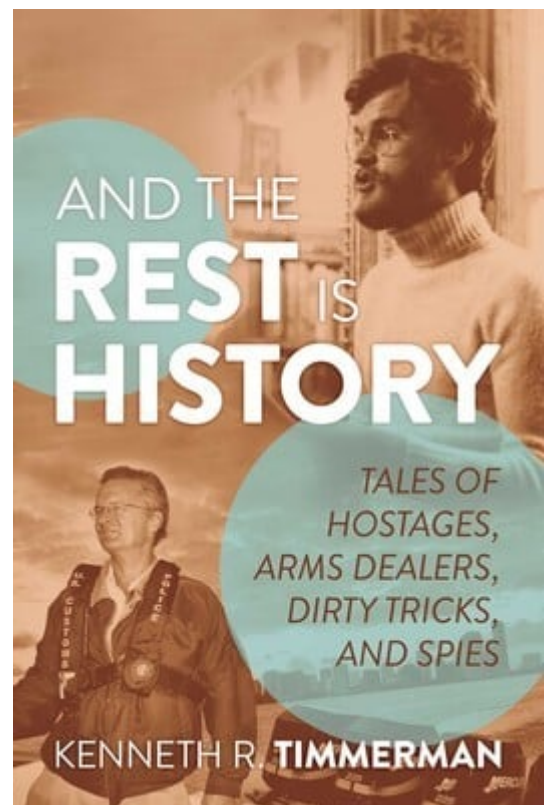


How I Became a Hostage, an Arms Dealer, and an Israeli Spy: Speaking with Ken Timmerman

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

This is an engrossing entertaining discussion with Ken Timmerman on the release of his new book [And the Rest is History: Tales of Hostages, Arms Dealers, and Spies](#). His latest opus chronicles his real-life adventures which began in 1983 with his spiritual salvation and “come to Jesus” moment when, as a stringer for a Dutch Radio reporting on the First Israel War in Lebanon, he is trapped and becomes a prisoner and hostage kept for 25 days under squalid life-threatening conditions in a Palestinian dungeon in West Beirut.



He emerges as a recognized international investigative journalist working out of Paris covering transfer of defense and dual-use technology to rogue regimes in Iraq and published in *Middle East Defense News Weekly* and in mainstream publications in the US and Europe. His return after 18 years in Paris to become a WMD investigator on a Congressional Committee ends in controversy when he's fired in 1994 for revealing US transfer of advanced aircraft manufacturing

technology at the behest of the Clinton White House.

Timmerman 's *And the Rest is History* is the first of a series of memoirs. The next volume, *Iran House* covers his secret work with Israeli diplomat and security adviser Uri Lubrani on another series of adventures through his founding leadership of the Foundation for Democracy in Iran aimed at fostering regime change in Iran.

Jerry Gordon: My name is Jerry Gordon, I am a senior editor at the *New English Review*. I am privileged to have US veteran investigative journalist, Kenneth Timmerman whose latest book—a memoir passing as a thriller—is titled *And the Rest Is History*. It is all about hostages, shady arms dealers, spies, terrorists—you name it. But it is also about two important life-changing events. One was spiritual, surviving as a hostage the demolition of a Palestinian dungeon in Beirut during the First Israeli war in Lebanon in 1983. The Second was his firing in 1994 as a Capitol Hill staff investigator on WMD by Holocaust-surviving Congressman Tom Lantos at the behest of the Clinton administration, because he told the truth about technology transfer to the Chinese regime.

Ken Timmerman: Communist China.

Jerry Gordon: That's correct. On that note, let us delve into the history and your story, which is really fascinating. Before you became an investigative journalist, what were you doing in Paris?

Ken Timmerman: I was playing around for 10 years, really, as a novelist. I ran an expatriate literary magazine called, *Paris Voices*, out of Shakespeare and Company, right across from Notre Dame. I was teaching English, I worked as an interpreter to make money. I had some interesting times working as an interpreter. But nevertheless, I was playing. I got to a certain age, around 28, and I said, "It's time to get serious." There was a war going on in Lebanon. I had a number

of Lebanese students, people who had been members of the Lebanese Forces, and they were telling me all kinds of stories about Lebanon and got me interested in going. So, I got a stringer job with a Dutch radio station and talked to the Palestinians. They were my buddies at that point, I thought. I was a Left Bank pot-smoking Liberal. So of course, the Palestinians were my friends, and they recommended me—not a problem.



Ken Timmerman

I went to Athens on the way to Beirut because you could not fly directly to Beirut any longer, talked to the Palestinian ambassador there as well. Absolutely no problem. “Welcome, Welcome, Yahni. Please, come and report.” And so, I was supposed to go there and sort of embed with a left-wing pro-Palestinian NGO in West Beirut. But instead of that, the Palestinians took me hostage. They took me hostage almost as soon as I arrived in West Beirut during a ceasefire. They held me for 24 days in a small room with a number of other surprising people: Lebanese Christians, Lebanese Shia, Syrians, Palestinians, people trying to flee West Beirut. That was kind of the first thing that really jived in my mind. I said, “Wait a second. Why are they getting put in this dungeon for trying to flee West Beirut?” The answer was well, they were all hostages, the entire civilian population of West Beirut was a hostage to the PLO. That was a story that the media was not telling you about. The story that I was hearing

in Paris and everybody else was hearing from the *New York Times* and elsewhere was, "Oh, the poor Palestinians. This is Stalingrad, the Israelis with their tremendous military might, it's David versus Goliath."

The Israelis were Goliath. And the poor Palestinians were the Davids, for whom we should all feel sympathetic. After getting pounded day and night by Israeli aircraft, naval guns, tanks, I began to take a different view towards the Palestinians. I and many other of my cell mates including a Lebanese Shia who was there with me, began to pray that the Israelis, that an Israeli tank, and we could listen to their treads on the ground or at least so we thought, would smash through our underground cell and free us. And it got very dicey at the end because the so-called Palestinian officers such as they were, all left. And this place was underground, as I said, it was eight floors when I went in there and one and a half floors and pancakes, when eventually by the grace of God I did get out. All of it was falling on top of our heads. But at the end, the so-called officers left, and we were left with teenagers with guns. So, one of the promotional tweets that I put out on the book, says "Which is more dangerous, a gorgeous Swedish woman with a Glock 19 or a Palestinian teenager with an AK-47?" Now, I will tell you, the answer to that is an open question. Because don't think the gorgeous Swedish woman with a Glock 19 is a pushover. But a teenage kid in a war zone with a Kalashnikov is pretty damn scary. No control, no sense of responsibility, and that is when we really knew, "We're going to die. We're all going to die."

Jerry Gordon: So how did you get liberated? You had met, was it two other Frenchmen who had been trapped somehow?

Ken Timmerman: Yes. One of them was a Foreign Legionnaire and he actually said quote, he "Deserved to be there," because he was fighting for the other side. He had enlisted with Saad Haddad, a Lebanese, Christian militiaman in South Lebanon, who was being supported by Israel. And he went up to Beirut with

his old Mercedes weighted down with about 300 kilograms of landmines that they had recuperated from the Palestinians. So, he mined the roads leading from the airport. Boom. The mines were going off, the Palestinians were getting blown up, and he escaped that, went back to East Beirut. Then the idiot, said, "Oh, I'm going to be a photojournalist." So, he picked up a camera and went back to start taking pictures of all this stuff, and then he got picked up by the Palestinians and thrown in that same dungeon several weeks before me.

Jerry Gordon: So, because he spoke French, is that why you formed a trio that was liberated in part by the French?

Ken Timmerman: Yes. I lived in Paris; I was fluent in French. And the French had a very good relationship with the Palestinians, as it turned out. Well, so one day we were visited by them; I do not know how many of you have read John Le Carré's, *The Little Drummer Girl*.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Ken Timmerman: *The Little Drummer Girl* was actually based on a woman named Janet Stevens who was a pro-Palestinian leftist, who lived in Beirut. She was escorting journalists around. And one day she actually showed up in this dungeon where we were, I do not think she was with John Le Carré, although he was there that summer. She was there with another American who I identify in one of the footnotes. So, me and the French Foreign Legionnaire, start to whistle the *La Marseillaise* through this Judas.

That's this little hole in the door that they slide shut. So, he starts whistling the *La Marseillaise* through the Judas. We see these two people out there in the common room, which is serving as a bomb shelter. So, then we start whistling *The Star-Spangled Banner*, and these two Americans freak out. They turn around and deliberately ignore us. You can see click, click, click going on in their heads, "Oh my God, they're

American hostages here.” What is the difference between we who are guests of the Palestinians and those people over there who are guests of the Palestinians? The only difference is a steel door. And that made them think and they fled. Neither she nor her colleague ever said a word to the US embassy.

When I was finally released with the Frenchman, I went to the US embassy to get a temporary passport. You will see this extraordinary copy of my temporary two-week passport issued to me by the US embassy in Beirut with no ID documents in my book. Quite extraordinary.

Jerry Gordon: Wow.

Ken Timmerman: Think about it. They had never known there was American held hostage by the PLO at that time. It was only the French who had known, they had been informed by an Irishman who had been there and released. So, he went to his embassy and said, there were a couple of Frenchmen there. When the French finally got word, they said, “Oh, there’s two French people.” And they came to get us and going from door to door, he said, “Hey, any Frenchman here?” And I kind of tossed a coin in my mind, I said “Heads, if I stay here, I’m dead. I’m going to die.” Either like a rat under the building being bombed, or they are taking people out and shooting them in the alleyway. So, either way I am going to die. I do not know what is going to go on out there, but I would rather die out in the light than down here in the dark. When I talk about it, I have to pray to my Lord and savior, Jesus, for saving me in so many times of great peril, and this certainly was one of them, and I got out through the intervention of angels. There is no other way of describing it. Completely illogical, no reason, it was God’s will.

Jerry Gordon: So, on your way out of this dungeon in the midst of intense warfare as a French citizen, in disguise, you actually caught a glimpse of Yasser Arafat.



Ken on USS Ticonderoga aircraft carrier off Beirut, 1983

Ken Timmerman: It was quite a story. We were then transferred to a temporary holding cell in another building. At night, we climbed up on a cot and could look down into the hallway outside. It was lined with ammunition crates. So, let us say the hallway was 4 or 5 feet wide, but there was a passage only about that wide, there were ammo crates on both sides of the hallway, floor to ceiling and in the middle of the night we were pretty sure it was Arafat. We could see him, and he was bald, he did not have any hair when he took his headdress off. And he was with this Natasha, this Russian female army officer in uniform, and they were walking down this corridor in the middle of the night.

The next day we were let go and taken up to the French temporary consulate in Baabda, up on the hillside looking down over Beirut. For the first time in 3 1/2 weeks, I actually saw the Israeli F-16s that had been bombing us day in and day out. It was gorgeous. It was beautiful. We loved it. We saw them going to hit West Beirut, where we had been just hours earlier and watched them drop the bombs. They were so far away you could not hear them explode. You could see the explosions. Then later, the sound washed over you. The next morning in the newspaper, there was a picture where they had bombed. It turned out it was the very building where we had been, where

Arafat had been, that was an ammo dump. We had been there just two hours earlier. I learned after the war that the Israelis were tracking Arafat the whole time. They knew exactly where he was, but they never wanted to kill him. The reason they did not want to kill him was because his driver was a Mossad agent. They wanted to just scare him, but not kill him.

Jerry Gordon: There is an interesting footnote in your book about this entire story that follows two reprehensible events. That was the bombings of both of the barracks of the French paras and the devastating truck bombing of the US Marine barracks that I remember very vividly by the terrorist mastermind of note at that time, Imad Mughniyeh. The episode you wrote about is very interesting because in the footnote, you resurrect the memory of "Cap the knife," Caspar Weinberger, who was Reagan's then Pentagon chief. The US had two F-14 Tomcats on an aircraft carrier loaded with bombs to go after these folks in the Beqaa valley, but what happened?

Ken Timmerman: I was there when that raid was supposed to take place, and coming back from Tripoli, Lebanon, covering another war—an intra-Palestinian war. It was kind of surrealistic. We went up there and reported during the fighting and came back and had lunch up in the mountains in the afternoon before going back to Beirut, very, very odd little war. We were sitting up there with a friend of mine, a Czech correspondent, and having lunch in the mountains late afternoon, when we see these jets come in off the ocean and heading towards the Beqaa Valley. And I said, those are French Super-Etendards, Naval fighter jets. Bombers. And I said I wonder where they are going. So, we had another bottle of wine. About 30 minutes later, here they come back returning from the Beqaa. We learned later on that they had gone to bomb the barracks of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Baalbek. They missed because there was a spy in the French foreign ministry, who informed the Iranians, and they left the area 10 minutes before the raid actually took place. Now, here is the kicker,

where you wanted to go with your question. The US was supposed to be part of a joint raid because the attacks were six minutes apart, 61 French paratroopers, 241 US Marines, at two different parts of Beirut, six minutes apart. This was the hallmark of Imad Mughniyeh. And later on, he taught Al-Qaeda how to do this. They used that same technique much more spectacular in 1998 when they hit two East African embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, hundreds of miles apart, and of course 9/11, which was also a simultaneous terror bombing. The US was supposed to go in jointly with them and Cap Weinberger just before the mission pulled the plug and said "we do not have any hard intelligence that the Iranians were behind this and so we are not going to do it. So, I started looking into this many years later because some of the people who had been there in Beirut were suing Iran. I got to know US Navy Admiral Ace Lyons, who was then the Chief of Naval Operations. He was personally involved in preparing the retaliatory raid and was very upset.

I got to know John Lehman, who at the time was the Secretary of the Navy. He was also directly involved in this. Ace Lyons later testified in a US court, and I was there for the testimony, and later spoke to him about it, while he delivered a sealed envelope to the judge. He said, "In here, is an intercept, which I cannot reveal in open court." It was actually an intercept from the Iranian regime, giving instructions to their people in Damascus to bomb the US Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut. That was why we were going to launch a retaliatory raid. So, I asked him why didn't Weinberger ask him? Lyons replied: "I asked Weinberger, he said, he never saw it."

I asked John Vessey who was then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and he had never seen it. I asked a whole bunch of different people, who also said they never saw it. The only two people who saw it were Ace Lyons and John Lehman. So, I said, "Ace, how could that be that the Secretary of

Defense wouldn't see something so important?" Well, it turns out that the chain of paperwork that gets to the Secretary of Defense goes through his military aide. It is the military aide acting as chief of staff determines what the SecDef is going to read or not read. And at the time, the military aide was a young Colonel named Colin Powell. I tried to interview Colin Powell many different times on this, and he would never talk to me, would never answer questions.

Colin Powell blocked the information from the SecDef because he thought it would be too extravagant, too aggressive for the United States to fight back. I believe to this day and in the same vein by the way with Communist China later on, that had we acted then in 1983 against the Iranians, hard action, tough action, we would not be where we are today. 9/11 would not have happened. We would not have had all these Iranian attacks against us because they would have respected us. As it was, the Iranians felt that we were essentially a paper tiger. The head of the revolutionary guards, Mohsen Rezaei, I got to know his son very well later on, in the second volume of my memoirs, which will be called *Iran House*, and he told me that his father loved to tell the story about Beirut and what happened there with the Marine barracks. He said the Americans left with their tail between the legs. And after that, we knew we could hit them, they would never respond.

Jerry Gordon: Which brings us to your episode dealing with some shadowy people trying to sell arms through the backdoor to Iran, as it turned out.

Ken Timmerman: The *New York Times* actually identified me as an arms dealer, and it was sort of funny. It was after I got out of Beirut and started returning to the Middle East. The bug bit me, so I went to Egypt, I went to Israel, I went to a bunch of different places, back to Lebanon. Then in Paris, I became friends with a guy named Mark Broman, Colonel Mark Broman, who was the head of the Pentagon Office of Defense Cooperation, a big job in Paris at the US Embassy, which was

basically in charge of US arms sales to France. Broman was going to retire, and his partner was a character named Paul Cutter, a former CIA operative who spent a lot of time behind the Iron Curtain clandestinely in the '60s and the '70s. He was Serbian by origin and quite a character.

They were trying to put together all kinds of arms deals and asked me, "Hey, we want to buy these used F-4s from Egypt." You know Egypt. You have been to Egypt a number of times. You have dealt with them. But would you go and ask the question if we could buy them?" I said, "Well, who are we going to buy them for? What is the deal?" They said, "Oh, well, look, we've got this end-use certificate, an EUC from Paraguay." I said, "Oh, that's great." Okay, so we would buy the old F-4s from Egypt for a couple of million dollars apiece and then sell them to Paraguay. What a great deal! And we get a 5 or 10% commission so that sounds like interesting business. I go down to Cairo with all this stuff about Paraguay and meet the arms director of the Egyptian Ministry of Defense. And we have a very pleasant chat. He is an older gentleman, kind of white-haired, distinguished, very friendly. And at the end, he kind of picks up this end-use certificate again and looks at it and he almost winks at me and he says, "Paraguay? Are you sure they have an Air Force?"

And I said, "Well, actually, general, I'll tell you what, I'll go back and ask some more questions to the people I'm working with," and went to the American University of Cairo and looked it up. Effectively Paraguay did have an Air Force consisting of a half dozen single engine propeller planes used as trainers. The amount of money for the F-4s, \$132 million I think it was at the time, would have been 15% of the entire GDP of the country of Paraguay.

Jerry Gordon: GDP, yes.

Ken Timmerman: And I said, "Oops." The next morning, I went back to see General Ussery Khatib again, and I said, "General,

I'll tell you what, I think, probably this ... you have been very, very kind to me, and I appreciate your hospitality. I am going to go back to Paris and check with these people, but you are right. Paraguay doesn't really sound very legitimate, and I'm going to figure out what's going on." When I get back to Paris and confront Broman, and I said, "You tricked me. You lied to me," and we are in his office, he says, "Not here, not here, we can't talk here." So, we go out to a cafe, and now in the cafe, he says, I said, "This is Iran, isn't it?" This is 1984. "This is Iran, isn't it?" He said, "Of course it's Iran, what do you think it was?" And I said, "But you've lied to me." "Oh, come on. You didn't figure it out?"

And that led me to scratch my head and wonder what was going on, because he was very well-plugged into the Pentagon. Cutter claimed to be very well plugged in at CIA and at NSC. I attended a lot of these meetings, because I was working for their defense electronics publication at the time. They claimed that they had it all wired back in the US in the Reagan administration. The idea was to bring the Iranian regime away from the Soviets who were trying to woo them and bring them back into the American fold by helping them with arms deliveries. This was not an arms for a hostage trade, this was actually a strategic initiative, and it later developed into Iran-Contra. And when people think of Iran-Contra, all they think about is arms for hostages, and they forget the other part of what was called by the White House and even by Ollie North as *The Initiative*.

I was involved in *The Initiative* in the very beginning, in the very first cut, the first draft of *The Initiative* in '84- 85. Later I tried to do a piece with *CBS 60 Minutes* on it as well. I took the story over to the media side and was hired by the *New York Times* and by *Newsweek* to work on it once Iran-Contra actually broke. But in the beginning, it really was a strategic initiative, and later degenerated into something else.

Jerry Gordon That is interesting. Did those F-4s that you may have facilitated end up in the Iranian Air Force inventory as well.

Ken Timmerman: Not the Egyptian ones. They never got the Egyptian F-4s, They have F-4s that were sold to them in the '70s, and because those were deteriorating, they needed new aircraft, and the Russians were not willing to sell them aircraft, so they were getting these junky fighters from China, the equivalent of MiG-21s. And they were not particularly happy with that. They would have preferred F-4s. *The New York Times* double crossed me as well. I was working for the *New York Times* on this story, and I told them the whole thing. I had given them all these documents that I had taken with me. I showed them the Paraguayan EUC and everything. In the end, when they finally ran the story, they said, "Well, Mr. Timmerman, who was helping us research this story, turns out to have been a player and he was an arms dealer." So, I get called an arms dealer by the *New York Times* and I was a little bit upset at the time. Then I talked to my agent who was selling my book on arm sales to Iran and Iraq. He said, "Ken, what's your problem?" I said, "Well, they're calling me an arms dealer." He says, "So what, what do you care? They spelled your name right, didn't they?"

Jerry Gordon: That was Mr. Gendelman, as I recall.

Ken Timmerman: Yes Paul Gendelman, quite an interesting personality.

Jerry Gordon: He's a character.

Ken Timmerman: Yes.

Jerry Gordon: You had mentioned you worked for a defense electronics publication, but you also reported on 'arms fairs.'

Ken Timmerman: I started to work as a defense correspondent

for different magazines in Paris, in Germany, in the UK, in the United States, as well, *The Journal of Defense & Diplomacy* in the US and others. One particular French magazine had opened the doors to be in Baghdad because every French defense company was selling to Saddam Hussein. This defense magazine wanted to get information about what they were selling, but the French never talked to them. In Paris, they would not, it was all secret. It was all considered to be classified. They could not reveal what they were doing. They could not even reveal the amount they were selling to Saddam Hussein.

The largest sales were made by Aérospatiale: 80 % of their Missile division total turnover was going to Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein was so important as a market for the French. If you were a French arms salesman and you inked a deal with Saddam Hussein, you retired in Saint Tropez with champagne and caviar. If you did not ink that deal, you are going to live in some *banlieues* outside of Paris in a two-room apartment. So, it was important for them. I went to Baghdad, and I have a letter of introduction from this French defense magazine. And lo and behold, it opens up every door. All of the arms dealers wanted to talk, all of them wanted to talk. I do not think a single one turned me down, but we would not talk openly.

We would start in the bar at one of the hotels. And then we would go out onto the balconies because everybody knew in Baghdad at that time under Saddam, all the rooms were bugged. So, you did not talk in your room. You went someplace else, someplace, generally, with a lot of noise. There were a lot of stories in Baghdad, a lot of fun I tell in, *And the rest is history*, trying to find the secretive General Amir, who was the key for the French to all of their contracts. Turns out he was also in charge of their missile programs. He is one of the guys in charge of their ballistic missile programs.

I did finally find him and another Lieutenant General Amir al-Sadi, who was in charge of the chemical weapons programs and uranium enrichment. I interviewed them. I was the only Western

correspondent to ever see them, let alone interview them. I have pictures of them in the book. Later on, they became the 6 of spades and 7 of diamonds in the deck of cards used by US forces in the Second Iraq War.

Jerry Gordon: There was an interesting episode when you attended one of those arms fairs in Baghdad. Because of your background, you spotted something very interesting under the wing of a French Mirage fighter.

Ken Timmerman: Oh yes. I was a defense correspondent. My job was to look at weapons. The Iraqis decided to display their French Mirage F1 fighter jets. Nobody had really seen them before like this. Nobody had been able to photograph them. There were only two journalists there from the West, me and Christopher Foss from *Jane's Defence Weekly*. So, I went there. I had a Canon EOS 100-300 lens. And so, I see two people that I was very familiar with. Hugues de l'Estoile, he was the chief arm salesman for Dassault. They used to say that his signature was worth 50 billion Francs. That was what he had brought into the company from all the contracts he had signed with Iraq in particular. He was standing under the wing of this Mirage F1 with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the French military, General Maurice Schmidt, who I also was following around and talking to at the Arms Fair. He was attired in his kepi and white full-dress uniform. General Schmidt was saying in unprintable language to De l'Estoile, "What have you done here, De l'Estoile? What is this Soviet missile?" It was an AS-14 Kedge, "Doing under the wing of your aircraft?" Then De l'Estoilehe said, "Well, general I didn't have anything to do with that. That was the Iraqis who did that." The Iraqis were mating Soviet missiles with French weapons. Why is that significant?



In South Africa, 1985

Because you cannot just throw a missile on an aircraft and expect it to work. There is the whole electronic interface. To be able to do the electronic interface, and the firing mechanism, and the radar interface basically you have to know everything about the missile, and you have to know everything about the aircraft. The Iraqis did not know anything about either. Clearly, they had Soviet technicians who were working on French NATO standard aircraft. This was a huge, huge deal because it basically gave the Soviets, at the height of the Cold War, access to some of our most secret targeting mechanisms, because, also under that wing, was the targeting pod, the laser designation pod. Well, the French said it was made by Thompson-CSF. They said, "Oh yes Thompson has sold this." It was not. Martin Marietta in the United States of America made it.

They supplied it to Thompson under an exclusive, no re-export

license. Thompson without a word, sold it to both India and Iraq illegally, and I have the picture in the book. When it hit the Pentagon – the Pentagon were subscribers to this defense newsletter I published at the time *Middle East Defense News*. When they saw that picture, they just went nuts because Thompson was trying to buy a US aerospace company for \$500 million, the missile division of a company called LTV at the time. This photograph scorched the deal. And later on, I joke in the book, Thompson had 500 million reasons to be upset with me.

Jerry Gordon: There's a side trip you take doing your investigative work to the Republic of South Africa to see a demonstration of a weapon, a 155-millimeter howitzer. But not only to demonstrate it, but you were whisked off to a location that perhaps close to or in Namibia during a war that was going on against SWAPO and its Russian and

Ken Timmerman: Cuban ...

Jerry Gordon: Benefactors.

Ken Timmerman: Yes. Russian and Cuban backers.

Jerry Gordon That's correct. A lot of people forgot who was involved in Namibia. But what was interesting was the shadowy Canadian researcher, Gerald Bull was behind it all. Why don't you describe what happened during your visit in South Africa and the connection to Gerald Bull's huge super gun project for Saddam Hussein.

Ken Timmerman: Gerry Bull was a ballistics genius. He invented what they called a base bleed technology which extended the range of the 155-millimeter gun to, I think, outwards of 40 kilometers, 24, 26 miles, roughly. This was probably 5-6 miles more than anything that the US had in our inventory. He worked for the Americans for the Pentagon, but they never bought his technology. So, then he went out in the international market and sold it to the Austrians, sold it to the Belgians, sold it

to the South Africans. They made the G5 gun and the G6, which is a wheeled version of it. I was down there for three weeks, at the invitation of ARMSCOR, the Armaments Corporation of South Africa, to do a defense magazine spread on the South African defense industry. They wanted to show it off. They had been embargoed for years, and they wanted to show that the embargoes had not only not slowed them down, but it had enhanced their modernization.



With ARMSCOR Head Piet Marais,
South Africa, 1985

It was quite interesting. I went to probably a dozen different defense factories around the country, in addition to going out into the Savannah. We landed on a red clay airstrip in the middle of nowhere, red clay airstrip with the dust going up behind us and no road signs. And this was going to be a live fire demonstration. So, I am there with Swaneei, the commander of the unit, who says, We can come in here with these guns, set up, fire, and leave in and seven minutes, maybe it was eight minutes, fire them. So, they drove up with eight guns, lined them all up. He told me to track it with my watch. When they are ready to go, he says, "Hey, Timmerman, would you do us the honor?" And I said, "Sure, why not?" I don't know where the hell we are, or where the guns are pointed. They're not pointed south, that's for sure." And they hand me this lanyard. There's the countdown, three, two, one, and I pull.

An enormous sound going off all around us, and the lanyard pops out of my hand. And Swaneei looks at me and says, "You got to pull it man. You got pull it." So, I go back, and I yank the lanyard and off goes the gun. And Swaneei says, "Ah, that is the sound of freedom."

So, then they took me to the ammo factory, where they were making all this stuff at a new automated ammo plant. And at a certain point, my ARMSCOR escort says, "I've got some things to do in the office there, you might want to have a look around outside and just see what's going on." And I said, "Oh, okay." I heard rumors that they were selling to Saddam, to Iraq. They were selling this new long range artillery system to Saddam Hussein. I go outside, and of course outside is the loading dock area.

I jump down on the ground and look at these enormous pallets after pallets, endless, hundreds of meters long stacked up, 12 feet, 15 feet high, and covered up with tarps. But on the tarps, you can see on the edge of it, there were big signs that say Ministry of Defense, Baghdad, Iraq. I mean, it was hilarious. Then I come back, and he says, "Ah, did you see something out there? You might want to take that up with the chairman when you meet him tomorrow." So, then I met the chairman of ARMSCOR, and there is a photo of us meeting in the book, where he has his hand on a mock-up of one of those guns. And he tells me the story. Very, very straightforward, very honest man, tells me the story. The South Africans were probably the only arms dealers who didn't cheat their customers, because Saddam Hussein, said, "Look, you can sell to me, but if you sell to me, you don't ship to the Iranians."



Uri Lubrani, Israeli Diplomat and security advisor, with President Shimon Peres

Before that, they had actually been shipping ammo to the Iranians like everybody else in the world. 28 countries were shipping both to Iran and to Iraq during the Gulf War. It was quite a story. And so, Saddam says, "If you ship to me, you don't sell to the Iranians." And by golly, the South Africans stop selling to the Iranians. Who in the right mind would do that?

Jerry Gordon: I would like to go back to an episode that occurred in 1986 after the downing of an Israeli aircraft over Lebanon, onboard was a weapon systems manager, by the name of Ron Arad. That led you to an assignment at the behest of two abiding Israeli principles. One of them is a gentleman you had a long-term relationship after this began, Uri Lubrani, who was the last Israel ambassador to what was the Shah's Iran, and also an IDF Colonel who spoke impeccable French by the name of ...

Ken Timmerman: Jacques Neriah.

Jerry Gordon: It was an effort to engage a terrorist group in Lebanon. The early elements of Hezbollah at that time.

Ken Timmerman: It was the early elements of Hezbollah.

Jerry Gordon: Correct. It took place in a town I know pretty

well from my banking experience called Geneva.

Ken Timmerman: Right.

Jerry Gordon: It was done with another shadowy gentleman who had established an NGO to help in hostage negotiations. He may or may not have been connected with Swiss Intelligence.

Ken Timmerman: Right.

Jerry Gordon: Describe what experience was like, but also a complicating factor, which made it a lost opportunity...

Ken Timmerman: Yes.

Jerry Gordon: Particularly in 1988.

Ken Timmerman: '88, right.

Jerry Gordon: The ability to get Arad out of there.

Ken Timmerman: Right. So, this is how I became an Israeli spy.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Ken Timmerman: A lot of people always thought I was an Israeli spy, but not for the right reasons. I did actually become an Israeli spy briefly, and for a specific operation.

Jerry Gordon: Right.

Ken Timmerman: I was publishing my own newsletter at the time called *Middle East Defense News*. I had many sources, like this Mr. Greisen, a former Geneva Intelligence Officer and who had set up the NGO to try to get hostages freed. I would write stories about them and then send them out. The Israelis were subscribers. And so, their defense attaché in Paris, Jacques Neriah, invites me out to lunch. I go out to lunch with lots of defense attaches. It's a very pleasant thing to do in Paris. He starts to ask me about this story. And he says, "Oh, well, it sounds like you've got a source." I said, "Yeah. I

can't tell you too much about this person, but I've got a source." And then somewhere we keep on talking about it. And then I refer to the source. So, Jacques invites me to meet with Uri Lubrani, who at that time I did not know, but I certainly knew of reputation. He was very well known. He was not in the Prime Minister's cabinet, but he had direct access to the Prime Minister and to the head of Mossad. Uri was in a very special position for many years. He was first dealing with Lebanon at that time and later on concerned with Iran. They arranged for me to meet Uri in a safe house in London. As I'm going over to the Farnborough air show, on the way I stop off at this safe house, and we have a long chat. Uri was very gracious and forthcoming. I describe all of this in the book. Later on, we go forward with the actual operation in Geneva to meet the Hezbollah contact. Uri and I get together at a hotel late, and he looks around and sees all these Arabs. He says, "I hate this town. I hate Geneva." I said, "Why? What's the matter?" And he said, "Too many Arabs. Too many Arabs."

They scripted these meetings, very carefully. And there was a lot of back scripting, which I did not see. So, for example, I am on my way, and I leave Uri, he knows where I am going. They know all of my movements. I am walking down the street to enter this hotel, I see this strange woman who looks a little bit Arab, and I see her in a window behind me, about 50 feet back I said, mm-mmm, I don't know if I like that, so I took a little detour. I went across the bridge over the river to the other side of the lake. I walked for several blocks and then came back over another bridge to reach the hotel and meet the Israeli contacts in the hotel. Lo and behold, three minutes later, in walks the woman, that very same woman, now she has a guy accompanying her. They take a table, you know, three tables away and started chatting away in Arabic. I said, hmm, one of ours, or one of theirs. Wasn't quite sure. And as it turned out Uri had a whole team of watchers there to keep me safe.

In the end, it all fell through. I believe the Hezbollah contact had access to the people who had Ron Arad and two young Israeli soldiers. Uri believed that as well. Then they had an Israeli election in November of 1988, and it was a hung election. And everything turned into marshmallows for months, and things fell through the cracks, and they never pursued it. After that, Ron Arad was transferred to the Iranians in Iran. Once he was in Iran, it was a hundred times more difficult to get him out. He is either dead or still there today. They do not know, they believe that he is dead, but they are not a 100% sure. The last time I spoke to Uri was shortly before he died, in 2018.

Jerry Gordon: Yes.

Ken Timmerman: He said, we think he is dead, but was not a 100% percent sure. So that was a missed opportunity by the Israeli politicians, who could not follow through on the opening that Uri and I had created.

Jerry Gordon: I would say it was a sad lost opportunity all the way around.

Ken Timmerman: Yes. I was a journalist, and was working as an Israeli spy, I felt really comfortable about that. at the time, and I feel comfortable about it now. And why do I feel comfortable about it? Because there was no subterfuge on my part. I was not pretending to be somebody I wasn't. When I met the Hezbollah guy, I told him who I was, I put out this confidential newsletter and I talked to all kinds of different people. And I had Israeli friends who were very interested in this.

I was there clearly as an intermediary, between the Israelis and this Hezbollah contact. And he understood that. Griessen at one point tried to say, oh, my friend from the CIA, referring to me. And I said, no, no, no, you are not going there. I really chewed him out and Uri was really upset with

that as well. I felt very comfortable with that, and I especially felt comfortable with what we were trying to do. Having myself being a hostage in Beirut, I could imagine but did not know what Ron Arad was going through. I am sure it was a hundred times worse than what I went through. I felt sympathy for him as a former hostage. Anything I could have done to help him get out; I would have done.

Jerry Gordon: So, we give you an Honorary Mensch Award. Let us go back to Saddam Hussein and his nefarious activities. What did you do to find out that Bush 41 the father, was engaged in some subterfuge, I believe when Donald Rumsfeld who was his Defense Secretary at that time, providing dual-use technology to Saddam Hussein that unfortunately culminates in the gassing over a hundred thousand Kurds in Halabja.

Ken Timmerman: Right.

Jerry Gordon: About the same time as you failed hostage release episode with Israel in 1988.

Ken Timmerman: Right. So, one thing leads to another. I was dealing with arms sales, and then I got interested in the technology that you need to manufacture arms. And as it turned out that we in the West, not just the United States, Britain and, in particular, France, Germany, Italy were selling Saddam dual-use technology for his factories. They were helping him build factories to make chemical weapons and biological weapons, to build ballistic missiles, cyclotrons, to enrich uranium, and a whole panoply of conventional weapons.

I began to track the companies that were selling it. And one of my first collaborations with the Simon Wiesenthal Center was over this issue with Rabbi Abe Cooper, the Associate Dean of the Center. He wrote the foreword to my new book. I am very honored that he agreed to do that. And he talks about our collaboration in the foreword. One of the first things we did together was to look at the poison gas connection between

Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi to the Germans, looking at those companies selling the equipment that the Iraqis and the Libyans could use to make poison gas. At the time, the export control situation was a bit fluid.

When the Americans, in particular, Steve Bryen, who became a very good friend, he was at the Defense Department, when he found out that chemical weapons precursors were going to Saddam in '84, he cut it off, stopped it dead. Well, he was out of the Pentagon by the end of '88 or '89 when Papa Bush came in. Papa Bush opened the flood gates again. He determined to do, billions of dollars of business with Iraq, not weapons business per se, but dual-use technology through the Commerce Department and different credits that they had, the bank of BNL, The Bank of Nazionale del Lavoro, in Italy, operating out of Atlanta.



Ken with Mike Wallace of CBS 60 Minutes, 1991

Jerry Gordon: And I might add its notorious branch in Atlanta, Georgia.

Ken Timmerman: Yes, the notorious BNL branch in Atlanta, Georgia, where I also went and interviewed the prosecutor and the officers who were working at the bank and everything else and looked at the documents. That prosecutor was thicker than a brick. She could not read a document in English which said, "End-use certificate and specify the Rashid State Establishment in Baghdad." I mean, she didn't have a clue what

she was doing. I could read those documents and say, "Oh, well, this is going to this state establishment, this stuff is going over here, they make missiles. This place over here makes electronics, this place over here makes radar, this one makes cryogenic fuel." In the book that I published later about this, [*The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq*](#), 1994. on the back cover, there is a map of Iraq with all the different weapons plants. This was just before the UN sent in their inspectors. When I ultimately got to know Rolf Ekéus, who was the head of that inspection team, the UN Special Commission called UNSCOM, he said that Ken Timmerman's book is our Bible, we use this to go figure out where Saddam was making his weapons, and then they dismantled the plants.

Jerry Gordon: Wow. One of your last episodes uncovering Iraq's weapons was used by the US Air Force in doing target intelligence during Operation Desert Storm.

Ken Timmerman: When my country was on the cusp of going to war in Iraq, I was living in France, and it turned out that the French were hiding stuff from us. I was invited to a lunch by the Air Force attaché at the US Embassy. And he had the two guys with him. And they were going like this, "Can we ask him a question? Can we ask him a question? They wanted to know what I learned from the French about various electronic systems, countermeasures, radar and all the rest of it. I said, "Well, haven't the French told you all that?" And he said, "No, they haven't told us at all." And I said, "You got to be kidding me." And they said, "No, they haven't, so anything that you know or could find out would be useful." I said, "Look, we are going to war, America's going to war, I am a patriotic citizen, I am also a journalist, I am not going to do anything that could be considered, "Espionage" per se. But what I will be very happy to do is to talk to my friends in the French arms business who are pro-American and ask them what they know and what might be of use. And I will publish most of that in my newsletter, so everybody can see it."

And I published most of it in the newsletter, but not all of it. I also delivered thick files with some of the technical specification on the French radars that Saddam was using for his early warning system. On the first morning of the US air strikes – I learned this later – they sent in Apache helicopters in what they called, Nap-of-the-earth flights, which is 40, 50 feet above the ground, in the dark with night vision goggles. They took out those radars, which I had identified for the US Air Force attaché. So, I played my small little part anonymously in the war effort against Saddam Hussein. Once they took out those radars, it was the New York Thruway with F-16s, F-15s, the F-117s, you name it, the New York Thruway, they just went in there, total air superiority. If they had not taken out the French radars, we would have lost many pilots.



Ken with Simon Wiesenthal,
Paris, 1992

Jerry Gordon: About the same time, you had been involved with Simon Wiesenthal Center on targeting emerging rogue regimes and WMD, Saddam Hussein was lobbing Scud missiles from Western Iraq into Israel, and the Israelis knew that something was going on. However, for a variety of reasons, the Israelis chose not to be really forthcoming about the extensive amount of damage that Israel was sustaining at that point in time. I remember dramatic photos with Israeli apartments swathed in

plastic to prevent chemical perhaps bio- weapons intrusion, one didn't know. But it is to the credit of Simon Wiesenthal Center, Shimon Samuel in particular in Paris, who, you had gotten to know, via Rabbi Abe Cooper, Chancellor Rabbi Marvin Hier, the great man himself, Mr. Wiesenthal on trips to Austria. And he gave you a *Beaux Mon* as the French would say. A good name.

Ken Timmerman: *A bon mot.*

Jerry Gordon: He said, while I was working to identify the historic monsters, you were engaged in uncovering the future monsters.

Ken Timmerman: The murderers of tomorrow. It was quite a statement that he made. And I was quite honored for that. That was actually made in public when we presented, one of my reports in Paris with Shimon Samuels. And Simon Wiesenthal came from Vienna to Paris for that unveiling of the report. And I was very honored that he was there. We had become friends by that point. And I was very honored that he made that trip, and of course by what he said.

Jerry Gordon: The question I raise was how corrupt was the Mitterrand government, which was allegedly a socialist regime, in terms of pursuing these arms deals? You said that every French manufacturer was salivating at the opportunity of having multibillion dollar French sales to Hussein and other tyrants. But how corrupt was the Mitterrand family in profiting from foreign arms sales?

Ken Timmerman: As a family, now, that is interesting. I do not think Mitterrand himself personally benefited from the sales to Saddam, and he kind of held his nose, which was sufficiently long, even by my standards. He held his nose as all of these deals were being done. The French socialists were no more corrupt than Chirac and his party, or his government before them. They were all corrupt. The reason they were

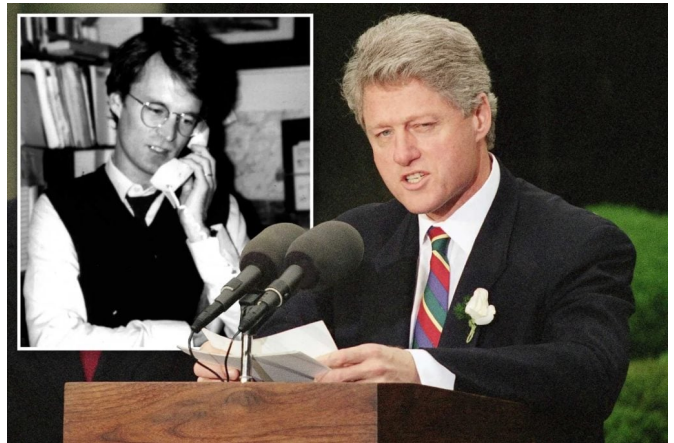
corrupt when it came to arm sales was because at that point, the French had no legal system for financing political campaigns. They financed their political campaigns through kickbacks from arms deals. Saddam Hussein would kick back, you know, 5% or 10% to the French in general. Until the end of the 1990s, when they changed the campaign finance system, the government would then divvy it up. The Communists would get their share, the Socialists would get their share, Chirac's party would get his share, you know the Republicans would get theirs. Everybody would get a share. And so, nobody ever said a word about it. They were all very fat, happy, and glad.

Jerry Gordon: Equal opportunity kickbacks.

Ken Timmerman: Equal opportunity kickbacks for all of them. The Mitterrand family was interesting. He had two brothers and I write about them in the book. There was a General Jacques Mitterrand, who was the head of the Aerospace Manufacturers Association. They were the ones who did the Paris Air Show. He was promoting French aerospace exports and all of the companies involved in that. General Mitterrand was believed to be a conservative and not particularly happy that his brother was President, except that he was his brother. He did not like his brother's politics. So, you know, they would appear together at the Paris Air Show. That was one relationship. The other brother Robert was a different character entirely. He was a "businessman". I am a businessman. My brother is the President of France. You got it? Like my name is Hunter Biden. My father is Vice President. Do you get it? Robert Mitterrand was the brother of the President of France. His business partners at the time of the Cold War, government included entities in places like Bulgaria.

Anyhow, there were a lot of different stories about Robert Mitterrand. Some of them I had to take out of the book because my publisher did not think it would be quite so interesting for American readers, but he also dabbled in the terrorism business and the hostage business. Hostages at that time were

a currency. You traded hostages. So, the French, like the Germans, and the Brits, and the Americans paid a lot of money to get hostages released from the Iranian proxies in Lebanon. And that money had to get there somehow. So, you would have intermediaries, and I name a number of them in the book who would set up NGOs or have their own private companies. And there was one guy I talk about in particular, who was known to have holes in his pocket. And this was kind of known on the street. He was going back and forth between Paris and Beirut, and he had holes in his pockets. Well, at the end of the story, he wound up with about 12 holes in his chest. It could be a very nasty business.



Ken and President Bill Clinton, 1994 (Source: New York Post)

Jerry Gordon: In the book, we are coming to the end of your sojourn in Paris, with your consummation of a more perfect union with Swedish wife Christina and the development of more children in your large family. What triggered an offer from Holocaust-surviving Congressman, Tom Lantos for you to return to Washington?

Ken Timmerman: Tom Lantos came to Strasbourg, to hire me, to make me a job offer. He had a subcommittee in the new Congress in 1993. Bill Clinton had just been elected President. At the time I thought Clinton was great. I supported him because I did not like Papa Bush because he was supporting Saddam Hussein. He was supporting building up dictators with US dual-

Use technology. And I thought it was just plain wrong. And Clinton said all the right things. Of course, he lied. We found that out soon enough. But at the time I did not know that he was lying in '93. So, Lantos was going to get a new subcommittee to deal with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). One of his good friends is Richard Perle. Perle is a good friend of Steve Bryen and Steve Bryen is a good friend of mine.

Jerry Gordon: And I knew Perle and our mutual friend Steve Bryen.

Ken Timmerman: Richard Perle and I became friends as well. Perle told Lantos that this is the investigator you need on your staff, he is the best there is. So, Lantos came to Europe to recruit me. I told him you can't pay me enough. He said, try me. And so, we actually came to a reasonable settlement, but less than I was making at the time. I was doing very well with our newsletter. So, we sold the house that we had just finished renovating, Christina, and I, took our five kids out of school, brought them to the United States, sold my newsletter for a significant amount of money, which was good and started to work for Lantos.

Bit by bit, I got into not just the Middle East, but into China because the Chinese were selling missiles to Iran, to Iraq and other countries. I was looking at Chinese missile sales, and at what dual-use technology was being shipped to China from the United States. At first, of course, the Bush administration was shipping it. That was great. Not a problem. You can investigate that all you want. Here are the US Department of Commerce records. Go at it. So, we had a hearing early on in April of '93 about that, wonderful. Everybody was very happy. Then we started to look at the Clinton Administration and its record. Oh, they are doing exactly the same thing. Is that what you are saying?

So, we started to plan a hearing about that as well. I was

leaving Washington to go back to Paris in September of '93, for the sale of our house. We had just had our fifth child, who had been born in Washington. The only one I said, who could become President of the United States because he was the only one born in America. And I was just about to go to the airport, when I got a call from my supervisor, Congressman Tom Lantos' Chief of Staff, telling me, I am fired. Well, what do you mean I am fired? He said, you're fired. He said, "All right. So, you pissed off a lot of people. I said, okay. I pissed off people, how? Investigating? He said, "Yeah." And I learned later on it was the China investigations.

Clinton invited Lantos to the White House after the Oslo Accords that were signed that fall and sat him down on the couch and said, "Tom how'd you like to be Committee Chair?" He said, "Well, I'm a Sub-Committee Chair." "No, how'd you like to be a Committee Chair, Tom?" "Well, I think I'd really like that." Clinton says, "get rid of this blank, blank staffer you have, who is messing around in China. He has no business looking at this stuff. It is none of his damn business." So, he fired me. And it turned out, and I told this in the book, and I have written about it elsewhere as well, there was a conscious China plan in the new administration to expand US dual-use technology exports to Communist China, supercomputers, high tech, and military production gear.



Ken with Iranian Kurdish PJAK

commander, 2007, Iraqi Kurdistan

That is what got me fired from *Time Magazine* as well. I went out to the B-1 Bomber plant in Columbus, Ohio and investigated the sale of these very sophisticated composite tape laying machines that were used for the B-1 Bomber. Now they are cranking out, Sukhoi 35 Jets in China. Okay. Thank you very much. We could have stopped all that stuff at the time. It was exactly like Beirut 1983, China 1993, we could have stopped it at the time. You would not be seeing China today with a fifth-generation fighter jets. They would not be launching missiles as they start to do today over the heads of Taiwan, because they would not have the technology to do it. We gave them the technology. Clinton gave them the technology. He did it quite purposefully, quite deliberately in exchange for campaign contributions. And I got fired both by Lantos and from *Time Magazine* for exploring that story. And I do not regret it for a day.

Jerry Gordon: I want to thank you for this extended fascinating interview, as I found, reading the book. Do I understand that there is another volume in the works?

Ken Timmerman: There are actually two more books. There is an extension of this book, called *The Iran House* which picks up where this one leaves off. Again, more adventure stories, foreign trips, almost getting kidnapped in Iraqi Kurdistan by Iranian Revolutionary Guards, dealing with guerrilla fighters in the mountains in stone huts and all kinds of fun, stuff like that. There is more on working with Uri Lubrani to try to overthrow the regime in Iran, insider information about Israel's effort to overthrow the Tehran regime. I was deeply involved in that, in part through the Foundation of Democracy in Iran, which I did on the side of my reporting work. That is a story that has not been told.

Then there is a completely separate book, which is just for fun. It is almost a travel book about raising olives in

Provence, in the South of France, because in the midst of all that, I became an olive farmer in France. We have a hundred olive trees. It is a really fun story about buying this old house, fixing it up, discovering the olive trees, all the really hilarious characters that I met and dealt with. It is a bit like these Peter Mayle books about Provence, but better. It is very funny.

Jerry Gordon: On that note, I want to thank you for this timely interview. We wish you Godspeed with the sale of this first volume, which I think is really a disguised factual thriller by any stretch of the imagination.

Ken Timmerman: It is a real-life adventure story.

Jerry Gordon: Yes, that too. You and I go back a way, I think close to 17 years in our relationship. I know some of the stories that you are about to tell with *The Iran House*. We eagerly await the publication to have you back for that interview. Now, why don't you tell our readers what the name of the book is and where you can find it?

Ken Timmerman: *And the Rest Is History: It's Tales of Hostages, Arms Dealers, Dirty Tricks, and Spies* or otherwise known as *How I Became a Hostage, an Arms Dealer, and an Israeli spy*. You can go to my website, kentimmerman.com or find in on-line at either Amazon or Barnes & Noble, as well.

Jerry Gordon: On that note, au revoir, see you next time, Ken.

Ken Timmerman: Okay. Jerry, what a pleasure to be with you. God bless. Thank you.

Jerry Gordon: Thank you, very much, Ken.

Watch the YouTube video of the interview with Ken Timmerman with Jerry Gordon.