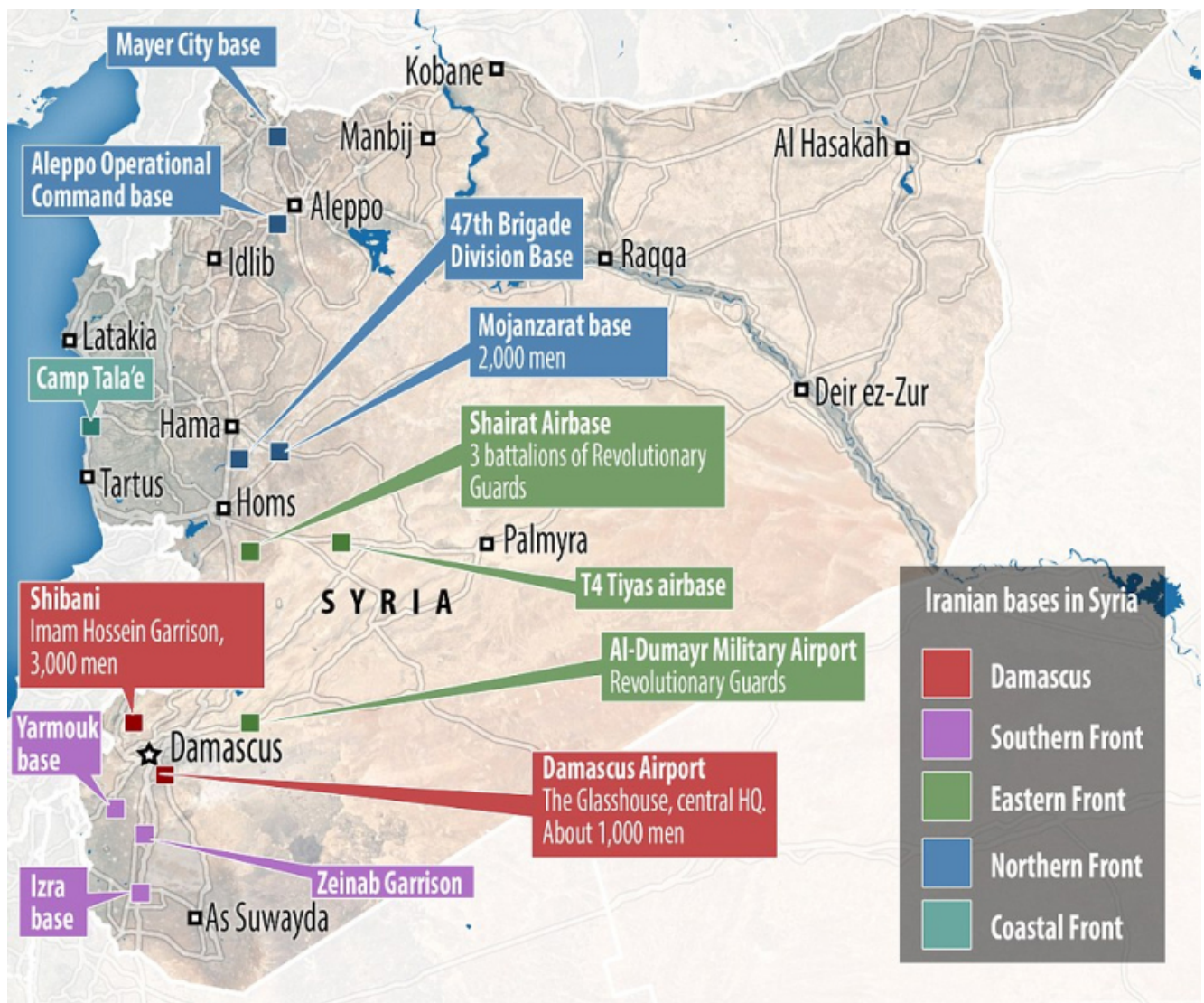


Israel, Iran, Syria and Europe: Interview with Shoshana Bryen of the Jewish Policy Center

By [Jerry Gordon](#) and Mike Bates (August 2018)



In late June, Israel was faced with the increasing threats from Iran and its Shia proxies hard by its northern Golan frontier that necessitated unleashing a series of punishing strikes at targets in Syria. It appeared that these raids were acquiesced in by Russia. This, despite the latter's backing of Assad regime forces and tacit recognition of the presence in Syria of 80,000 Iranian and Shia proxies from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Lebanon's Hezbollah. Especially concerning was the launch by Assad regime and Iranian forces, backed by Russian air support seeking to eliminate the last rebel – held area in the Southwest Syrian province of Daraa. That area is on tri-border abutting both Jordan and Israel. Israeli security officials had met with Russian Military police officials in Jerusalem to discuss deconfliction arrangements in the conflict zone on its borders. Israeli PM Netanyahu subsequently flew to Moscow to confer with Russian President Putin to personally make the case for removal of Iran on Israeli border.

Israel PM Netanyahu, in a widely broadcast YouTube video, had offered to provide expertise to Iranians of the Jewish nation's water conservation technology and practices to combat the drought that had triggered roiling protests in Iran. It was an exercise in soft power that caught a wave of interest from Iranians who overwhelmingly logged onto a Farsi-language Israeli website offering information seeking to alleviate Iran's water shortage. Protests in Iran had erupted in the Tehran Bazaar and other major cities over economic issues, hyper-inflation, unemployment and diversion of funds released by the lifting of sanctions under the 2015 Iran nuclear deal supporting military adventures in Syria, Yemen and Gaza. The cry of "Death to the Palestinians" was heard among Iranian protesters. President Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal, imposing "zero oil purchase" sanctions and denial of access to the international financial transaction system SWIFT. European

countries and businesses were loath to risk extending credit for development projects and trade deals with the Islamic Republic. The result was the country's currency, the rial, plunged in value to 90,000 to the dollar. The EU-3, the UK, France and Germany, were stymied in their efforts to maintain the Iranian nuclear deal, after the US withdrawal ordered by President Trump.

At the same time, US Special Envoys for Middle East peace, Jason Greenblatt and President Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner, had traveled to the region visiting the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. They were soliciting interest in the Trump Middle East peace plan, despite the opposition of PA President Mahmoud Abbas to moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. There were also the continuing violent protests by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad on the Gaza Israel frontier. Salvos of mortars, rockets and an aerial arson campaign featured fire kites and exploding balloons. This despite Israel's delivery to Gaza of humanitarian aid, agricultural and commercial supplies. The Gaza violence was supported by both Iran and Turkey. Turkish President Erdogan was on the brink of a crucial snap parliamentary election transforming his office into an executive one with wide ranging powers increasing his autocratic Islamist hold on the country.

Israel had been visited by young Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in an act of mea culpa for the country's support of the Nazi holocaust. He also supported and combats both European and Islamic anti-Semitism. The latter involved closure of extremist Mosques and ejection of radical Imams funded by groups in Turkey.

The visit of Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel to Amman, Jordan raised concerns over Iran's presence on its borders. That diverted attention from her own political problems created by the open migrant policies that threatened to cause the fall of her working coalition in the Bundestag. There were also questions arising from Germany's support of the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia just prior to the G-7 meetings in Canada.

In light of this, convened another in the series of Middle East Round Table Discussions with Shoshana Bryen, senior director, of the Washington, DC-based Jewish Policy Center.

Mike Bates: Good afternoon and welcome to Your Turn. This is Mike Bates. This hour is one of our Middle East round table discussions and I have with me in the studio Jerry Gordon, Senior Editor of the *New English Review* and its blog, "the Iconoclast". He is also co-host of Beyond the Matrix on Israel News Talk Radio out of Jerusalem. Jerry Gordon, welcome to Your Turn.

Jerry Gordon: Thanks, Mike.

Bates: And joining us by telephone is Shoshana Bryen. She is the U.S. Defense Policy and Middle East Affairs Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center in Washington. She is online at www.jewishpolicycenter.org. Shoshana Bryen, welcome.

Shoshana Bryen: Hello.

Bates: Let's begin the conversation, Shoshana. I have a question for you about similarities that may exist. People have focused for so long on the potential threat of a nuclear armed Iran but there have been recent developments obviously with the president's trip to Singapore with a known nuclear state North Korea. Are there similarities between either potential deals or lessons to be learned in how to prevent these rogue states from having nuclear weapons that threaten the rest of the planet?



Bryen: It's more like a how not to. Let's look at the lesson of the Iran deal and also previous Korea deals. President Obama wanted a fully fleshed-out, step-by-step, "we've got all the bases covered" deal and he sent his underlings—including the Secretary of State, many times—to create a fully worked out deal. All the commas, all the *Is*, all the contingencies, anything that might happen, it was all going to be in the deal. What they do and what we do. President Obama presented it as a fully done deal.

The problem is you cannot anticipate all the things that can go wrong. Or, at least, we didn't. You can't anticipate, for example, precisely where and how people will cheat—which the Iranians did.

The other way to create a deal is a CEO deal. The CEO of a company or the president of a company or the president of the United States says, "This is where I want to end up and we are agreed on where we are ending up. Now go fill in the details. Tell us how to get there." The benefit of this is you don't give away your big leverage in the beginning. We gave the Iranians more than a hundred and fifty billion dollars; it's hard for me to say a number that big. They have that money. There is no getting it back. The fact that they cheat doesn't mean you can go back to square one.

With the North Koreans this time, we did it the other way. We have an agreement in principle. I call it aspirational because I'm not sure we will get there. We and the Koreans agree it will be denuclearized. How? I don't know. It's not my job. But it has to be somebody's job.

So now that we are agreed on where we are going, let's see what steps we need to take to get there and we will never get out so far that we can't get back. We are not giving them a hundred and fifty billion dollars to play with. In fact, all we have given them so far is a couple of photo ops and the postponement of a military exercise that the South Koreans don't like anyhow, so we are not on the hook for anything. They have given us three live American prisoners. I think that's worth something and they also returned the remains of a number of Korean War American soldiers. This is important symbolically for them because it means they are prepared to end the Korean War that divided the peninsula. It's very important to them so they took a step, we took a step, now let's see what happens.

Will we have a denuclearized North Korea? I'm not sure.

Bates: I think both sides of the political aisle in the United States have it wrong. Your analysis is very well reasoned in my opinion. The people who love President Trump want him to receive the Nobel Peace Prize though it's way too premature for that and the people who hate Donald Trump think that he's somehow capitulated and giving away the world when we haven't done that either. I think this is a wait and see. I'm glad they met, they had good talks, they have stated a goal; let's see what could be worked out. Stand by the sidelines and watch the game unfold.

Bryen: It's even a little better than that. I would go back to two other American Presidents. FDR told Eisenhower, "Bring me the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany." Germany didn't agree, right, but it didn't matter. The President said to his subordinate, go get that. He didn't tell him to cross the channel on D-Day. He set out the principle and he sent the General after it. Now what if D-Day had failed, God forbid!?

Bates: It would have been a disaster.

Bryen: Would we have cancelled the war? No. We would have found another way to get to the goal. We are going to be stymied in North Korea at some point and then we have to find a way around it. I would then point to President Ulysses S. Grant. When he was General Grant, he presided over the bloodiest day of the American Civil War, the battle at Cold Harbor, 18,000 casualties. The story is that after the battle ended, he went to his tent and he said to his aide, "Tomorrow we have to do something different."

Those are principles you can live with.

Gordon: Shoshana, last week, of all people who should appear in the Middle East but Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel making noises in Amman saying that basically we must deal with Iranian aggression. That is one aspect of it but the more important one is Merkel has had a rather peculiar stance when it comes to Russia and Iran. What are they and why are they peculiar?

Bryen: Look for the money. They are peculiar because they don't serve Western interests and Germany is supposed to be a leading purveyor of Western interests. Russia first. We, the West, claim to have sanctions on Russia because of Ukraine and Crimea. Merkel is out there saying you can't bring the Russians to the G7 meeting and you can't do this with the Russians and that with the Russians. Never mind. Well over, forty percent—maybe fifty percent—of Germany's heating and industrial fuel comes from Russia. Other Western European countries take Russian gas as well—they are not sanctioning Russia. They are providing hard currency for Russia, so whatever she says she's not quite telling the truth. And not only do they buy Russian gas, they are building new pipelines to bring in *more* Russian gas. That's the number one problem.

The number two problem, as it relates to Iran, is that Germany is doing lots of business in Iran and they are angry that sanctions may take them out of Iran. But I would point to something else. Russia only has two things to export in the world. One is natural gas—which Germany buys—and the other is weapons—which Iran buys. If you are giving Iran German

business and you are working in Iran, you are helping Iran; Iran will spend the money on Russian weapons. Oh, that hundred and fifty billion dollars the Obama Administration released to Iran? Did they put it in water projects for their people? No. The Iranian government is using it to buy weapons. The front door and back door Russia is not being sanctioned and Germany is at the center.

Gordon: Shoshana, Merkel has also done something else and that is use the back door to allow Iran's Islamic Republic to basically engage in the International Financial Transaction System otherwise known as SWIFT. I thought that was going to be one of the top of the list activities on the part of the Trump Administration to shut down.

Bryen: We did it too, by the way. The Obama Administration not only allowed it, they cheated to allow it. They created a whole new bank to allow the Iranians- it was an Iranian bank but they called it a something-else bank—so that it could evade our sanctions. I think it is being unwound now in the Treasury Department. I think we will start to see some push back on those things. It's not that the administration is unaware of it.

Bates: That transaction that the Obama Administration authorized was it actually illegal or was it just subterfuge and dishonest?

Bryen: What is the fine line between dishonest and illegal?

Bates: Well, I have heard the Administration defend it saying there was, not the current administration, the Obama Administration saying but it wasn't illegal. Yet they lied to Congress, but it wasn't illegal so . . . I'm not sure which side to come down on that.

Bryen: It is possible that creating the bank was only dishonest. When I grew up and we had a Constitution, lying to Congress was illegal, so parts of this may just have been tremendous subterfuge. Parts of it I do believe were illegal but you have to get to the bottom of them. Again, somebody has to get to the bottom of what everybody did. The last thing I heard, lying to Congress is still illegal.

Bates: Good point. I would like to ask another question about Angela Merkel. She is having her own internal troubles in Germany over the immigration policies. Recent turmoil has been triggered by a rape and murder of a young Jewish girl by an Iraqi Kurdish asylum seeker in Germany. What is the outlook for Merkel's political life and the overall immigration policies of Germany and the EU?

Bryen: EU rules don't apply. You saw that Italy has turned away boats of asylum seekers. They have gone on to Spain and they have gone on to France. The theory is that in the EU, the first place you land is where you claim asylum and people have to let you in to claim asylum. The Italians said no, because with such a long coast line into the Mediterranean, they feel overwhelmed have simply said no to the EU rules. I wouldn't have much faith in EU rules; they are collapsing everywhere.

The German problem is that having let them in, they are claiming now that they will deny asylum to a lot of people and deport them. I don't think so. They will find it very hard to deport people. So they are left with a community that will not integrate, that will not live as Western Europeans do, but people who have come to Western Europe to import their African or Middle Eastern ways of life in the midst of Western European society. They will be indigestible nuggets unlike Central American migration to the United States. I'm not dealing with the politics of that. Central American people when they come here generally by and large get it, they understand what they have to do and they do it. In Europe they don't want to do it. They don't care about it and they would like to subvert the system. I don't see much good in Angela Merkel's future. I don't see how she holds on to this indigestible group of people and wins elections.

Bates: It is an outrageous policy in my view. The EU rule that I was specifically referring to wasn't so much the asylum rule, rather once you are in one EU nation you can go to any nation you want.

Bryen: That is collapsing as well. The asylum issue was only an example of where countries determine for themselves what they want and they don't necessarily live by the EU rules. Whether you have to let them in, and then once they have gotten to Italy do they have to be allowed into Germany? They are starting to put up border controls again because they don't want them. They are starting to build fences again. France is beginning to say we are not an open border country, even to Spain, even to Germany, even to other EU countries. Britain has basically cut it off and they are still in the EU. Britain doesn't leave the EU until next year, but they said, "No. You can't come." The EU rules matter much less today than

they mattered ten years ago, even five years ago, even two years ago.

Bates: May there be hope for Europe after all?

Bryen: I wouldn't call it hope, Mike, because if the Western Europeans rise up against what their governments are doing it will be ugly and conceivably bloody. I'm not wishing that on anybody. When European nationalism exerts itself—whether it's in Hungary and Romania which it is now, or Poland which it is having nothing to do with Muslim migration because they won't take them — or if you get nationalistic Germans and French, they are not nice to people. I'm not sure it's hope for Europe. I'm not sure it is the complete degeneration of Europe. We have seen what happens when Europe turns on minority communities, including ours.

Bates: That has not been a good history over the centuries. That's true.

Bryen: No, it's not and it's not just the Holocaust by the way. It goes back hundreds of years where people who are nationalists of one sort or another take it out on other people. We tend to think that Western Europe emerged from World War II as something else. No, it's just another incarnation of European history. U.S. money, U.S. troops, U.S. management of Europe made it a great place for seventy years. We don't have the money anymore. We don't have the troops stationed in Europe anymore, and you may see Europe return to what it really is. Sometimes it's pleasant—sometimes it's Mozart—but it's not always pleasant. Sorry.

Bates: No, truth above all. I'd rather know the truth and not like it than to believe a lie.

Gordon: Shoshana, Austria's young Chancellor Sebastian Kurz was in Israel recently and met with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and attended some conferences there. What were some of the more important public stands he articulated about Austria's historic role in the Nazi holocaust era, dealing with European anti-Semitism, Israel's sovereign rights for defense of its borders and a stand on radical Islamic extremism in his own country that provoked reactions from Turkey's President Erdogan?

Bryen: Chancellor Kurz had a great visit in Israel; what he did that was important was to take historic responsibility for Austrian behavior during the Holocaust. That is, he said, "We did it. We did it and we were wrong and we are sorry." Why is that important right this minute? In Hungary and Poland, governments are saying that only the Germans killed Jews in their countries. "We didn't help the killing of Jews. It was Nazis and the Nazis did it." That's just not true. The Nazis had allies in every single country they occupied. Not just Poland and Hungary but in France, in Holland in Belgium—they all did it and not all of them want to take responsibility. They said and some continue to say, "Oh well we were occupied by the Nazis, so don't blame us."

Kurz owned it; he owned it a hundred percent. "It's our history, we did it and we are sorry we did it." Then he went on and he did the other things—all of which were great, the borders, the Western Wall, he did all the right things.

As far as Turkey's President Erdogan, he threatened a religious war in Austria between "the Cross and the Crescent" because Kurz closed the mosques in Austria that were spewing virulent anti-Semitism and he threw out the Imams. The war-mongering is typical Erdogan, but Kurz responded in a really great way. He said, "Look, there is freedom of religion in Austria. Everyone gets to pray the way they want, but everyone has to respect Austrian law." Austrian law says it's illegal to have influence—meaning money—coming into the country for Islamic organizations and Imams, and that's what he's cutting off. He's cutting off Turkey's money to support radical mosques and he will cut off Iranian money and whatever there is in Austria. Austrian Muslims can go to the mosques, they can pray, it's not a problem, but they cannot import philosophies that are inimical to Austrian law. It's a big move. It was a great move.

Bates: Does Austria have similar laws to the United States in terms of religious freedom and free speech to the point that they can't stop the Imams from advocating violence in the name of Islam?

Bryen: No, Mike, they do not have the same laws. By the way, U.S. law forbids the incitement to violence; we have laws against that, but in all of Europe there are laws restricting speech, things you can say, things you can't say. Holocaust denial for example is illegal in most of Europe. Certainly it's illegal in Austria, absolutely illegal in Germany. It hasn't helped much that it's illegal mostly in Germany—they chalk it up to right-wing extremists. They don't say that it's Muslim; they call it right-wing extremism. But they all have laws and all of those laws were initially designed to protect Jews remaining in the country.

Gordon: Shoshana, there has been a disturbing rise of anti-Semitism in, of all places, the UK and it starts from the top of the labor party meaning it's leader Jeremy Corbyn. What is going on there and why is it so dangerous?

Bryen: Jeremy Corbyn has always been an anti-Semite. In the British context he was considered a fringe guy and so people didn't pay attention. He now is not a fringe guy; he is now an important player. One reason is that Britain has discovered that its Muslim minority is, first of all, growing but secondly, radicalizing at home. The one thing the Brits have thought was that the children of immigrants would become more British and less Muslim. It hasn't happened. They have become less British and more Muslim and they are exercising their interest in Islam through a variety of radical organizations and radical Imams. Jeremy Corbyn is just riding this crest but what he's riding the crest of is fear in Britain of its Muslim minority.

Gordon: Does that also explain his strident pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli stance?

Bryen: Absolutely. There is no way that you can be pro-Israel in the eyes of these people and understand the Islamic wave that's coming. Corbyn is very comfortable with people who kill Jews and there is a minority, it's a minority in Britain—to be very clear. I'm not saying that all the Brits and I'm not saying that all British Muslims—but there is a vocal minority in Britain that is larger than the British government would like to see that thinks it's fine to announce that Hezbollah and Hamas killing Jews is a good idea. It's becoming louder

and it's becoming more public. There was a huge Hezbollah rally in London.

Bates: Disgraceful!

Bryen: I never thought I would see Hezbollah flags fly in London.

Bates: Yes, that is disgraceful. Shoshana, I have a question about Israel and how nice Israel is and doesn't get credit for doing it. Israel is so often portrayed as being mean to other nations and other people and the Palestinians. But when Gaza is launching attacks on Israel, Israel is still supplying food, electricity, water and gasoline. Iran has sworn to annihilate Israel and yet the Israelis have just made this fantastic offer of helping alleviate the drought in Iran. What is your reaction to that?

Bryen: My reaction is think of "Captive Nations" in the Cold War. The United States broadcasted to the people who were under Communist control because we understood there was a difference between people and their governments. Captive people were captives of their own government. Iran is exactly the same. Hezbollah is mostly the same in Gaza, but Iran is exactly the same.

The Iranian people have a great interest in what happens in Israel and what Israel does, and Israel responds to that. Years ago, Israel had a Defense Minister who was Iranian-born, so he spoke Farsi. Israel set up a phone line in Europe where

Iranians could call and talk to the Defense Minister of Israel. And they did it by the thousands! So Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel got on You Tube (thank you Social Media) with a pitcher of water and a glass of water and he said to the Iranians, "I'm going to talk about water because water is important." He explained that Israel was going to set up a website for the Iranians to learn about water management—because the problem in Iran is not just the drought; the system of water management has collapsed, meaning that people who shouldn't be without water are without water. So, Israel set up the website, five hundred thousand hits, one hundred thousand Iranians have signed on to this website to learn from Israel about water management. Israel understands perfectly well the difference between people in their government and the Iranians understand it as well. It's good news because when the mullahs fall—and they will fall—the people will be there.

Bates: So, what was the reaction of the Iranian government to that?

Bryen: First, they tried to ignore it, and then they called Prime Minister Netanyahu a "stinking Zionist." They called it nothing, but it's not nothing—the people of Iran are responding, and the same is true of every manifestation of rebellion in Iran. There are the women who take off their head scarves on Wednesdays. This is a thing now in Iran. Thousands of women go out on the streets with their head scarves on and take them off. The government doesn't acknowledge that it happens—even as they arrest brave women every week.

When the Iranian government falls—which I personally believe it will—Israel will have done the two most important things it

could do. One was to steal all the documentation on the nuclear program and second was to keep the Iranian people on its side.

Bates: Well, wouldn't that be nice if the theocratic mullahs of Iran do in fact lose control?

Bryen: They may. This rebellion by the way is much different than 2008 and 2009 which was centered in Teheran which is where Persians live. Remember, Iran is about forty-five percent minority-non-Persian-all around the country. This rebellion is outside of Teheran. This rebellion is where the people are. This rebellion is grass roots up and I think it's an important one and we need to keep an eye on it.

Bates: That would be nice because the Iranian history is that it has been historically a great country up until 1979. Not that the Shah was the nicest guy that ever ruled a country. However, the Iranian culture and the Iranian people have a very long and proud history of accomplishments and, to a certain extent, freedom

Bryen: They do. The Shah was not a great ruler in some respects, but Iranian people could do business. They could create the arts. They could travel. They could study abroad. They couldn't show opposition to their government, and that was a serious problem. However, you are right, Iranian culture, and certainly Persian culture, are amazing.

Gordon: Shoshana, there was a visit recently by the Russian

Military Police head to Israel and a phone conversation between Russian President Putin and PM Netanyahu. It was focused on an area of Southwestern Syria, the Tri-Border area with Jordan and Israel's Golan. It was all about the question of removing Iranian forces from there. The question is how big is that Iranian threat and what is the status of U.S. Russian and Israeli deconfliction arrangements to secure Israeli security?

Bryen: Iran is sort of like Sherman marching to the sea and destroying everything in its path to get to the Mediterranean. It has destroyed Northern Iraq. It has destroyed Syria. It has destroyed Lebanon to get to the Sea. Somebody has to stop the Iranians. At this moment, the Russians, the Americans and the Israelis all agree that Iran should not have a permanent presence in Syria. It's an amazing meeting of the minds. The Americans are not paying quite enough attention, but the Israelis and the Russians have coordinated the idea that Israel can strike Iranian targets in Syria without fear of either Russian condemnation or, more importantly, Russian retaliation.

What we need is for the US, Russia, and Israel to have a meeting of the minds. John Bolton went to Russia. This gives me great hope for our future because Syria has to be at the top of that list of what will be important when President Trump meets Vladimir Putin. As far as Hezbollah is concerned, they made an agreement with the Russians that Hezbollah has to move the forces that are abutting Israel or close to Israel. Hezbollah forces are moving away from the Israeli border. That is a big deal, so the possibility exists that with proper coordination we can minimize the damage by Iran. Iran has tens of thousands of forces under their control. They are not all Iranians. Some of them are Syrians. Some of them Pakistanis,

some of them are Afghans. We need to break up that Iranian control in the center of Syria. The U.S. should be prepared to play a role in that.

People are trying to get us involved in the war in Yemen. Forget Yemen. Iran wants Syria. Yemen is a sideshow. If you are going to choose—excuse me for a military expression—if you are going to choose a hill to die on, the hill to die on is Syria. It's the most crucial spot.

Bates: There was a recent missile strike Shoshana in Eastern Syria that killed fifty-two members of an Iranian Revolutionary Guard-controlled Iraqi Militia. Now Israel did not claim responsibility for that but the U.S. Coalition said it was Israel. Regardless of who actually did it what is the message being sent and what is the message being received?

Bryen: Same message. Israel has red lines against Iran. Most of the red lines are in Syria. You know Israel has not tried to oust Assad or play in the Syrian Civil War, but it has red lines in Syria and all the red lines have to do with Iran. Those red lines may cross over the Iraqi/Syrian border. If there is behavior by Iran across the border those forces might disappear as well. The other thing that strike on the Shiite militias did was to help the Kurds. The Kurds are looking at the end game in Syria. They see that ultimately in Syria there will be a confederation, a loose association that they stand to gain control of their own space in Syria. The Iraqi space is just to their East and so they need for that to be safe as well. Israel helps its Kurdish allies, it is enforcing its red lines in Iran, and it is telling the Iraqis do not play in Syria, do not let your Shiites play in Syria because they will pay a price.

Bates: This space that the Kurds may control in Syria, would this be a sovereign nation or would it be a state still under a federal system with Damascus?

Bryen: It would probably be a District of Syria loosely under the control of Damascus. Remember, Syrian Kurds had no problem with the central government before the war. Assad being a minority ruler took care of Syrian minorities so that was the Kurds, the Christians the Druze and whatever minorities. He didn't bother them and they were loyal subjects. Generally speaking, the Kurds are less concerned about what happens in Damascus if they are left alone. The Russians have no problem with the Kurds either, so the Kurds are saying to themselves, "If the Russians and the Israelis make a division in which we get autonomy, it's good enough. We are not afraid of Assad. We are afraid of Iraqis, we are afraid of Shiites, we are not afraid of Assad and we are not afraid of Russians. Especially if Israel is with us."

Gordon: Shoshana, there have been three months now of violent protests on the Israeli-Gaza border typified by new innovations besides mortars and precision rockets. We have had fire kites, exploding balloons and attempted breaches of the frontier. What kind of a toll has that taken on Israel? What have been U.S. reactions and the rather murky roles of Iran and Turkey?

Bryen: The toll on Israel is the toll that it always takes. It makes the Israeli public further cynical about its place in the world. With all of this going on the *Financial Times* said Israel was made nervous by "party balloons." So, readers think

of kids with party balloons and *Financial Times* is telling people that frightens the Israelis. No, it doesn't but it makes Israel understand that people who read the *Financial Times* will never understand what it is like to live in Southern Israel and what it is like to live on a hostile border.

The Israelis face fire every day and fire is a terrible thing. Six thousand acres have been hit. That is crops, nature reserves and animals. Fortunately, because the Israelis are good, there haven't been any Israeli deaths (thank you God) but it is creating havoc and as Hamas sees that the world doesn't care or they think that this is about party balloons you now have rockets and mortars. So they escalate because they know they can get away without fear of reprisal. So, the toll on Israel is the toll that always is.

You have about fifteen to twenty seconds to hit the shelters when the alarm goes off. That is sort of okay if you are an able-bodied adult. What if you have to grab your kids? What if you have to grab your elderly mother and take her to the shelter? It is impossible so the Israelis will do what they always do. The impossible.

They will fight back but it increases peoples' "yuck" level with the UN, with the EU, with all these organizations that should understand that when you are under direct fire you get to fight back. The Israelis have begun hitting targets in Gaza and they are Hamas leadership targets. They have not hit civilians. They have hit Hamas leadership targets, they will escalate as necessary. Iran and Turkey are *agents provocateurs*, they goad these guys and they provide money. There is lots of money. The people are poor but Hamas has tons

of money. So it goes on and on and Israel does not want to occupy Gaza, and they don't want the people of Gaza to be miserable. They are still supplying food, medical supplies, everything, electricity, whatever the people need. The Israelis will provide because that is who they are, but that increases their cynicism.

I worry about ultimately an Israel that can and will protect itself but is very cynical about the rest of the world.

Bates: I am always cynical about the media portrayal of this. I'm not making this up. If you read the American press what we have is a situation where Gaza residents on their side of the border are protesting against Israel and Israel is shooting and killing them or causing injury that requires amputation. Very little coverage in the American press has reported the incendiary kites that are setting fire inside Israel, the rockets that are being launched into Israel. It is really you said okay, nobody has been killed on the Israeli side yet, that is pure luck. Because the point of these rockets is to get lucky and kill some people and a rocket did just land inside a kindergarten. It is just pure luck that the Israelis have not had fatalities as a result of this. However, if you don't read the *Jerusalem Post* or the British press you would never know it. The American press is all about reporting how terrible Israel is treating these peaceful Gazans who were just protesting on the border as if they are just on a picket line outside the Union Hall.

Bryen: You know what they don't show you. There was an enormous protest on the West Bank by Palestinians against the Palestinian government—huge, in Ramallah, against the PA. Like with Iran, people understand that their government stinks and

these people came out to protest the Palestinian government. There was no coverage of that. I think if Palestinian people are brave enough to protest their own government we should pay attention. What you have is the media showing you what it wants you to understand, which big bad Israel versus poor little Palestinian people is. Remember the eight-month-old baby that Hamas said was killed by tear gas? Number one, she wasn't. The Palestinian Medical Authority finally had to say she was not a casualty of the rioting. We discovered recently that her family was paid a lot of money by Hamas official Yahya Sinwar to go to the press and claim that the Israelis killed their baby. They are paying people to lie to the media.

Bates: And the lie appears on page one above the fold, not the correction.

Bryen: But the lie is so sad. That poor baby, the Israelis killed the poor baby. No they didn't.

Bates: So, the lie appears on page 1 above the fold and the correction if it happens at all is on page 26 in a small box in the corner. Most people still believe if they are aware of it at all that the Israelis killed that child.

Bryen: That is right. That is why you need to diversify your news sources. You mentioned the British press, Mike. The British press is fabulous, not editorially—they don't like Israel. However, they show you a lot more about what is happening and you can draw better conclusions that way.

Gordon: Shoshana, Trump special envoys Jason Greenblatt and Jared Kushner were on a series of visits in the Middle East. Were they actually trying to deliver on this Trump peace plan?

Bryen: What is clear about the peace plan is that the President intends to have buy-ins from the Arab world before it goes public. The President is looking for buy-ins from countries that we need. One of those countries is Jordan, because it's unlikely in my opinion that a Palestinian state will emerge as a separated, constricted little entity. It needs some organic relationship with the Kingdom of Jordan partly because the Kingdom is majority Palestinian. Moreover, there are family, business, social and other relationships between people on the West Bank and in Jordan. Somehow you have to get the King to buy into the concept that Palestinians are part of his responsibility in some fashion and I suspect that is what they were doing. Otherwise, the Jordanians will not be happy with a West Bank Palestinian state because that state will attack Jordan as much as it attacks Israel.

Bates: They do share security interests don't they?

Bryen: Absolutely! Very close security interests. The fact that PM Netanyahu went to Amman and talked to the King and they both came out smiling tells you something.

Bates: Jerry, I have a question for you about the internal politics of Israel. Sarah Netanyahu, Bibi's wife, has been indicted on corruption charges apparently for eating nice food or something?

Gordon: That is one way to characterize it. I guess it was eating out to the tune of nearly a hundred thousand dollars. The reality is Sara has a kitchen at home, with a cook. It is not the White House, it isn't the East Room. Their home does not have a professional staff funded by the government. Thus when you have foreign delegations who visit Israel she has a habit of saying let's show them the best of Israeli cuisine by taking them out. Therefore, the reality is that this indictment is for all intents and purposes political.

Bates: And there have been many indictments of Netanyahu and none of them really go anywhere.

Gordon: Virtually very few, except ones where illegal funds from third parties have been involved and a Prime Minister like Ehud Olmert, who was prosecuted and went to jail.

Bates: Jerry I appreciate that and both of you joining us on our Middle East round table discussion. We have been speaking with Jerry Gordon, Senior Editor of the New English Review and its blog, "the Iconoclast". You can find Jerry online at www.newenglishreview.org. Shoshana Bryen is the Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center in Washington. You can find Bryen online at www.jewishpolicycenter.org. I look forward to doing another one of our Middle East round table discussions here on 1330 WEBY, Northwest Florida's Talk Radio.

Listen to the *Israel News Talk Radio—Beyond the Matrix* interviews with Sander Gerber, [here](#) and [here](#).

Jerome B Gordon is a Senior Vice President of the *New English Review* and author of *The West Speaks*, NER Press 2012. Mr. Gordon is a former US Army intelligence officer who served during the Viet Nam era. He was the co-host and co-producer of weekly The Lisa Benson Show for National Security that aired out of KKNT960 in Phoenix Arizona from 2013 to 2016. He is co-host and co-producer of the Middle East Round Table periodic series on 1330amWEBY, Northwest Florida Talk Radio, Pensacola, Florida.

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