

# Israel Facing a Perfect Storm

by Jerry Gordon and Mike Bates with Dan Diker and Shoshana Bryen (March 2015)



Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, Ma'ale Adumim Campaign Stop, Feb. 25, 2015

Source: Reuters

A perfect storm is threatening Israel. While the world's attention is focused on the rise of the Islamic State or ISIS with its apocalyptic view of traditional Jihadist Sunni Islam, a state with another Islamic apocalyptic vision, Shia Iran, is about to achieve nuclear hegemony in the Middle East. Iran, a notorious state sponsor of terrorism, is using proxies Hezbollah and Hamas to confront Israel on its borders and internally. A clash [occurred](#) in mid-January 2015 when the IAF attacked a convoy in Quneitra, Syria, hard by the Israeli Golan frontier killing four Senior Hezbollah Commanders, including Jihad Mughniyeh and six Iranian Quds Force commanders, notably, Gen. Mohammed Ali Allahdadi. Hezbollah retaliated shortly thereafter with an attack in the disputed Shebaa Farms area in Lebanon firing anti-tank weapons and hitting an IDF vehicle, killing two and injured several Israeli soldiers. Hezbollah leader, Sheik Hasan Nasrallah, in a public statement [threatened](#) Israel with an invasion of the Galilee followed with a reign of terror from its estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles able to cover all of Israel. Israel's air force [conducted](#) raids in December 2014 on Damascus international airport and Dimas on the Lebanese border. Those raids on December 8, 2014 may have destroyed Russian equipment that might have deployed to [counter](#) a proposed no-fly zone inside Syria.

The IAF has conducted several prior raids that included targeting longer range Iranian-supplied [Fateh-110 missiles](#).

Hezbollah has been engaged in actions in Syria and along the Lebanese border, fighting Sunni opposition forces. Its casualties in the nearly four year civil war have steadily mounted. Thus, despite the clash, Nasrallah may not be so inclined to open a full-throated war on Israel's north. But Iran's intention may be to foment a series of cross-border actions seeking to divert IDF conventional military resources.

Former National Security Adviser Maj. Gen. Yaakov Arad (ret.) nevertheless [considers](#) Hezbollah Israel's most significant threat ranging across its entire northern border, a development highlighted in a recent [analysis](#) from the MEMRI organization. A recent report by

the *Times of Israel* [revealed](#) a meeting between Quds Force Commander, Gen. Qassem Suleymani and the head of Hamas' Politburo, Khaled Meshaal in Turkey shortly after the end of last summer's Hamas rocket war in Gaza. That marked a renewal of relations between Iran and the Sunni terrorist group to provide funding and weapons after Qatar refrained from that role it had previously held. Iran is not above working with Sunni terror groups, like Muslim Brotherhood affiliate Hamas, and even, as some analysts believe, assisting ISIS in its beginning stages. Iran is now fighting ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu considers these actions by Iran and its proxy Hezbollah in the Jewish nation's north as opening a third front. Iran and Israel have been fighting a secret war around the world over the past thirty years. This is the latest of a series of chess moves by the Persian experts of the Islamic Regime.

That conventional threat to Israel on its border is just one of the storms it is facing. The other is the existential threat posed by Iran becoming a nuclear threshold state capable of producing nuclear weapons. Iran's nuclear program began during the Eisenhower Administration with a US agreement with the Shah of Iran to assist in building a civilian nuclear reactor. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Islamic regime has conscientiously engaged in an illicit nuclear weapons program, with the aid of North Korea and the A.Q. Khan network, gradually building its nuclear enrichment capability. Iran is also developing its nuclear payload capabilities, nuclear triggers, and warheads to be fitted on medium range and intercontinental missiles. Intrusive inspections under the auspices of the UN International Atomic Energy Administration began over a decade ago which revealed both known and unknown cascade halls of more than 10,000 centrifuges.

Israel and others contend that one only needs centrifuges for enriching uranium to provide fissile material for bomb-making. Both US and UN sanctions against Iran were established, aimed at deterring Iran from its ultimate objective. Discussions by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany (P5+1), reached an [interim agreement](#) (Joint Plan of Action) on November 24, 2013 seeking a permanent agreement. On December 4, 2014 the deadline was [extended](#) by mutual agreement to June 30, 2015 together with release of several billions of dollars of funds impounded under US sanctions against Iran's nuclear program. An earlier date for achieving a working version of a final agreement had been announced for March 24, 2015.

In late February 2015 [breaking news](#) came of a possible phased agreement arising from bi-lateral discussions between US Secretary of State Kerry and Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif. They may have reached an agreement in principle that would seek to defer achievement of Iran's nuclear breakout for over a decade. These revelations prompted Israeli PM Netanyahu to [say](#)

that “it would provide Iran will a license to make a bomb.” He also [said](#) in an address to a gathering of major American Jewish organizations in Jerusalem in late February, “That if the deal was a good one, then why hide it?” A reference to Israel being excluded from weekly briefings, given suspicion in the Administration that it might be engaged in leaking information.

However, Netanyahu was not alone in questioning the Administration’s negotiations for a deal with Iran. On February 5, 2015 the *Washington Post* Editorial Board published “[The emerging Iran nuclear deal raises major concerns](#)”:

? First, a process that began with the goal of eliminating Iran’s potential to produce nuclear weapons has evolved into a plan to tolerate and restrict that capability.

? Second, in the course of the negotiations, the Obama administration has declined to counter increasingly aggressive efforts by Iran to extend its influence across the Middle East and seems ready to concede Tehran a place as a regional power at the expense of Israel and other U.S. allies.

? Finally, the Obama administration is signaling that it will seek to implement any deal it strikes with Iran – including the suspension of sanctions that were originally imposed by Congress – without seeking a vote by either chamber. Instead, an accord that would have far-reaching implications for nuclear proliferation and U.S. national security would be imposed unilaterally by a president with less than two years left in his term.

*The New York Times* editorial board issued on February 25, 2015 its declaration of support for the Administration, “[An Emerging Nuclear Deal With Iran](#)”:

The United States and its partners (Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany) have properly focused in the negotiations on curbing Iran’s activities, especially uranium enrichment for weapon purposes. They are trying to structure the agreement so they would know at least a year in advance if Iran moved to speed up its program to build a nuclear bomb. That would allow plenty of time to re-impose sanctions, interrupt the program through cyberwarfare or take military action.

The nuclear threat has dominated Iran’s relations with the United States for more than a decade. If this can be resolved, the two countries may be able to tackle other differences, including Iran’s missile program and its growing involvement in regional conflicts. It won’t be easy, but it could open up space for cooperation.

Mr. Netanyahu, who is scheduled to address Congress next week, has already denounced the deal. The agreement must be judged on the complete package, not on any single provision. Even if the deal is not perfect, the greater risk could well be walking away and allowing Iran to continue its nuclear activities unfettered.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu also contends that the Administration is desirous of ending the isolation of Iran by concluding a nuclear agreement with the P5+1, lifting economic sanctions and forming an alliance to “degrade and defeat” ISIS. Many Israelis and Americans believe that a final nuclear agreement between the P5+1 and Iran may be a bad one. Thus, an invitation was issued on January 21, 2015 by Speaker John Boehner of the US House of Representatives to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to speak before a joint session of Congress on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, two weeks prior to a Knesset election on March 17<sup>th</sup>. The Administration, however, views that as a threat to the possible conclusion of a working nuclear agreement with Iran by March 24<sup>th</sup>. Netanyahu’s speech before Congress would mark his third address to a joint session. His last one, in May 2011, was a well received bi-partisan occasion. Such is not the case this third time. Democrats are divided; the Administration will not receive Netanyahu in the Oval Office. All while nearly 3 out of 4 Israelis [polled](#) do not trust the President to deliver a deal with Iran to protect them against this existential threat. The risk could be a possible nuclear holocaust to wipe Israel off the map of the world and end the “Zionist Enterprise.” 3 out of 5 Americans [polled](#) are in favor of Netanyahu speaking and 3 out of 4 suggest that any deal with Iran should be subject to vetting and clearance by Congress. A Senate [panel](#) passed new sanctions legislations in late January 2015 for floor consideration shortly following the outcome, if any, of the P5+1 negotiations with Iran on March 24<sup>th</sup>.

This deepening divide between Washington and Jerusalem constituted another factor in the perfect storm facing Israel. These developments were discussed at a meeting in Northwest Florida in late February 2015. During a question and answer period following the presentation, a member of the audience confirmed that Americans on the Gulf Coast also voice the opinion that Iran’s possession of a nuclear bomb was a threat to them, as well. That comment is reflected in polls that most Americans view Iran, rather than Russia, China or ISIS at the leading threat because of its development of nuclear weapons.

In the run up to PM Netanyahu’s speech before Congress, the Administration, American media and J-Street launched their attack against his appearance in Washington. There was an instant brusque rebuttal by Netanyahu and a senior Israeli official, Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz.



**National Security Adviser Susan Rice**

***Charlie Rose Show*-PBS, Feb. 24, 2015**

On Tuesday evening, February 24, 2015, during a *Charlie Rose Interview* (watch [here](#)) Obama National Security Adviser Susan Rice commented:

On both sides, there has now been injected a degree of partisanship which is not only unfortunate. I think it's destructive of the fabric of the relationship. The relationships has always been bipartisan, we need to keep it that way.

*The New York Times* in a front page story on Thursday, February 26, 2015, "[Talk Toughens As US-Israel Relations Fray](#)," cited a White House leak that Ms. Rice had "upbraided" Israeli National Security Adviser Yossi Cohen for alleged leaks concerning the negotiations with Iran. Israeli Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz, [said](#), "Maybe Kerry doesn't know what we know." Buried in the front section of the same *Times* edition was a full page ad by J-Street, which fashions itself as "pro-Peace, pro-Israel" with the headline, "Prime Minister Netanyahu: Congress Isn't a Prop for Your Election Campaign."

On Tuesday, February 24, 2015, PM Netanyahu deflected some "partisanship" concerns when he formally [declined](#) an invitation from senior Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) to attend a closed session with Democratic members of the US Senate. In his view this was not necessary as he was speaking to an open joint session of Congress on a bi-partisan basis.



**Secretary of State Kerry testifying before a House Committee**

**February 25, 2015**

As [reported](#) by the *Wall Street Journal*, on Wednesday, February 25, 2015 Secretary of State Kerry, in testimony before a House Committee hearing, struck out at Netanyahu faulting his judgment about the Iran Talks. He suggested that Netanyahu had been wrong about support of the 2003 Iraq invasion under Bush, an invasion that Kerry had voted for. Kerry [concluded](#), "He may have a judgment that just may not be correct here."

PM Netanyahu during a campaign stop on Wednesday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in the Israeli town of Ma'ale Adumim [responded](#):

The superpowers are committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons, but from

the agreement that's being formulated, it appears that they have given up on this commitment.

Against this background we arranged for another in the periodic Middle East Roundtable discussions sponsored by 1330amWEBY of Pensacola, Florida.



**Mike Bates:** Good afternoon and welcome to Your Turn. This program is a special edition. We do this from time to time, our Middle East round table discussions. I have with me in the studio Jerry Gordon, Senior Editor of the *New English Review* and its blog *The Iconoclast*. Welcome Jerry.



**Jerry Gordon:** Good to be back Mike.

**Bates:** And joining us from Washington D.C., Shoshana Bryen, She is Senior Director of the [Jewish Policy Center](#). Shoshana, welcome.



**Shoshana Bryen:** Nice to be here.

**Bates:** Through the magic of satellite telephone we have Dan Diker, live from Jerusalem. Dan Diker is the Executive Producer of the [Voice of Israel](#) and the host of "National Security" on the Voice of Israel's Global Radio Network in Jerusalem. Dan, welcome to Your Turn.



**Dan Diker:** Thanks, nice to be here Mike.

**Bates:** This evening Jerry Gordon will be giving a special presentation entitled, "Israel facing a perfect storm." This event will be held at the First Baptist Church of Bagdad, Florida. Jerry, what is the gist of that presentation?

**Gordon:** Israel is clearly facing some major international difficulties. At the head of the list is contending with Iran's nuclear program, the negotiations on the part of Washington as part of the P5+1. There is a new development, the presence of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and its proxy Hezbollah on Israel's Golan frontier. Then there is Bibigate. That is the controversy surrounding the forthcoming speech by Prime Minister Netanyahu on March the third before a joint session of Congress.

**Bates:** Israel is facing threats from multiple sources.

**Gordon:** Correct.

**Bates:** Multiple sides and sadly many of those threats are coming from the United States which as an American citizen I am not pleased to acknowledge. However, the truth is the truth. Jerry, I think this is the overriding question about national security. Frankly not just for Israel, not just for the United States but, in fact, for the entire planet. That is the status of the Iranian nuclear weapons program. Does it really look like the Obama Administration is going to allow Iran to develop nuclear weapons down the road. Did I read that right? That can't possibly be!

**Gordon:** It sure looks like that. Except it is under the aegis of a so-called phased deal over a decade. The reality may be is that Iran already has a nuclear device or is looking for a capability in that direction. That is something that is really consternating. There has been lots of commentary out of Israel objecting to what was announced as breaking news by the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and other mainstream media in this regard. The question really is whether or not a deal has been struck with the Islamist regime in Tehran that would allow them to become a so-called nuclear breakout nation.

**Bates:** Shoshana, I have read reports that the Iranians are saying that the American Administration is so desperate for a deal on the Iranian nuclear weapons program that they'll pretty much concede anything as long as they can hold up a piece of paper and say, "peace for our time." Is that an accurate depiction of what's going on in these talks?

**Bryen:** Some of it is the general tendency of Iranians to overstate the obvious. But yes, the President is looking hard for a deal partly because he knows Israel doesn't want one. And he finds himself being backed into a corner. He doesn't want to be having a public argument with Bibi, because people—including many in his own party—believe Bibi is right. He needs a deal *now* to trumpet his success and shut people up, particularly Bibi, but not only him. His thinking appears to be that ten years from now the Mullahs will have fallen, young Iranian democrats will have taken over, and it will be OK. The big piece of this that he missed is that the Mullahs only represent one part of the Iranian body politic and that is the religious part. Iran is also Persian and Persians are empire-oriented. Even if we get rid of the Mullahs, even if we get rid of the religious basis for governance in Iran and we have secular people, secular people in Persia believe in a Persian Empire. If we kick this can down the road ten years and the Mullahs are gone, Obama thinks that will be a good thing. I'm not sure that's true.

**Bates:** Now the mad Mullahs in Iran are somewhat suicidal and apocalyptic because they think that if they do this it will bring about the Twelfth Imam and some sort of everlasting peace under Islam. However, is the secular side of Iranian society they nearly as suicidal and crazy?

**Bryen:** I don't think the Mullahs are suicidal. I think the Mullahs have pursued a very hard headed, very correct-from-their-point-of-view approach to their own nuclear capabilities and the understanding of the United States. I don't think they are suicidal at all.

**Bates:** And what's your take on this Dan?

**Diker:** I would tend to agree that the Mullahs are not suicidal. In fact they are quite rational in many senses if you look at the way they have conducted these negotiations. Let's be very clear the President of Iran is not conducting these negotiations. Ayatollah Khamenei is conducting these negotiations and his supreme council of advisors is the Mullahs, not to mention the IRGC and that ILC. They have been handling these negotiations in an extremely sophisticated fashion. Let's remember the Iranians introduced chess to the world, they're carpet weavers. They are extremely sophisticated at political warfare and they have been doing a number on the United States in terms of political warfare that the former Soviet Union could have learned much from. One has to be very clear certainly from an Israeli point of view that if this deal goes through, this is going to make the world, the free world an impossible place to live in. I believe that the Iranian regime is dead set on acquiring nuclear weapons and their promise to destroy Israel. They say it every day. They discuss it in Farsi several times a day. I think that Prime Minister Netanyahu who is one of the most skilled analysts in having



followed the Iranian nuclear program for some twenty-five years. I think that the free world ought listen to him lay out the case against this Iranian regime's race for nuclear supremacy and stop it in its tracks now. They should not wait until it is too late after they have decided to break out and acquire nuclear weapons which they can do in a matter of months.

**Bates:** We will get into Benjamin Netanyahu's address to Congress later. Specifically about these P5+1 talks, they do not include Israel for obvious reasons. The Iranians wouldn't talk directly to the Israelis. However, shouldn't Israel be involved in the process since they face the most imminent threat from Tehran?

**Diker:** Clearly they should. In fact they are behind the scenes. It is very clear to people who are sitting on the inside that the Israel's have had a very substantial behind the scenes role in these talks. It should be the P5+2, with Germany being one and Israel being two. However, for all kinds of reasons Israel is not included in these negotiations. First and foremost the United States would not want Israel involved in these negotiations because they simply wouldn't have passed the first stage. Because the Iranian regime's positions are totally and completely untenable. The notion that Iran would be able to enrich any centrifuges is completely unacceptable. The civilian nuclear programs around the world hosted by Canada and other western countries have nothing to do with centrifuges. They are just not part of the nuclear file. Many countries want to have peaceful civilian nuclear power. The notion that the Iranians would claim that they need centrifuges to produce peaceful nuclear power is an absurdity. The fact that the P5+1 have allowed any uranium to be enriched is an extremely dangerous proposition. That is the message that Prime Minister Netanyahu is going to bring to the American people and by extension to the world community.

**Bates:** What about the administration not even keeping the Israeli government apprised of the progress? I read in the *Jerusalem Post* last week and confirmed in other sources too, that the administration is not telling the Israelis what is going on because they (1) don't trust them and (2) believe that Netanyahu is going to somehow undermine the talks through strategic leaks.

**Bryen:** They might be right. The Administration is holding back because it wants to present a full and complete deal. They figure everybody will get all excited. "We have removed the threat of nuclear war from the world and everything is great and I'm brilliant," is the President's view. At that point, Israel's sour grapes wouldn't have mattered. Once it's done, if Bibi came to the Hill and said the deal is done but it's a bad deal," people would have said, "Too bad. We've saved the world from nuclear war." So the President was hoping to get all this done before the terms leaked. It didn't work out that way. In this day and age you

cannot assume that things will not leak. Bits and pieces of the deal have been coming out for a long time and opposition has been growing including in the Congress. Even *The Washington Post* thinks that the President is doing a bad deal with Iran—and for *The Post*, which is a mouthpiece for the Administration to go that far is amazing. The administration is irritated. They are irritated with *The Post*, they are irritated with Senator Menendez of their own party, they are irritated with a lot of people and the easiest person to take that out on is the representative of the State of Israel. That's why they don't complain about *The Post*