

**ON IRAN PROTESTS & JERUSALEM TRUMP HAD COURAGE TO
SPEAK THE TRUTH, UNLIKE OBAMA AND WEST'S
"PROGRESSIVES"**

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[Jerusalem and Now Iran: Is Donald Trump Turning Into a Morally Serious President?: Jonathan S. Tobin, *Ha'aretz*, Jan. 02, 2018](#)— In the summer of 2009, as the forces of the Iranian government brutally repressed mass demonstrations protesting a stolen election, the United States sent the people of Iran an unmistakable message.

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[Hungry for Regional Hegemony, Iran Takes a Bite Out of Hamas: Charles Bybelezer, *The Media Line*, Jan. 4, 2018](#)— One week of popular protests in Iran has brought into stark focus the country's deep internal divisions...

[How Iran Became the Dominant Power in the Middle East: Prof. Benjamin Miller, *BESA*, Jan. 4, 2018](#)— Iran has emerged as the winner of the so-called “Arab Spring,” a state of affairs some lay at the feet of the Obama administration.

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[What Washington Can Do to Support Iran's Protesters: Richard Goldberg and Jamie Fly, *New York Post*, Jan. 2, 2018](#) Iran has a peculiar habit of surprising Americans.

[Protests in Iran: Social Challenges vs. Foreign Policy Ambitions: Dr. Doron Itzchakov, *BESA*, Jan. 3, 2018](#)

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JERUSALEM AND NOW IRAN: IS DONALD TRUMP

TURNING INTO A MORALLY SERIOUS PRESIDENT?

Jonathan S. Tobin

[*Ha'aretz*](#), Jan. 02, 2018

In the summer of 2009, as the forces of the Iranian government brutally repressed mass demonstrations protesting a stolen election, the United States sent the people of Iran an unmistakable message. The man regarded as an international beacon of hope offered them no encouragement. President Barack Obama's initial silence, and then continued restraint, in his remarks about what was going on, was a significant milestone along the road to the Iran nuclear deal he would later sign. It told Iranians they were on their own with respect to any international effort to secure their freedom.

But now, more than eight years later, as a new wave of protests spreads throughout Iran, those suffering under the theocratic rule of the ayatollahs are getting a very different message from the United States. President Donald Trump's tweets reminded the ayatollahs that "the world is watching" as they sought to put down the protests against their regime's tyranny, corruption and support for terror. Trump let Iranian dissidents know the world is with them and turned up the pressure on Tehran - just at the moment when he wants to start a conversation about renegotiating the nuclear deal, so as to remove the sunset clauses that make the regime's acquisition of a bomb inevitable.

Yet, as was the case with Trump's declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, many on the left, as well as others on the right, who are still appalled by the Trump presidency, are not prepared to give him credit even when he is obviously in the right. In their view, Trump's inappropriate behavior and statements rob him of any moral legitimacy, therefore nullifying the impact of

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anything that he does or says that they would approve of if someone else had done it.

But the contrast with Obama is instructive, not only in terms of the debate over Iran, but because it also undermines the narrative which portrays the Trump administration as patently illegitimate. As was the case with Jerusalem, it is Trump who had the courage and the will to state an important truth about Iran, while it was Obama who failed that great moral test.

That contradicts the assumptions of both the "resistance" on the left and the conservative "Never Trump" faction. This ought to force even the president's sternest critics to reassess their belief that Trump's administration cannot be taken seriously, especially when so much of the arguments against him are premised on the notion that his character is such that he must be opposed under any and all circumstances.

Rather than see the contrast between the two successive administrations as one of stark choices between good and evil, Trump's ability to do the right thing on Iran while Obama conspicuously failed, means his administration should be judged, as all governments must be, in shades of grey rather than in terms of moral absolutes.

The attempt, principally by Obama administration alumni, to claim that the best course for the West on Iran is to be silent about the protests, is unpersuasive. As in other efforts to deal with tyrannies, such as that of the former Soviet Union, outside pressure aimed at bolstering internal dissent is a critical factor in undermining support for any such authoritarian government. Moreover, Obama's diffident posture toward the 2009 protests gives us a clear example of how Western democracies encouraged the theocrats to believe they can murder with impunity and not face any international consequences.

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Obama believed that the objective of obtaining a nuclear accord with ~~progressives/~~ any concession. But that choice and others, such as the reports that he discouraged federal authorities from pursuing efforts to curtail Hezbollah's drug-running operations in order to further appease Tehran, weakened his negotiating position, as well as undermining other Western interests. It also made it easier for the regime to convince Iranians they had no choice but to meekly accept the continued rule of a government that used the wealth it acquired from the pact to enrich regime entities, while doing little to help its people.

By contrast, Trump's truth-telling sets the record straight in a way that ought to alter the debate not only about Iran, but on other foreign policy issues too. His critics generally dismiss the president as ignorant or foolish. But it is difficult to see how either former Obama officials or European governments (who have been conspicuously silent on recent events in Iran) are in any better position to preach to Trump about morality.

The implications for Israel and those who care about it from this discussion are clear. Trump's more favorable attitude toward Israel, as well as his willingness to hold the Palestinians accountable for their rejectionism and support for terror, does not erase his other shortcomings. Yet, as with his reversal of a decades-long policy that denied the truth about Jerusalem, Trump's ability to say what needed to be said about Iran, and in a way that Obama couldn't or wouldn't, needs to be acknowledged. It should be seen as a significant measure of how his administration should be judged going forward as it tackles the ongoing challenges relating to the Mideast peace process and terrorism.

Disgust with some of what Trump says and tweets is understandable. But we have no choice but to judge leaders by their choices, rather than our assumptions about their character and intentions. After the Jerusalem stand and the Iran protests, it's getting increasingly difficult to pretend that the moral dichotomy between Obama and Trump is as clear-cut as the president's detractors claim it to be. Hard as it may be for the "resistance" and the Never Trumpers to accept, it may be that it is possible that Donald Trump is turning out to be a morally serious president.

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**IF 'CANADA'S BACK,' LIKE TRUDEAU SAYS,
WE SHOULD BE SUPPORTING IRAN'S PROTESTERS**

Kaveh Shahrooz

[National Post](#), Jan. 3, 2018

“Canada’s back,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau likes to say in progressive international circles. But since the outbreak of the growing protests that have rocked Iran, Canada has been nowhere to be found. The protests, which began in the religious city of Mashhad in northeastern Iran, have been raging across the country for nearly a week and, to date, have claimed nearly 20 lives. The protesters’ demands were initially about economic justice, but have quickly transformed into a rejection of Iran’s theocratic structure and the Iranian government’s military adventurism in Syria and Yemen.

In the face of this, Canada’s Global Affairs department released a statement that indicated Canada is “encouraged” by the protesters’ exercise of their rights, and stated that Canada will continue to monitor the situation. This statement — tepidly recognizing the protests without endorsing their message, and emphasizing the protesters’ rights to free expression without giving any offence to Iran’s rulers — was the diplomatic equivalent of hedging Canada’s bets.

As of the time of this writing, neither Trudeau nor Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland have weighed in. Domestically, this is in contrast to a strong statement

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of support by Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer. And, internationally, progressives/inconsistent with the very strong statements by President Donald Trump and members of his administration. Why, then, is Canada hesitating to offer support to the protesters? The answer, likely, lies in the prime minister's commitment to reverse Stephen Harper's decision to cut off diplomatic relations with Iran and close the Iranian embassy in Ottawa.

It is probable that Trudeau believes supporting the protesters will make it harder for him to deliver on his promise. Such failure may, in turn, entail political costs, as Iranian-Canadians are becoming an electoral force in at least two Greater Toronto Area ridings. The Liberals may believe that segments of the Iranian-Canadian community, some of whom legitimately suffer due to lack of access to consular services in Canada and some with financial ties to the Iranian government, will punish them in the next election if they don't make good on their commitment.

But the prime minister should break his silence on Iran. The reason for that is simple: It is because doing so is the morally right thing to do. The cause championed by the brave protesters in Iran's streets is just. They are calling for an end to a theocracy that has produced nothing for Iranians except economic stagnation, repression, mass executions, and gender and religious apartheid. Does Canada's feminist prime minister wish to be on the side of a government that treats women as second-class citizens? Can he pay lip service to diversity and inclusion on the one hand, and keep silent in the face of a government that treats its Baha'i religious community as non-persons? In short, in the clash between a theocratic regime that murders its citizens (and Canadian citizens, as it did in 2003 with Zahra Kazemi) and young protesters calling for democracy, which side does Trudeau wish to be on?

Re-engaging the Iranian government may be a sincere Liberal government commitment, but it surely isn't worth sullyng Canada's reputation as a force for justice and human rights in the world. And if the prime minister decides that he wants to express solidarity with the protesters, there are several concrete steps

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he can take. First, he ought to make a powerful statement that supports the protesters and their demands. The importance of such a statement cannot be overstated. Given the bellicose language of the Trump administration, the Iranian government would love nothing more than to paint the protesters as saboteurs doing America's bidding. Given that Trudeau is the anti-Trump, the PM's support of the protest would considerably weaken the Iranian government's rhetoric.

Second, Canada ought to make clear to Iranian authorities that any violation of the protesters' rights would lead to significant consequences. For example, Iran ought to understand that in the face of a serious crackdown, re-engagement should no longer be on the table. In addition, now that Canada has its own version of the Magnitsky Act (a law that freezes assets and limits travel for government officials who engage in human rights abuses abroad), Iranian officials ought to be warned that they could end up on its list if they illegally silence protesters. In addition, Canada should exert its influence to get other countries to stand with the protesters. Each year, Canada leads a resolution at the UN General Assembly that condemns Iran's human rights abuses. We have the experience, know-how, and moral authority to lead on this issue, too.

Finally, Canada should take serious aim at Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the military and economic juggernaut responsible for so much domestic repression and regional conflict. It is now time to sanction the IRGC using a bill (S-219) that has so far stalled in the Senate thanks to Liberal-affiliated Senators. The prime minister ought to make the sanctioning of the IRGC a priority. Iran's protesters are taking tremendous risks these days to secure freedom and democracy. They need Canada's support and solidarity. We should provide it.

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HUNGRY FOR REGIONAL HEGEMONY, IRAN TAKES A BITE OUT OF HAMAS

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Charles Bybelezer

[The Media Line](#), Jan. 4, 2018

One week of popular protests in Iran has brought into stark focus the country's deep internal divisions, along with widespread resentment towards the mullahs, which have remained relatively dormant since regime forces brutally quashed the Green Revolution in 2009. What started last Thursday in the city of Mashhad as a small economic rally—with participants primarily venting frustration over the lack of trickle-down effect from some \$100 billion in sanctions relief granted to Tehran in the 2015 nuclear deal—has morphed into nationwide, deadly demonstrations against the rulership of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Across Iran chants of "death to the dictator" have become common refrain as pictures of the ayatollah are set on fire. Among the many grievances being aired is anger over the Islamic Republic's deep military, and thus financial, involvement in conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, in addition to support for Lebanese-based Hezbollah. Somewhat less pronounced is the regime's bankrolling of the Palestinian terrorist groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, although protesters have reportedly recited slogans such as 'Let go of Palestine' and 'Forget Palestine' while invoking the Gaza Strip in particular.

In this respect, relations between Shiite Iran and Sunni Hamas have thawed since the former froze ties with Gaza's rulers after they refused to support the Assad government at the onset of the Syrian war. Now, Tehran's renewed funding of Hamas is part and parcel of the Islamic Republic's attempt to increase its regional influence and, on the micro level, its presence along Israel's borders. The latter entails accelerating Hezbollah's militarization in Lebanon and establishing a permanent presence in Syria, including the entrenchment of Shiite proxies in the Golan Heights.

According to Brig. Gen. Yossi Kuperwasser (ret.), former director general of the

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Israeli Ministry of International Affairs and Strategy, Iran's growing influence in progressive/Gaza is based on a convergence of interests. "On the one hand, Hamas has become weaker as it lost the ability to rely on its usual supporters, while its effort to forge unity with the Palestinian Authority appears to have failed. "On the other hand," he explained to The Media Line, "the Iranians want to increase the strength of the 'resistance' axis that opposes Israel and promotes radical Islamic ideology and Hamas can be a useful ally in this cause."

Brig. Gen. (res.) Eli Ben Meir, who served as the IDF's chief intelligence officer, agrees that Iran is making inroads in the Strip to fill the vacuum created by Hamas' isolation, but also in response to developments in the north. "There is a potential for escalation in Syria," he told The Media Line, "as Israel has repeatedly talked about enforcing its red lines [and reportedly carried out multiple strikes against Iranian assets to uphold them]. So Tehran is sending a message that such action can be met with a response from Gaza." In fact, there has been a marked uptick in rocket attacks against Israel emanating from the Palestinian enclave since US President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the Jewish state's capital. However, in the wake of last week's apparent targeting of a ceremony honoring an IDF soldier whose remains are being held by Hamas, multiple Israeli officials have publicly accused Tehran of deliberately raising tensions.

For his part, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman released a video in which he slammed the Islamic Republic for working to "destroy" Gaza while "hurting Israel as much as possible." Intelligence Minister Israel Katz referred to the Strip as a "ticking time bomb" caused by a "direct Iranian intervention," with Tehran allegedly having supplied some of the mortars fired at southern Israeli towns. Former defense chief Moshe Ya'alon warned that Iran, empowered by military successes throughout the region, is likely to shift some of its attention towards subverting Israel.

On Monday, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot revealed that Tehran has increased its funding to Hamas and Islamic Jihad from an estimated \$70 million to \$100 million annually in order to exert more influence over Gaza. Nevertheless, he

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described as "irresponsible" those calling for a stronger response to ~~progressives/~~ confirming that the IDF is "carrying out various covert and open efforts including [the] promotion of restraining factors." Indeed, there appears to be disagreement within the Israeli political and military establishments over how to deal with the growing threat from Gaza, where the Jewish state has fought three wars over the past decade. "There are three main courses of action that Israel can take," Ben Meir explained to The Media Line. "The first is a full-scale operation that involves throwing Hamas out of the Strip. The second is conducting low-intensity warfare, a tit-for-tat approach—such as responding to rocket fire with airstrikes—in order to contain the situation. And the third option is finding a way to dramatically change the severe civilian economic conditions."...

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HOW IRAN BECAME THE DOMINANT POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Prof. Benjamin Miller

[BESA](#), Jan. 4, 2018

Iran has emerged as the winner of the so-called "Arab Spring," a state of affairs some lay at the feet of the Obama administration. When the US administration (together with five other powers) signed a nuclear accord with Tehran to curb its nuclear program, it did not insist on a halt to Iran's assorted aggressions in the Middle East. But Obama is not entirely to blame for Iran's success. In each of the four Arab countries in which Tehran has made incursions, its rivals inadvertently played a key role in strengthening the Iranian position through the trans-border Shiite connection.

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In other words, interventions by other foreign powers unintentionally progressives/strengthened the pro-Iranian Shiite group in each of the countries in question. In some cases (though not all), the outcome was influenced by nationalist opposition to foreign interference. In all four cases, however, the interventions reinforced a regional transnational sectarian connection that is enabling the fulfillment of Iranian aspirations to become the dominant force in the Middle East.

How have the other intervening powers helped Iran win the Middle East game (at least for now)? In the case of Iraq, another enemy of the Islamic Republic accidentally brought about Iranian dominance in a country that used to be a major rival. In this instance it was the US that played the key role. Following their 2003 occupation of Iraq, the Americans tried to democratize the country. But elections in an ethnically and religiously fragmented state like Iraq mean that the largest ethnic or sectarian group is going to win.

The Shiites are the majority group in a polarized Iraq, and some of their leaders are allies of the Iranian Shiite regime. This trans-border connection has guaranteed significant Iranian influence in Iraq. Thus, the US invasion and democratization project in Iraq brought to power forces allied with its main enemy in the region - even if the alliance with Tehran is not welcomed by all Iraqis, including some Shiites.

The (next) case of an external intervention that resulted in growing Iranian influence is the Russian involvement in Syria. In this instance, the intervening power is not an enemy of Iran's - at the moment. It was one for a very long time, however, and the future of the alliance is uncertain. At any rate, the Russian bombing in 2015 was the decisive factor that ultimately brought about the victory of the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war. This is the case even though Tehran, Hezbollah, and other Iranian-led Shiite militias had been fighting alongside the regime since well before the Russian bombing started.

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As in the other cases, the support of Iran and its Shiite allies for the ~~Alawite~~ ~~regime in Damascus is based at least partly on a common sectarian affiliation, as~~ the Alawites are considered an offshoot of Shiite Islam. The Assad regime's dependence on the Iranian/Shiite militias' support seems to guarantee that Tehran will remain a major influence in Syria.

While the Russian bombing provided the coup de grâce, the Iranians and their allies continue to provide the ground forces necessary to preserve the regime. Israel is worried that the regime's debt to Iran will translate into a continuous Iranian/Hezbollah military presence in Syria near the border with the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. Recent Russian statements seem to indicate Moscow's acceptance of such a military presence. This forward military deployment of Iran and its allies creates the potential for escalation, whether intended or inadvertent...

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On Topic Links

[Iran's Protests are Fading, but Iranians Are Still Angry: Amanda Erickson, Washington Post, Jan. 4, 2018](#)—For just a moment around the new year, Iran seemed poised for something big. What started as a couple of scattered protests on Dec. 8 over the cost of eggs quickly erupted into a countrywide movement. Iranians took to the streets in nearly every province, calling for an end to corruption, a better economy and a less-oppressive government.

[The Uprising in Iran: 'This is What Revolution Looks Like': Terry Glavin, Maclean's, Jan. 1, 2017](#)—The Iranian uprising that began last Thursday in Mashhad, Iran's

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second largest city, was initially reported as an isolated protest over ~~for oppressives/~~ and unemployment. By Sunday, the entire country was heaving in convulsions. —

[What Washington Can Do to Support Iran's Protesters](#): Richard Goldberg and Jamie Fly, *New York Post*, Jan. 2, 2018

Iran has a peculiar habit of surprising Americans. —Even before the widespread anticlerical protests in Iran, President Trump made clear what he thinks of the regime. In recent days, he has even gone so far as to support those Iranians protesting the regime, in stark contrast to President Barack Obama's desperate attempt in 2009 to curry favor with their oppressors.

[Protests in Iran: Social Challenges vs. Foreign Policy Ambitions](#): Dr. Doron Itzchakov, *BESA*, Jan. 3, 2018—The social protests currently taking place in Iran arise from the gap between the Islamic leadership's ambition for regional hegemony and ordinary people's desire for a lower cost of living and an improved standard of living - expectations stemming from promises made by President Hassan Rouhani during his first term in office and reinforced by the July 2015 nuclear agreement (JCPOA) and the attendant release of Iranian assets worldwide.