long. If you look back at the whole relationship with Russia, you can ask who understood, before Russia invaded Ukraine, the full extent of this threat to energy resources?

Jerry Gordon: Where do the French Presidential candidates stand on Putin's War in Ukraine? What are the prospects of Zemmour, Le Pen, Pécresse, Mélenchon versus Macron in the first and second Rounds, April 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>?

Nidra Poller: What I'm looking at now is, who can react fast enough and understand what's at stake in the national elections in April. And there you have some glaring failings. As to Macron's standing— if the polls mean anything, he's been given as the winner since the beginning. What changes in the electoral result is the percentage of his plurality. What might change, given the current situation with Russia and Ukraine, is which candidate will survive to face him in the first round. The polls are like see-saws! You can go to one TV channel and Valérie Pécresse (Les Républicains) is in the basement. You switch to another channel, and it's Eric Zemmour in the basement.

This is probably the hardest election to call in modern times in France. The factor of abstention is considerable. There's no way to know if people that express their preference will

actually vote. We've had examples where one candidate was high in the polls, but the voters didn't turn out. Let's go down the line and see how it's playing out. Marine Le Pen's voters might care about what's happening in Ukraine, but it's not their main problem. She has a troubling proximity to Putin and Russia. She has a large loan from the Russian Bank. She had to skittle out of that issue as fast as possible. Her program now is focused on how the French people will suffer from the sanctions and her job is to protect them, to insure they have no loss in buying power and won't be exposed to runaway inflation.

That seems to work with her voters. So, she might make it to the second round. But she won't win. The question is, will some that said they would vote for Zemmour figure out that a vote for Zemmour means Macron will be reelected? Some might switch to Pécresse. Valérie Pécresse has an image problem. The same people that claim to defend our wonderful French culture, the elegance, refinement, the art and literature— and she's quite elegant refined and cultivated—find her too bourgeois to be president. They claim she doesn't understand the little man. In fact, as president of the largest region in France, Ile-de-France, she's constantly dealing with the problems of the little man. But she has a problem getting her message across. We've never had a female president. As it looks now, she probably won't make it to the second round.

Zemmour is in a tight situation. He's lost too much in the polls. His image of the candidate that comes out of the blue and soars to the heights is not holding up. The next question will be the respective roles Les Républicains and Reconquête in the legislative elections and, eventually, in reshaping the Right. Zemmour's position on Ukraine is incoherent. On the one hand, he'll say that Russia has no justification for attacking Ukraine. But he follows with ... you have to understand that Russia has been humiliated and constantly targeted by NATO, they have a right to say they don't want NATO on their border.

Zemmour would like us to forget that at the beginning of this crisis, he gave the Putin/Russian version of history: the western part of Ukraine is Galicia, it's Poland; on the east, it's Russia. Ukraine has to compromise.

Donetsk and Luhansk, the breakaway republics that Putin created in Eastern Ukraine, are like a two-state solution. Claiming the right to limited autonomy, Putin uses them to try to destroy Ukraine. That's what he's been doing for the last eight years. He got away with it, so he thought he could get away with even more. Presidents Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden all have a share in this. The Europeans too. What we need to look at now is: how are they reacting to the new situation?

Germany suddenly increased its military budget by tens of billions of euros, and is sending lethal weapons to Ukraine. It's a complete break with the past. None of the center to far right candidates— Marine Le Pen, Eric Zemmour, Valérie Pécresse —give the impression, in their approach to European security in the wake of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, that they would handle the situation better than the outgoing president. The issues where they disagree with Macron that will be a problem for France over the next five years, are related to jihad, Islamization, immigration, crime, domestic security... On some of those issues, Macron has to move to the right. In fact, he has picked up elements of Valérie Pécresse's platform.

There's an incident that occurred with Zemmour this week. We have a terrible problem now with crack-heads. This is not a country where people can be parked off in the hinterland, everything is next-door to everything else. So, the crack-heads are next-door to costly apartments in gentrified neighborhoods. Zemmour went to one of these trouble-spots to show he would be tough on this kind of thing. And he was physically attacked. His usually discrete bodyguards had to come out in the open and get him out of there. It's not the first time that a candidate has been attacked, but he didn't

look very strong. It's nice to perform at a big rally with people that worship you. You say you'll know how to deal with the problem. But when you get up close to it, you can't even defend yourself, let alone defend France. So, incidents like this are detrimental to Zemmour's campaign. And he has not gleaned any support from the Les Républicains. His idea of making the new right, which would include what's called the far right, is not going anywhere.

Jerry Gordon: How do the French Jews feel about this election? There have been a couple of disturbing polls— one indicated that an overwhelming number of French Jews who were polled said that antisemitism is a problem for them. And there's also a question of who they would prefer to vote for in this election.

Nidra Poller: Well, I don't know of any polls that give a clear picture. There is not a Jewish vote per se, but the Jewish vote in France is, generally speaking, on the right. The Jewish vote for the left would be very limited.

On the question of Ukraine, there's fierce debate, on an international scale, among Jewish commentators. One commentator, who has been very brilliantly distinguished in other aspects, wrote an article about "Zelensky the warmonger" who exploited the Shoah. I know people were upset by the Ukraine President exploiting the Shoah—in which he lost relatives—but Zelensky the "warmonger"?

Sarah Cattan, the editor-in-chief of *Tribune Juive*, where I publish regularly, has been very good at publishing a wide variety of viewpoints. Some of the writers are totally defending Ukraine and others go all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Cossacks to undermine its reputation. They talk about the neo-Nazis, I ask you, how many neo-Nazis do you have in the United States and how many do we have in France" What about the January 6<sup>th</sup> invasion of the Capitol in Washington, DC?

What prompted the February 24<sup>th</sup> Russian invasion of Ukraine ? It's not the time, in my opinion, to pick nits out of the heads of the brave Ukrainians fighters. Because what we're seeing ...this is one of the main questions of our time... Will democracies fight for their freedom? The democracies were reluctant to fight in the Second World War. Finally, they took on the fight for freedom, and they won. Today, again, they are reluctant, or want to fight from a safe distance.

I understand people that say "anything but war," but then it's "anything but destruction." How do you choose? That is the big question of our time. The way we answer that challenge will determine our future as democracies. Today, the contributions in military aid and humanitarian aid and every kind of support have been extraordinary. We've never seen anything on this scale. But they don't seem to understand communications.

You can criticize Zelensky, but he is the one who is leading his country, defending it. Remember, not only Americans but many others thought they would have to exfiltrate him to a safe place where he would lead a government-in-exile, let his people die, and then make a deal. When people saw who he is and how he is, they couldn't help but admire him. On our side, there is a lot of very defeatist talk. Like, we can't do a no-fly zone because then it's going to be all out war. We can't send Ukraine airplanes because then Putin is going to use nuclear weapons.

We can't influence reality exclusively by what we say, but it helps. I think it would help to say, wait a minute, if this goes any further, we're going to just let lose all of the constraints and we're stronger and we'll smash Putin. You know the Israelis do that way with Iran.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Nidra Poller: They don't say, Iran is so big and what if they attack us and maybe they'll win. They say, "Don't you dare,

because we'll smash you to smithereens and no one will ever know where you were." And it matters. I don't know if it's too late to change it. But there are some commentators and specialists here, serious people, who say we should call Putin's bluff. Because otherwise we're sitting there watching him destroy this country.

Jerry Gordon: Nidra, this was the 10th anniversary of something that was riveting for me and certainly for you when it occurred. That was the Toulouse Massacre in 2012 where a teacher Jonathan Sandler, his two sons, and the daughter of the director of the Jewish day school were murdered. One of the candidates, Valérie Pécresse, talked about that.

Nidra Poller: Yes. She's strong on this question.

Jerry Gordon: And also, the occasion for a visit by Israel's new president, Isaac Herzog who, along with Macron attended a Memorial for the Toulouse victims. Macron assured Herzog that he had Israel's security in mind. That was a reference to what is emerging in terms of this contrived new nuclear pact with Iran. There are commentators in Israel, the United States, perhaps in Europe, who say this is going to be a disaster. The issue is whether Israel now finds itself in the peculiar position, on the one hand, trying to balance between nuanced behavior to Putin on the one hand, because of the de-confliction agreement that Israel has had for several years now giving it the freedom to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran in Syria, versus, on the other hand, taking action as the strong horse in the Middle East to deal with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. That is the range of commentary that has popped up, not only here in the United States but in Israel among some of the knowledgeable commentators. Then there is Israel's dilemma: hang in there as a mediator of a possible settlement in Putin's war against Ukraine. A poll in Israel found most Israelis sampled think that Prime Minister Bennett will fail in his role as mediator between Ukraine's President Zelensky and Russia's President Putin.

Nidra Poller: Of course, at this point, everyone will fail, that's clear.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Nidra Poller: Mediation doesn't succeed during war; it comes after it ends.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, that's correct.

Nidra Poller: Yes, war is bad. But somebody wins, somebody loses, and then they try to negotiate for peace. You don't succeed in the middle of a war; you just start negotiations. Besides, Putin has shown that he's not even interested in a cease fire. We can compare Putin with regard to Ukraine and Iran with regard to Israel. Or the Palestinians with regard to Israel. The Palestinians do the same thing as Putin. They start a war and when they lose, they say, "Oh, it's not fair. Now, here's what I wanted, and you have to give it to me because if not I'll start another war." In the past, there was the Age of Absurdity. Today, we are living in the Age of Incoherence. If they go through with this Iran deal, it's going to be similar to what a French person felt when he turned on the radio and found out the Nazis were marching into France.

What I mean is, you turn on the television and you discover that you're being delivered into the hands of another tyrant. It is totally incoherent... Today, I checked rapidly, and didn't see anything in French media about the Iran deal. If I remember correctly, Russia is in the JCPOA. So how can they make a deal, including Russia, to allow Iran to attack Israel freely while claiming they'd love to help Ukraine, but can't do it because it's going to set off a Fourth and a Fifth World War before they're finished. I can't believe them; I can't believe it. The situation in Ukraine is the smoke screen. Could they just go ahead with the Iran deal while no one is looking? But if I understand correctly, the original JCPOA was

not signed. If they had signed it, they would have had to go to the US Senate for approval as a treaty. They didn't. I think the American congress can do something to stop it. It's simply incoherent. Macron says anti-Zionism is antisemitism, and then France votes in favor of anti-Zionist UN resolutions. And sticks to an official two-state solution policy. But the two-state solution, whether for Ukraine or for Israel, is a form of suicide.

I've been following the Vienna negotiations all year, attentive to all the consultations and strong statements. Remember? Nothing is settled until everything is settled. And now they're going to take the Revolutionary Guard off of the list of terrorist organizations? There can't be any rational basis for that agreement. Macron will have to discuss it after the elections but, as I said, nobody is talking about it now. We fear that they're just going to go ahead and do it. Can't stop Putin, can't stop the Iranians.

Jerry Gordon: That is the conundrum of the moment now. It would appear to me as a former US Army intelligence officer who six decades ago used to brief commanding officers on Russian military prowess and doctrine during the Cold War. The message was that Ivan is not 10-feet tall. This war in the Ukraine is an illustration of how badly Russia's armed forces are trained and equipped. The facts are that there is no combat leadership at what we consider the unit level, which was the brilliance of General Marshall during World War I that carried over to World War II and subsequent conflicts. In a discussion with another commentator, I pointed out that nothing has changed in six decades virtually since the end of the Stalin era, the end of the Cold War. As evidenced by the brutality of Russian operations in Ukraine that have stalled.

Nidra Poller: Same techniques and same impasse. When I was a student in the late '50s... I was at the University of Wisconsin and we had real Communists, because we were perhaps...believe me... the only important left-wing university. All the



universities in the United States were conservative in those days. We had real Communists and we had Russians grooming people up, down, and sideways. They hitched onto the civil rights movement, whatever, they were everywhere, and McCarthy was as right as he was wrong. So, they're doing the same thing now.

By the way, I wanted to tell you that when Valérie Pécresse talks about a long-range policy with Russia, and whether we missed early signs of what is happening today, she always mentions the Wagner mercenaries in Mali and how they pushed us out of Mali. We just took it on the chin, she said,

Jerry Gordon: Pécresse is dead spot on. My colleague and co-author, former US -trained Chadian Lt. General Abakar M. Abdallah who is a Darfur native and Chair of the Sudan United Movement, noted that Putin's Wagner group is training a Free Arab Army in the Sudan to overthrow neighboring Chad, all amid violence erupting in Senegal. Macron and the EU are not addressing the Russian threat destabilizing the important region of Sahel in Africa.

Nidra Poller: Pécresse speaks Russian. She was in Russia for a year or so when she was a student. She speaks a little Japanese too. She's very bright and, I think, honest. But it doesn't seem to help her in the presidential race. The Russians have been getting a foothold here and there. And now they come with their "great" army. I'm sure you've heard the stories of our central European grandparents... One of the reasons they left the Pale of Settlement is the that the men would be drafted into the army for 25 years.

Today, you can see, they don't care. I've seen reports from Ukrainian sources ...they say the Russians don't pick up the wounded and dead soldiers. The Ukrainians set up a hotline, I suppose it still works, where Russian mothers, sisters, wives, sweethearts could call and ask for information. They don't know what's happened to their own soldiers that were sent

there. They weren't told they were going to war. You can't have a good army with that kind of disregard. They say the soldiers were given rations unfit for consumption after 2015. These guys are cannon fodder. But, of course, there's fear of what might be behind them.

Jerry Gordon: True. In many ways, I thought that the resilience on the part of the Ukrainians under these dire circumstances almost paralleled what Israel had to go through in several wars fought from its Independence in 1948, the June 1967 Six Day War, the grueling October 1973, the First and Second Intifada, Operations in 2008-09, 2012, 2014 and 2020 against Hamas in Gaza and the War between the Wars against Iran in Lebanon and Syria.

Nidra Poller: Maybe if Zelensky weren't in the situation he's in, he might have been able to make more valid comparisons. We can tell him later, after he survives this terrible ordeal. Yes, of course, there are similarities.

Jerry Gordon: Yes. No one's written about it.

Nidra Poller: Not the comparisons that some conservatives are throwing at us. Another conservative friend told me he didn't want to admit the Russians bombed the maternity hospital in Mariupol because it will validate accusations against Israel the next time Hamas hides in the hospital... The Ukrainian troops weren't hiding in the hospital! It was pregnant women. If you can't make a distinction between these things...

But I have often written about this: if the West wants to save democracy, they have to stop hammering on Israel. Or saying how much they love Israel but doing everything to undermine Israel's security. And they have to understand that Israel, like Ukraine...these are the people that fight for their freedom. And that's the only way they can be free, the only way they can maintain their national integrity.

If you're sitting in a big comfortable country far away from

the battlefield, you might think that your freedom is secure. But in the United States, you have to fight internal enemies too. Why would anyone think that suddenly, after all the centuries and millennia of human life, suddenly you don't have to fight for your freedom? In everyday life you have to fight for your freedom, and it demands coherence and utility.

We try our best to help and I'm open to debate, but with the people I'm telling you about, there's no debate. You publish an article, and they say, take me off your list.

Jerry Gordon: On that note, I want to conclude another brilliant wide ranging conversation with you. We will soon know what the results are of the French election, as the first round occurs in just a few weeks followed by the second round to see who is going to get the nod.

Nidra Poller: You can tell your listeners I'm bad at predicting the vote. I never believed the French would elect François Hollande. And they did! But this one is really up for grabs (for the 1<sup>st</sup> round candidate that will face Macron). We'll know the result before our next conversation. By then, we'll be going into the legislative elections. This is important because if Macron wins but doesn't get a legislative majority, it will be "cohabitation." And that might be a stumbling block. You know, it's like a situation in the U.S. where the president doesn't have a congressional majority. It's hard to pass legislation.

Jerry Gordon: I want to thank you again an engrossing discussion on France, Russia's dangerous provocative war against Ukraine, Israel's dilemma on how best to deny Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.

Nidra Poller: Thank you.

What happened is, the Greens had strong influence on national energy policy during the previous administration. President

Hollande gave in to their demands that we get weaned from nuclear power, reducing it to half of the total, then a quarter, etc. Macron inherited that. He closed one nuclear plant that had already been halfway shut down. Then, he reversed the policy. Now he's very happy that we have nuclear power and are only dependent on a small amount of Russian gas and oil. The same is true for the United States, though I see that the US was importing Russian oil. The EU had previously supported the Mid-East gas pipeline, involving Israel, Cyprus, and Greece. that Biden opposes.

If I look at the general direction in the most responsible places, I would say they're going to work on all of these things. It took time and a shock, but they suddenly face up to something they had been denying for so long. If you look back at the whole relationship with Russia, you can ask who understood, before Russia invaded Ukraine, the full extent of this threat to energy resources?

Jerry Gordon: Where do the French Presidential candidates stand on Putin's War in Ukraine? What are the prospects of Zemmour, Le Pen, Pécresse, Mélenchon versus Macron in the first and second Rounds, April 10<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>?

Nidra Poller: What I'm looking at now is, who can react fast enough and understand what's at stake in the national elections in April. And there you have some glaring failings. As to Macron's standing— if the polls mean anything, he's been given as the winner since the beginning. What changes in the electoral result is the percentage of his plurality. What might change, given the current situation with Russia and Ukraine, is which candidate will survive to face him in the first round. The polls are like see-saws! You can go to one TV channel and Valérie Pécresse (Les Républicains) is in the basement. You switch to another channel, and it's Eric Zemmour in the basement.

This is probably the hardest election to call in modern times

in France. The factor of abstention is considerable. There's no way to know if people that express their preference will actually vote. We've had examples where one candidate was high in the polls, but the voters didn't turn out. Let's go down the line and see how it's playing out. Marine Le Pen's voters might care about what's happening in Ukraine, but it's not their main problem. She has a troubling proximity to Putin and Russia. She has a large loan from the Russian Bank. She had to skittle out of that issue as fast as possible. Her program now is focused on how the French people will suffer from the sanctions and her job is to protect them, to insure they have no loss in buying power and won't be exposed to runaway inflation.

That seems to work with her voters. So, she might make it to the second round. But she won't win. The question is, will some that said they would vote for Zemmour figure out that a vote for Zemmour means Macron will be reelected? Some might switch to Pécresse. Valérie Pécresse has an image problem. The same people that claim to defend our wonderful French culture, the elegance, refinement, the art and literature— and she's quite elegant refined and cultivated—find her too bourgeois to be president. They claim she doesn't understand the little man. In fact, as president of the largest region in France, Ile-de-France, she's constantly dealing with the problems of the little man. But she has a problem getting her message across. We've never had a female president. As it looks now, she probably won't make it to the second round.

Zemmour is in a tight situation. He's lost too much in the polls. His image of the candidate that comes out of the blue and soars to the heights is not holding up. The next question will be the respective roles Les Républicains and Reconquête in the legislative elections and, eventually, in reshaping the Right. Zemmour's position on Ukraine is incoherent. On the one hand, he'll say that Russia has no justification for attacking Ukraine. But he follows with ... you have to understand that

Russia has been humiliated and constantly targeted by NATO, they have a right to say they don't want NATO on their border. Zemmour would like us to forget that at the beginning of this crisis, he gave the Putin/Russian version of history: the western part of Ukraine is Galicia, it's Poland; on the east, it's Russia. Ukraine has to compromise.

Donetsk and Luhansk, the breakaway republics that Putin created in Eastern Ukraine, are like a two-state solution. Claiming the right to limited autonomy, Putin uses them to try to destroy Ukraine. That's what he's been doing for the last eight years. He got away with it, so he thought he could get away with even more. Presidents Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden all have a share in this. The Europeans too. What we need to look at now is: how are they reacting to the new situation?

Germany suddenly increased its military budget by tens of billions of euros, and is sending lethal weapons to Ukraine. It's a complete break with the past. None of the center to far right candidates— Marine Le Pen, Eric Zemmour, Valérie Pécresse —give the impression, in their approach to European security in the wake of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, that they would handle the situation better than the outgoing president. The issues where they disagree with Macron that will be a problem for France over the next five years, are related to jihad, Islamization, immigration, crime, domestic security... On some of those issues, Macron has to move to the right. In fact, he has picked up elements of Valérie Pécresse's platform.

There's an incident that occurred with Zemmour this week. We have a terrible problem now with crack-heads. This is not a country where people can be parked off in the hinterland, everything is next-door to everything else. So, the crack-heads are next-door to costly apartments in gentrified neighborhoods. Zemmour went to one of these trouble-spots to show he would be tough on this kind of thing. And he was physically attacked. His usually discrete bodyguards had to

come out in the open and get him out of there. It's not the first time that a candidate has been attacked, but he didn't look very strong. It's nice to perform at a big rally with people that worship you. You say you'll know how to deal with the problem. But when you get up close to it, you can't even defend yourself, let alone defend France. So, incidents like this are detrimental to Zemmour's campaign. And he has not gleaned any support from the Les Républicains. His idea of making the new right, which would include what's called the far right, is not going anywhere.

Jerry Gordon: How do the French Jews feel about this election? There have been a couple of disturbing polls— one indicated that an overwhelming number of French Jews who were polled said that antisemitism is a problem for them. And there's also a question of who they would prefer to vote for in this election.

Nidra Poller: Well, I don't know of any polls that give a clear picture. There is not a Jewish vote per se, but the Jewish vote in France is, generally speaking, on the right. The Jewish vote for the left would be very limited.

On the question of Ukraine, there's fierce debate, on an international scale, among Jewish commentators. One commentator, who has been very brilliantly distinguished in other aspects, wrote an article about "Zelensky the warmonger" who exploited the Shoah. I know people were upset by the Ukraine President exploiting the Shoah—in which he lost relatives—but Zelensky the "warmonger"?

Sarah Cattan, the editor-in-chief of *Tribune Juive*, where I publish regularly, has been very good at publishing a wide variety of viewpoints. Some of the writers are totally defending Ukraine and others go all the way back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Cossacks to undermine its reputation. They talk about the neo-Nazis, I ask you, how many neo-Nazis do you have in the United States and how many do we have in France" What

about the January 6<sup>th</sup> invasion of the Capitol in Washington, DC? What prompted the February 24<sup>th</sup> Russian invasion of Ukraine ? It's not the time, in my opinion, to pick nits out of the heads of the brave Ukrainians fighters. Because what we're seeing ...this is one of the main questions of our time... Will democracies fight for their freedom? The democracies were reluctant to fight in the Second World War. Finally, they took on the fight for freedom, and they won. Today, again, they are reluctant, or want to fight from a safe distance.

I understand people that say "anything but war," but then it's "anything but destruction." How do you choose? That is the big question of our time. The way we answer that challenge will determine our future as democracies. Today, the contributions in military aid and humanitarian aid and every kind of support have been extraordinary. We've never seen anything on this scale. But they don't seem to understand communications.

You can criticize Zelensky, but he is the one who is leading his country, defending it. Remember, not only Americans but many others thought they would have to exfiltrate him to a safe place where he would lead a government-in-exile, let his people die, and then make a deal. When people saw who he is and how he is, they couldn't help but admire him. On our side, there is a lot of very defeatist talk. Like, we can't do a no-fly zone because then it's going to be all out war. We can't send Ukraine airplanes because then Putin is going to use nuclear weapons.

We can't influence reality exclusively by what we say, but it helps. I think it would help to say, wait a minute, if this goes any further, we're going to just let lose all of the constraints and we're stronger and we'll smash Putin. You know the Israelis do that way with Iran.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Nidra Poller: They don't say, Iran is so big and what if they



attack us and maybe they'll win. They say, "Don't you dare, because we'll smash you to smithereens and no one will ever know where you were." And it matters. I don't know if it's too late to change it. But there are some commentators and specialists here, serious people, who say we should call Putin's bluff. Because otherwise we're sitting there watching him destroy this country.

Jerry Gordon: Nidra, this was the 10th anniversary of something that was riveting for me and certainly for you when it occurred. That was the Toulouse Massacre in 2012 where a teacher Jonathan Sandler, his two sons, and the daughter of the director of the Jewish day school were murdered. One of the candidates, Valérie Pécresse, talked about that.

Nidra Poller: Yes. She's strong on this question.

Jerry Gordon: And also, the occasion for a visit by Israel's new president, Isaac Herzog who, along with Macron attended a Memorial for the Toulouse victims. Macron assured Herzog that he had Israel's security in mind. That was a reference to what is emerging in terms of this contrived new nuclear pact with Iran. There are commentators in Israel, the United States, perhaps in Europe, who say this is going to be a disaster. The issue is whether Israel now finds itself in the peculiar position, on the one hand, trying to balance between nuanced behavior to Putin on the one hand, because of the de-confliction agreement that Israel has had for several years now giving it the freedom to attack Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran in Syria, versus, on the other hand, taking action as the strong horse in the Middle East to deal with the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. That is the range of commentary that has popped up, not only here in the United States but in Israel among some of the knowledgeable commentators. Then there is Israel's dilemma: hang in there as a mediator of a possible settlement in Putin's war against Ukraine. A poll in Israel found most Israelis sampled think that Prime Minister Bennett will fail in his role as mediator between Ukraine's President

Zelensky and Russia's President Putin.

Nidra Poller: Of course, at this point, everyone will fail, that's clear.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Nidra Poller: Mediation doesn't succeed during war; it comes after it ends.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, that's correct.

Nidra Poller: Yes, war is bad. But somebody wins, somebody loses, and then they try to negotiate for peace. You don't succeed in the middle of a war; you just start negotiations. Besides, Putin has shown that he's not even interested in a cease fire. We can compare Putin with regard to Ukraine and Iran with regard to Israel. Or the Palestinians with regard to Israel. The Palestinians do the same thing as Putin. They start a war and when they lose, they say, "Oh, it's not fair. Now, here's what I wanted, and you have to give it to me because if not I'll start another war." In the past, there was the Age of Absurdity. Today, we are living in the Age of Incoherence. If they go through with this Iran deal, it's going to be similar to what a French person felt when he turned on the radio and found out the Nazis were marching into France.

What I mean is, you turn on the television and you discover that you're being delivered into the hands of another tyrant. It is totally incoherent... Today, I checked rapidly, and didn't see anything in French media about the Iran deal. If I remember correctly, Russia is in the JCPOA. So how can they make a deal, including Russia, to allow Iran to attack Israel freely while claiming they'd love to help Ukraine, but can't do it because it's going to set off a Fourth and a Fifth World War before they're finished. I can't believe them; I can't believe it. The situation in Ukraine is the smoke screen. Could they just go ahead with the Iran deal while no one is

looking? But if I understand correctly, the original JCPOA was not signed. If they had signed it, they would have had to go to the US Senate for approval as a treaty. They didn't. I think the American congress can do something to stop it. It's simply incoherent. Macron says anti-Zionism is antisemitism, and then France votes in favor of anti-Zionist UN resolutions. And sticks to an official two-state solution policy. But the two-state solution, whether for Ukraine or for Israel, is a form of suicide.

I've been following the Vienna negotiations all year, attentive to all the consultations and strong statements. Remember? Nothing is settled until everything is settled. And now they're going to take the Revolutionary Guard off of the list of terrorist organizations? There can't be any rational basis for that agreement. Macron will have to discuss it after the elections but, as I said, nobody is talking about it now. We fear that they're just going to go ahead and do it. Can't stop Putin, can't stop the Iranians.

Jerry Gordon: That is the conundrum of the moment now. It would appear to me as a former US Army intelligence officer who six decades ago used to brief commanding officers on Russian military prowess and doctrine during the Cold War. The message was that Ivan is not 10-feet tall. This war in the Ukraine is an illustration of how badly Russia's armed forces are trained and equipped. The facts are that there is no combat leadership at what we consider the unit level, which was the brilliance of General Marshall during World War I that carried over to World War II and subsequent conflicts. In a discussion with another commentator, I pointed out that nothing has changed in six decades virtually since the end of the Stalin era, the end of the Cold War. As evidenced by the brutality of Russian operations in Ukraine that have stalled.

Nidra Poller: Same techniques and same impasse. When I was a student in the late '50s... I was at the University of Wisconsin and we had real Communists, because we were perhaps...believe

me... the only important left-wing university. All the universities in the United States were conservative in those days. We had real Communists and we had Russians grooming people up, down, and sideways. They hitched onto the civil rights movement, whatever, they were everywhere, and McCarthy was as right as he was wrong. So, they're doing the same thing now.

By the way, I wanted to tell you that when Valérie Pécresse talks about a long-range policy with Russia, and whether we missed early signs of what is happening today, she always mentions the Wagner mercenaries in Mali and how they pushed us out of Mali. We just took it on the chin, she said,

Jerry Gordon: Pécresse is dead spot on. My colleague and co-author, former US -trained Chadian Lt. General Abakar M. Abdallah who is a Darfur native and Chair of the Sudan United Movement, noted that Putin's Wagner group is training a Free Arab Army in the Sudan to overthrow neighboring Chad, all amid violence erupting in Senegal. Macron and the EU are not addressing the Russian threat destabilizing the important region of Sahel in Africa.

Nidra Poller: Pécresse speaks Russian. She was in Russia for a year or so when she was a student. She speaks a little Japanese too. She's very bright and, I think, honest. But it doesn't seem to help her in the presidential race. The Russians have been getting a foothold here and there. And now they come with their "great" army. I'm sure you've heard the stories of our central European grandparents... One of the reasons they left the Pale of Settlement is the that the men would be drafted into the army for 25 years.

Today, you can see, they don't care. I've seen reports from Ukrainian sources ...they say the Russians don't pick up the wounded and dead soldiers. The Ukrainians set up a hotline, I suppose it still works, where Russian mothers, sisters, wives, sweethearts could call and ask for information. They don't

know what's happened to their own soldiers that were sent there. They weren't told they were going to war. You can't have a good army with that kind of disregard. They say the soldiers were given rations unfit for consumption after 2015. These guys are cannon fodder. But, of course, there's fear of what might be behind them.

Jerry Gordon: True. In many ways, I thought that the resilience on the part of the Ukrainians under these dire circumstances almost paralleled what Israel had to go through in several wars fought from its Independence in 1948, the June 1967 Six Day War, the grueling October 1973, the First and Second Intifada, Operations in 2008-09, 2012, 2014 and 2020 against Hamas in Gaza and the War between the Wars against Iran in Lebanon and Syria.

Nidra Poller: Maybe if Zelensky weren't in the situation he's in, he might have been able to make more valid comparisons. We can tell him later, after he survives this terrible ordeal. Yes, of course, there are similarities.

Jerry Gordon: Yes. No one's written about it.

Nidra Poller: Not the comparisons that some conservatives are throwing at us. Another conservative friend told me he didn't want to admit the Russians bombed the maternity hospital in Mariupol because it will validate accusations against Israel the next time Hamas hides in the hospital... The Ukrainian troops weren't hiding in the hospital! It was pregnant women. If you can't make a distinction between these things...

But I have often written about this: if the West wants to save democracy, they have to stop hammering on Israel. Or saying how much they love Israel but doing everything to undermine Israel's security. And they have to understand that Israel, like Ukraine...these are the people that fight for their freedom. And that's the only way they can be free, the only way they can maintain their national integrity.

If you're sitting in a big comfortable country far away from the battlefield, you might think that your freedom is secure. But in the United States, you have to fight internal enemies too. Why would anyone think that suddenly, after all the centuries and millennia of human life, suddenly you don't have to fight for your freedom? In everyday life you have to fight for your freedom, and it demands coherence and utility.

We try our best to help and I'm open to debate, but with the people I'm telling you about, there's no debate. You publish an article, and they say, take me off your list.

Jerry Gordon: On that note, I want to conclude another brilliant wide ranging conversation with you. We will soon know what the results are of the French election, as the first round occurs in just a few weeks followed by the second round to see who is going to get the nod.

Nidra Poller: You can tell your listeners I'm bad at predicting the vote. I never believed the French would elect François Hollande. And they did! But this one is really up for grabs (for the 1<sup>st</sup> round candidate that will face Macron). We'll know the result before our next conversation. By then, we'll be going into the legislative elections. This is important because if Macron wins but doesn't get a legislative majority, it will be "cohabitation." And that might be a stumbling block. You know, it's like a situation in the U.S. where the president doesn't have a congressional majority. It's hard to pass legislation.

Jerry Gordon: I want to thank you again an engrossing discussion on France, Russia's dangerous provocative war against Ukraine, Israel's dilemma on how best to deny Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.

Nidra Poller: Thank you.

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Jerry Gordon is a Senior Editor of *The New English Review*, author of [The West Speaks](#), NERPress, 2012 and co-author of [Jihad in Sudan: Caliphate Threatens Africa and the World](#), JAD Press, 2017. From 2016 to 2020, he was producer and co-host of [Israel News Talk Radio-Beyond the Matrix](#).

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