

**IRANIANS, CHANTING “DEATH TO HEZBOLLAH! NO TO
GAZA...”, DENOUNCE MULLAHS’ CORRUPTION & FOREIGN
ADVENTURISM**

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IRAN’S THEOCRACY IS ON THE BRINK

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Mark Dubowitz

[*Wall Street Journal*](#), Jan. 1, 2017

Iran has a peculiar habit of surprising Americans. It has done so again with the protests engulfing its major cities. The demonstrations began over economic grievances and quickly transformed into a rejection of theocracy. The slogans must have unsettled the mullahs: “Death to Khamenei!” “Death to Rouhani!” “We will die to get our Iran back!” Imperialism has not revived the regime’s legitimacy, as the protesting Persians pointedly reject expending their meager resources on Arab wars: “Death to Hezbollah!” “No to Gaza, not Lebanon! Our life only for Iran!”

However the events on the streets unfold, their most immediate casualty will be the presidency of Hassan Rouhani and its false claim of pragmatic governance. In the aftermath of the Green Revolution of 2009, which rocked the foundations of the Islamic Republic, a sinister argument gradually pervaded Western salons and chancelleries. The convulsions of that summer, the claim went, were over no more than electoral irregularity. With the election of the so-called moderate Mr. Rouhani in 2013, the system rebalanced itself. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his allies supposedly learned some hard lessons on the need to yield to popular mandates. Iranians want gradual change, we have been told, and believe that the system’s own constitutional provisions and plebiscites can be used to nudge it toward moderation.

Then, last week, Iranians took to the streets. Every decade of the Islamist regime’s rule has seen one of its political factions lose its legitimacy through national uprisings. In the 1980s, the Islamic Republic waged a determined civil war against liberals and secularists who sought to redeem the revolution’s pledge of a democratic order. The student riots of 1999 ended the reformist interlude and Mohammad Khatami’s presidency, which had promised that the expansion of civil society and elections would harmonize faith and freedom. The reformists lingered as discredited enablers of a repressive regime, but no one believed in their

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[promises of change from within. The hard-liners offered their own national compact, one that privileged economic justice over political emancipation. But the tumultuous presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad produced only corruption and bellicosity.](#)

Then came Mr. Rouhani and his centrist disciples with their pledge to revive the economy, primarily through foreign investment. Mr. Rouhani needed a nuclear agreement to lift debilitating sanctions and stimulate commerce. The Obama administration was happy to deliver, and Iran received tens of billions of dollars in financial dividends, including \$1.7 billion in paper currency. Instead of channeling that wealth into productive uses, Ayatollah Khamenei, the clerical establishment and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps consumed much of it on foreign adventurism and corruption. Mr. Rouhani made a crucial mistake: overpromising and underdelivering on both economic and political reforms. His modest experiment in centrist rule has come crashing down, taking with it his injunction that all must trust the system. The regime is at an impasse. It has no more political actors—no establishment saviors—to offer its restless constituents.

As with the Soviet Union in its last days, the Islamic Republic can no longer appeal to its ideals; it relies only on its security services for survival. That is deadly for a theocracy, by definition an ideological construct. Ideological authoritarian states need a vision of the future by which their enforcers can condone their own violence. The theocracy’s vast patronage system will not cure this crisis of legitimacy. In many ways, Mr. Rouhani was the ruling clergy’s last gasp, a beguiling mullah who could enchant Westerners while offering Iranians some hope. That hope has vanished.

In the coming weeks, many in the commentariat will advise the Trump administration to remain silent and stay on the sidelines, as the Obama administration did in 2009. They will recommend that it is best to let the Iranian drama play itself out. If American officials weigh in, the argument goes, the regime would brand its detractors as agents of a foreign power. Such stale prescriptions miss the point that Iranians are looking toward America to support their struggle.

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Democratic dissidents always do so. In that regard, Iranians are no different from
non-Muslim dissidents from the former Soviet Union to communist China, who
have struggled against tyranny and ardently welcomed American and European
support.

Barack Obama has been rightly castigated for his silence during the Green
Revolution. President Trump is right not to follow his predecessor’s discredited
path. The White House should continue issuing condemnations daily, including
through Persian-language media outlets, and follow up with sanctions targeting
corruption and human-rights abuses. Congress should rediscover its once-
bipartisan determination to hold the regime accountable for its crimes and push
America’s European allies to overcome their mercantile greed and support Iranians
striving to be free from theocracy.

The Islamic Republic is a relic of a century that yielded multiple ideological
regimes claiming to have mastered the forces of history. By now most of them are
history. Mr. Trump entered office with an understanding of the Islamic Republic’s
profound threat to American security. The most consequential legacy of his
presidency may be a Middle East free of its most powerful unsavory regime.

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THE IRANIAN EXPLOSION OF TRUTH

Caroline B. Glick

[Jerusalem Post](#), Jan. 1, 2018

If the Iranian regime is unable to brutally stomp out the countrywide protests
raging through the country, and if the protesters achieve their goal of bringing

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down the regime, they will go down in history as the saviors of millions of people/ not just in Iran but throughout the world. Given the earth shattering potential of the protests it is extraordinary to see the liberal media in the US and Europe struggle to downplay their significance.

Aside from a lukewarm statement on Twitter from British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, as of Monday morning - five days into the protests - no senior European official had spoken in favor of the hundreds of thousands of Iranians marching throughout their country demanding freedom. In the US, former members of the Obama administration and the liberal media have determinedly downplayed the importance of the protests. They have insisted that President Donald Trump should stop openly supporting the protesters and so adopt former president Barack Obama’s policy of effectively siding with the Iranian regime against the Iranian people who seek its overthrow.

These talking points have been pushed out into the media echo chamber by Obama’s former deputy national security adviser and strategic communications chief Ben Rhodes, his former national security adviser Susan Rice and former secretary of state John Kerry. Obama’s Middle East coordinator Philip Gordon stated them outright in an op-ed in *The New York Times* on Saturday. Gordon called on Trump “to keep quiet and do nothing” in response to the protests. In Gordon’s view, no matter how big their beef with the regime, the protesters hate the US more. And they really hate Trump. Gordon wrote, “Whatever Iranians think of their own government, they are unlikely to want as a voice for their grievances an American president who has relentlessly opposed economic relief for their country and banned them from traveling to the United States.”

Just as Obama’s surrogates have repeated Gordon’s claims, so the Obama-supporting liberal media have gone out of their way to diminish the importance of the protests in their coverage of them and use Obama’s surrogates as their “expert” analysts to explain what is happening (or rather, distort what is happening) to their audiences. Obama administration officials have been so outspoken in their defense of the Iranian regime because they rightly view the

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prospect that the protesters will succeed in overthrowing the regime as a result of
threat to their legacy.

Obama’s foreign policy rested on the assumption that the US was a colonialist, aggressive and immoral superpower. By their telling, the Iranians - like the Cubans and the Russians - were right to oppose the US due to its legacy of meddling in the internal affairs of other countries. This anti-American worldview informed the Obama administration’s conviction that it was incumbent on the US to make amends for its previous decades of foreign policy.

Hence, Obama traveled the globe in 2009 and 2010 apologizing for the policies of his predecessors. Hence, Obama believed that the US had no moral right to stand with the Iranian people against the regime in the 2009 Green Revolution. As he saw it, anyone who stood with the US was no better than an Uncle Tom. Truly authentic foreign regimes were by definition anti-American. Since the Green Revolutionaries were begging for his support, by definition, they didn’t deserve it.

Since the current wave on anti-regime protests began last Thursday, the liberal media have parroted the Obama alumni’s talking points because they feel that their war against Trump requires them to embrace Obama’s legacy just as they embraced his talking points and policies for eight years. After all, if Obama is not entirely infallible, then Trump cannot be entirely fallible. And if Trump may be partially right and Obama partially wrong, then their dispute may be a substantive rather than existential one. And so, the *New York Times’* coverage of the most significant story in the world has deliberately distorted and downplayed events on the ground in Iran.

The protests are potentially so important because the Iranian regime is so dangerous. Thanks to Obama, the regime is on a glide path to a nuclear arsenal. Its proxy armies in Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq possess sophisticated armaments most militaries can only dream of. Its tentacles spread throughout the

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[globe. The longer the Iranian regime remains in power, the greater the risk to](#)
[humanity will soon face a global conflagration that will dwarf World War II.](#)

Nothing any single state does against Iran’s proxies will end Iran’s continued ability to cause mayhem and death on multiple fronts. Every day the Iranian regime remains in place, it will use its power to continue its direct and indirect wars against its enemies in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Gordon argued that Trump’s pro-Israel and pro-Saudi policies since taking office have made him less credible with the Iranian people. All you have to do to understand that this is nonsense is listen to what the protesters are chanting. They insist that they want their country’s money spent at home, on them. They do not want their money used to underwrite Hezbollah, the Assad regime in Syria and Hamas’s regime in Gaza. In other words, they don’t want to make war with Israel - or, presumably Saudi Arabia. Their criticism is on point.

In 2016, flush with cash from Obama’s nuclear deal, Iran quadrupled its support of Hezbollah from \$200 million to \$800m. per year. In 2012 Iran cut off its funding to Hamas in retaliation for Hamas’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood against Iran’s Syrian proxy President Bashar Assad. In the wake of Obama’s nuclear deal, Iran became Hamas’s largest financier. Last August, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar said that Iran is Hamas’s “largest backer financially and militarily.”

The \$100 billion in sanctions relief Iran received in the wake of the nuclear deal enabled the regime to give hundreds of millions of additional dollars each year to its proxy militias and armies in Iraq, Yemen and Syria. It is self-evident that if the protesters get their way and the ayatollahs are overthrown, that money would stop flowing to Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and the Shi’ite militias in Iraq. Instead, that money, and billions more, would be spent developing Iran.

There are many ways that the nations of the world can help the protesters in Iran. The US and Iran’s other targets can expose the financial corruption in the Islamic

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Republic, including the bank account information of everyone from Supreme
Dictator Ayatollah Ali Khamenei down to local Basij commanders. They can
broadcast anti-regime information into Iran through multiple platforms outside the
regime’s control. They can bypass the regime and unblock Twitter, Facebook,
Telegraph and other social media platforms...

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DEMONSTRATIONS IN IRAN REFLECT THE STRENGTH OF US ALLIANCES

Prof. Hillel Frisch

[BESA](#), Jan. 2, 2018

Sometimes relatively minor events reflect facts of global importance. The chants in Mashhad and Tehran, “No to Palestine,” “No to Gaza and Lebanon - Only Iran is Worth Dying For” to protest the regime’s dissipation of resources on battlefields a thousand kilometers and more from Iran’s borders, rather than allocating them to the hard-pressed citizens back home, are among them. These demonstrations underscore a major overlooked truth in the global balance of power: namely, that the US is the only power to have many allies whose strategic importance to the US is matched by mutual economic benefits.

All other challengers are saddled with allies that do nothing but drain their treasuries. Hence the demonstrations and slogans in Iran. Tehran is trying to project power abroad at the cost of arousing domestic opposition, a dangerous prospect. Non-democratic states, even when powerful, are not supple enough to absorb such opposition. Compare Iran to the US in this regard. The US was engaged in \$3.6 trillion of trade in 2014, or just over one-fifth of its GNP. Thirteen of its twenty biggest trading partners are states formally allied to the US as part

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of the NATO alliance (Germany, the UK, France, Italy, and others), or ~~the latter~~ have in recent years become strong informal allies, such as India and Vietnam. The latter was even a warring enemy in the past. Significantly, the three largest trading partners of the US in the Middle East are Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The Iranian-led alliance perceives these three countries as its deadliest foes.

Trade between the US and its allies dwarfs trade between Iran and its allies - over \$3 trillion compared to \$73 billion for Iran. Even more significant, however, is the relative economic importance of such trade to the economy of the US and its allies compared to Iran and its allies. Whereas trade between the US and its allies represents over half the total trade between the US and the world, Iran’s \$12.3 billion trade with its allies (overwhelmingly with Iraq) represents less than 20% of its total trade with the world. (It is important to note that not all agree with the Carnegie report of \$12 billion in trade between Iran and Iraq; the figure might be much smaller).

For Iran, Syria and Yemen are battlegrounds that drain resources with little or no offsetting economic benefits. The \$300 million trade between Iran and Syria, mostly to Iran’s benefit, hardly offsets the costs of subsidizing the regime. Actual figures are impossible to get, but the CIA in 2012 reported an \$11 billion surplus at the outset for Syria, which during the first year of the civil war was reduced by slightly over \$2 billion to finance the Assad regime. By extrapolation, one can infer that after the fifth year, Iran began stepping in to prop up the regime. Such a sum is more than Iran spends on its own public health system. And this does not include the costs of direct Iranian involvement or subsidies to Hezbollah, the Iraqi militias, and Afghani mercenaries.

Tehran’s economic predicament in Yemen is even more one-sided. There are no figures on Iranian-Yemeni trade because they have been so insignificant. Today they are probably nonexistent. The relationship repeats itself in the case of China and Russia. China’s only staunch allies, North Korea and Pakistan, drain Chinese resources with little economic advantage accruing to the greater power. China,

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unlike Iran, is a major leader in international trade and economic growth, which
allows it to bear the costs of subsidizing these states. It also does not bear the
costs of actual warfare...

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ASSAD MAY HAVE RETAKEN THE SYRIAN GOLAN,

BUT IRAN IS PULLING THE STRINGS

Avi Issacharoff

[Times of Israel](#), Dec. 31, 2017

The evacuation of several hundred Syrian rebels from the Beit Jinn area on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights over the weekend puts Israel in an old-new position on the border. Assad’s army is once again at the fences, just like it was from 1967 to 2011. In the southern Golan, a few pockets of resistance remain from supporters of the Islamic State group, or as they are known locally, the Khalid Ibn Walid Army. But beyond that, the Syrians have almost completely retaken control of the border with Israel. Only a few moderate forces remain south of Kuneitra that would maintain some relative cooperation with Israel or keep the Shiite or Sunni extremists at bay.

The actual evacuation took place quietly, and the buses carrying nearly all the rebels and their supporters have already made their way from the slopes of Mount Hermon to the last bastion belonging to the (relatively) moderate opposition, in the Idlib area. This seemingly familiar presence — an army of Syrian regulars, disciplined and beholden to regulations, that understands the Damascus regime’s need to keep things quiet — ostensibly heralds stability. But that’s only on the

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surface. Over the last several years, Syrian President Bashar Assad has been forced to give up a foothold and then some to Iraqi Shiite militias, Hezbollah and, most importantly, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. His regime was saved by their intervention and he literally owes them his life, physically as well as politically. Assad will be forced to give the Shiite crescent a foothold in the border area, and may even do so happily.

Hezbollah’s presence on the border is nothing new. The town of Khader on the side of the Hermon has become known in recent years as a redoubt of support for Assad, encircled by Sunni rebels. Hezbollah managed to build a military infrastructure in the town to carry out attacks against Israel, as evidenced by the assassination of its operatives while carrying out these activities. Chief among them were Jihad Mughniyeh and the Iranian general killed in 2015, and, of course Samir Kuntar, the terrorist who served time in Israeli prison for killing a Nahariya family and was released in a deal with Hezbollah in 2008. Kuntar was killed near Damascus in 2015, reportedly assassinated by Israel amid attempts to set up a structure near Khader for attacking Israel.

Iranian Revolutionary Guards will be much less careful than Assad’s forces about keeping things quiet on the border. It’s possible they will actively try to destabilize the situation along the frontier — in order to keep war from erupting in Lebanon, among other reasons. Israel has warned time and again that it will not allow Iranian forces near the border, and the Russian-American ceasefire is supposed to keep them at bay. However, Washington and Moscow might not consider Hezbollah fighters in Syrian uniforms — or IRGC advisers who come to “visit” forward positions, including a Syrian post on the Hermon — as a classical “Iranian presence.” Indeed, Hezbollah or IRGC fighters may very well be present in Syrian positions on the Hermon right now.

In 2018, Assad will need more help than ever from Iran and Hezbollah to stabilize his regime, and may become an Iranian-Shiite puppet. He doesn’t have much to be excited about. The Sunni enemies of his regime, who make up the majority in the country, are still hostile. Syria is bankrupt as a country, with hundreds of

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thousands dead, millions injured and a destroyed infrastructure. But he does rise/
one significant thing going for him: He survived the Arab Spring. That’s something
not a lot of current leaders in the Arab world can say. And survival is the name of
the game for everybody.

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[Support the Iranian People: Editorial, *Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 31, 2017](#)—At the University of Tehran, students gather and declare: “We are ashamed of our officials who do not feel our pain.” In Qom, thousands throng the streets shouting: “We don’t want Islamic Republic, we don’t want it, we don’t want it!”

[What to Make of Latest Protests in Iran?: Lawrence A. Franklin, *Gatestone Institute*, Jan. 2, 2018](#)—For the past several days, Iranians have demonstrated against a government that has not delivered on promised economic improvement and against a regime whose ruling clerical class they despise.

[Iran Ignores Israel’s Warnings: Brig.-Gen. \(ret.\) Dr. Shimon Shapira, *JCPA*, Dec. 28, 2017](#)—Iran continues to dispatch commanders and fighters from the Shiite Foreign Legion stationed in Syria to southern Lebanon.

[Iran and the New Land Corridor: Emil Avdaliani, *BESA*, Dec. 19, 2017](#)—In the early 620s CE, just before the Arab/Muslim invasions of the Middle East, the Sasanian Shah, Khosrow II, besieged Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, with his large armies. His forces had already occupied Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and other former Byzantine lands. This was a momentous event in world history, as the Iranians had not reached the Mediterranean Sea since the end of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BC.

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