

# After Afghanistan Debacle, Global Threats are Rising



U.S. Marines provide assistance at an evacuation control checkpoint at Hamid Karzai International Airport, Kabul, Afghanistan, Staff Sgt. Victor Mancilla/U.S. Marine Corps, 8/21/21

**In the aftermath of the** chaotic US and international withdrawal from Afghanistan with more than 123,000 US citizens, foreign nationals and Afghan translators and embassy staff, the realities of what occurred have begun to emerge. Despite the representations and UN [speech](#) by President Biden, the “forever war” has not ended. The Taliban, who now occupy the Presidential palace and lead the Emirate of Afghanistan have reasserted the worst aspects of Salafist medievalist Islam, introduced restrictions on women and girls, who had flourished under the US attempt to build what passed for a corrupt democracy with access to education. The Taliban who

promised an inclusive society, promptly told girls their education would end at age 12, if not sooner and women would no longer be employed outside the purdah of their household under control of male family members. The Taliban announced the return of horrific dismemberment [penalties](#) for alleged crimes under Sharia. What remained of internal resistance in the Panjshir Valley bastion fled to neighboring Tajikistan after attacks by Taliban using vast stores of [abandoned](#) US weapons and equipment. No sooner than the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan occurred fissures emerged within its leadership with the return of extremist [Kahlil Rahman al -Haqqani](#) Network leader, to control security in Kabul and [attacks](#) by the extremist Islamic State of Khorasan in Eastern Afghanistan erupted. Then we witnessed the re-emergence of Al Qaeda with video message from Bin Laden's deputy [Ayman Al-Zawahiri](#) and return to Kabul of Security chief, [Dr. Amin ul-Haq](#), on the cusp of the 20th commemoration of the 9/11 attacks in the US. That raised the specter of the re-emergence of the global Al Qaeda terrorist network. In visits by Taliban leaders to Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran, they promised not to permit terrorist to operate in the country.



Afghanistan, under the Taliban, is a pariah Islamist state without recognition of credentials at the UN, temporarily. Neighboring Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, a Taliban supporter, in a pre-recorded [speech](#) delivered at the UN General Assembly meeting in New York noted: "A destabilized chaotic Afghanistan will again become a safe haven for international terrorists—the reason why the US came to Afghanistan in the first place." He [suggested](#) "there was only one way to go stabilizing the current [non-elected] government," "incentivizing" [the Taliban] to respect human rights, keep terrorists off their soil and have an inclusive government, touting this as a "win-win situation for everyone." He [noted](#) that it is a "critical time" for

Afghanistan as it faces a massive humanitarian problem with hunger and 90% of the population living in poverty.” He [pleaded](#) for massive humanitarian assistance led by the UN. Khan also made a play for justice in the decades long unresolved problems of Jammu and Kashmir and further suggesting a UN conference on Islamophobia. The reference to Kashmir [raised](#) Indian concerns about the possible rise of Kashmiri terror training bases in Afghanistan.

Khan avoided the obvious that Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence had created the Taliban in the 1990s as a solution to the cross-border problem of dealing with the Pashtun refugee issues recruiting the future Emirate leaders of Afghanistan from Salafist Madrassas in Pakistan. Moreover, at the behest of former Trump Administration, Pakistan [released](#) in 2018 from a 10-year sentence current Taliban Emirate leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar to participate in Doha peace talks with US.

China’s [interest](#) in Afghanistan is entwined with two objectives: preventing a base for Uyghur irridentist East Turkmenistan fighters in exchange for exploiting the trillions of values in country’s mineral wealth and oil projects. So far, mineral projects begun under the vanquished governments of former President Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Gahni under an MOU [signed](#) in 2019 have languished because of corruption and extensive baksheesh payments. China recognized the “good will” of the new Taliban emirate but went no further than that.

For Russia, dealing with the Taliban, brings back bitter memories of its wars and civil failures that ended in the rout of the then Soviet 40th Army in 1989 that contributed to the breakup of USSR in 1991. No wonder Russia Federation Foreign Minister Lavrov [said](#) “we were in no rush” to recognize the Taliban, with whom they had been in contact for years. Instead suggesting Russia was seeking a more “inclusive government.” Noteworthy is that both Russia and China [did not](#) withdraw their embassy staffs. Further Russia had engaged

in [military maneuvers](#) with former Central Asian “stans” republics at the same time.

Taliban leader [Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar](#) during peace talks in Doha went to Tehran to meet with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif and Secretary of Supreme National Council Al Shamkhani, despite the unresolved matter of responsibility for the deaths of several Iranian Diplomats and journalists in 1998 in Mazer e Sharif, during the prior Taliban regime. That didn't stand in the way of the discussions. While recognizing the 1998 atrocity in Afghanistan, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Saeed Khatibzadeh [saying](#), “the Taliban are part of today's reality in Afghanistan”.

In the West and the Middle East, the US withdrawal from Pakistan after 20 years of a failed conflict was not without its implications. For one thing it questioned the reliability of the Biden administration as a leader of the NATO and other international security arrangements. This despite the leverage the US Federal Reserve Bank in New York [holdings](#) of Afghanistan's \$9.5 billion in gold and Treasury securities.

Boasts of the ability to fight terrorism in Afghanistan and elsewhere from “over the horizon” appeared lame in the wake of a Reaper drone [launch](#) of a hellfire missile that killed a family of an Afghan NGO aid worker and seven members of his family despite last minute warnings by the CIA. The matter is now under [investigation](#) by the Inspector General of the US Air Force.

Secretary Blinken tried to put a brave face on the end of the Afghanistan conflict by [suggesting](#) in a speech at ASEAN conference that the US could turn its attention to the threats of China to US and allies interests in the Indo-Pacific region: Japan, India, Australia with the outlier being Taiwan. Defense of Taiwan, with a robust international trade in critical [semiconductors](#), is problematic. China threatens invasion of the island country's Air Defense Identification

Zone (ADIZ) with [periodic](#) mass flights of fighters, surveillance aircraft and nuclear bombers intruding Taiwan's airspace.

The Biden administration says they will defend Taiwan but has [not indicated](#) under what conditions nor what defense equipment that the independent nation could purchase from US contractors. Taiwan has made moves by applying for membership in joining the [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) trade agreement, that the US didn't join, as an economic bulwark against Chinese predatory ambitions in the region. China had also threatened Australia, which led the US and UK to announce a [treaty](#) binding the three countries to defend our ally down under. That was followed by the announcement of a [deal](#) by the US to supply Australia with nuclear submarines, reneging an existing \$36.5 billion deal with France for construction of a fleet of diesel/electric subs. That led to speculation about whether the EU might [sanction](#) Australia's important trade in wine, mutton, and beef.

During the transition between the Trump and Biden Administration Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley had contacted his opposite in the Chinese People's Liberation Army General Li Zuocheng to allay his fears about an alleged possible attack order by President Trump. That appeared as an episode in a new book, [Peril](#) by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa. It set off [criticism](#) of General Milley for violating the tradition of civilian control at the Defense Department. That will be the subject of a US Senate Hearing on September 28th.

Then there was the White House [meeting](#) of the Quad—Australia, India, Japan, and the US. This while Japan is replacing its Prime Minister, Australia's PM Morrison is facing COVID-19 problems and domestic criticism over the abandoned French submarine deal, and India's Modi concerned about possible US basing requests, given the loss of those in Afghanistan while maintaining relations with China, Russia, and Pakistan.



In the Middle East, there are concerns about reliability over missile defense in the face of possible renewal of negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. That was compounded by US [withdrawal](#) of both Patriot Missile Batteries and the THAAD systems from Saudi Arabia. There were contretemps in the US House of Representatives over appropriation bills for replenishments of Israeli Iron Dome interceptors made by US contractor Raytheon. Progressive Democrats caucus members in the US House of Representatives momentarily forced withdrawal of appropriations for Iron Dome replenishment in a Continuing Resolution bill to fund the government. The Iron Dome has successfully taken down more than 2,500 rockets and missiles. That action by Progressive anti-Israel Democrats forced an overwhelming House [vote](#) on a standalone measure to fund \$1 billion for Iron Dome interceptors over a three-year period. Saudi Arabia [signed](#) military agreements in August 2021 with Russia about possible supply of S-400 air defense systems. Meanwhile, Greece [deployed](#) a Patriot battery to Riyadh. Then there is the mystery propounded by [articles](#) in the *New York Times* and Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* behind the alleged assassination by an Israeli Mossad remote AI-controlled machine gun of the head of Iran's nuclear program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

The lack of an effective ballistic missile defense system in the US has also emerged given results of a successful [test](#) of the joint US -Israel Arrow 3 system in Alaska that vanquished the ineffective USAF [Ground Based Interceptors](#) (GBI). This after two decades and billions of dollars of investment in ineffective systems in the face of threats of nuclear ICBMs from Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

Against this background, what follows is an interview with Dr. Stephen Bryen, a former Reagan Era Undersecretary of Defense for Security and Technology, noted military technology expert and columnist for *The Asia Times*.

**Jerry Gordon:** I'm Jerry Gordon, senior editor of *New English*

*Review.* I'm here with Dr. Stephen Bryen, a former Reagan-era senior Pentagon official, noted military technologist, former defense company executive, and currently a columnist for The Asia Times. Let us start with Afghanistan. What is your takeaway on the tragic drone and missile strike, using a Hellfire missile in Kabul August 29, 2021, that took the life of an Afghan aid worker and his family members?

✘ **Stephen Bryen:** The Defense Department has rather belatedly come and said it was a mistake, that they made an error. That is the official line. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, General Milley, called it a righteous strike on the enemies of America, killing ISIS people. Well, it killed seven children, three adults, one of them was an aid worker working for a non-profit voluntary private organization working with malnourished people. The real question is, how they got it so wrong? How did they mess this up? They violated all the kind of normal rules of engagement for using Hellfire missiles on Reaper drones against these targets. It seems like they could have taken this ISIS-Khorasan person of interest, if that is who they really thought was the right target, before he came to his home. Before he was in a deeply populated area, but they waited to the last minute, and then they hit him.

There is something going on here in the chain of command. When one of these strikes takes place, it takes very high-level approval. The operators don't approve it, they provide the information, and then the judgment is made up the chain of command. We don't know who made that judgment. My guess is there was a lot of urgency in the White House to somehow show that they could fight against somebody, and they decided to fight against ISIS, what they call ISIS-K, meaning ISIS Khorasan. They did what you can call it is an atrocity. Now they've announced that they're going to investigate it. However, the investigator is the Inspector General of the Air Force, not an independent investigation by any stretch of the imagination. It is very unusual for an Inspector General to

condemn his chain of command. It's been done, but it's not very normal. I'm not very optimistic that we'll get to the truth through this investigation. Now, Congress could investigate, they made a lot of noise, but they haven't done anything. We don't have the whole story, but the whole story is not a nice one.

**Jerry Gordon:** The weapon involved was a Hellfire missile.

**Stephen Bryen:** That's right.

**Jerry Gordon:** Once those are launched, there's no take-back on that.

**Stephen Bryen:** That's right. The Hellfire, once it's launched from the drone it takes around 30 seconds to hit its target. In those 30 seconds it can't be called back, it can't be diverted, it's over with. The Israelis, during the Obama administration, had been using Hellfire Missiles and when Obama canceled the Hellfire sales to Israel, they decided to adapt the SPIKE missile. Their SPIKE missile, which was an anti-tank missile, (was) adapted for use on their helicopters and probably on their drones, although I can't confirm that. But the SPIKE missile has a feature that the Hellfire doesn't. It can be diverted to a different target or to no target at all, or it can be destroyed by the operator. As you know because it's been in the newspapers, the CIA allegedly warned after the Hellfire rocket was launched that there were children there in that space. Had there been the possibility of calling this thing back, it would have been done, but there wasn't any.

I don't know if the story is entirely true, whether it has veracity. In any case there's the major problem with what is called fire and forget weapons, and this is not the first time. We've had these kinds of incidents in the past in Yugoslavia in Belgrade and in Kosovo. In one case we blew up a train not knowing it was crossing a bridge. The train came,



and it took the Maverick missile about 20 minutes to get to its target. By that time the target had changed and there was a train there and we ended up killing 10 people. Then we blew up a civilian bus in Kosovo killing 10 Albanian school children. Terrible. These are weaknesses in fire and forget missiles. Once you've launched, there is no way to stop it again.

That is something that shouldn't be allowed. We should do better than that. We should redesign our system so that we can adjust in case there's a reason. The Israelis have gone to extreme lengths to try to minimize human casualties in their battle against Hamas but also against Hezbollah. There are two reasons why you don't want to do this, one is ethical. You don't want to kill people who are non-combatants, who have no role in the fighting and essentially are collateral damage. You don't want to do that ethically. There is another reason, which is equally valid and important is when you do it, you create enemies. Those enemies never forget what you did, so it's counterproductive politically as well as it's ethically unacceptable.

**Jerry Gordon:** What do you say about that the credibility of the Biden administration and in counter-terrorism strategy and quote, using "over-the-horizon" attacks to deal with "terrorist enemies", whether they're in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

**Stephen Bryen:** It reminds me of what Obama was doing. They launched some Predator or other drone, or we were using cruise missiles to try and attack Taliban and then Al-Qaeda. I think that this is not really a very good strategy. First, you are bound to kill a lot of civilians, so it's not clean, and that's a key problem. Secondly, the intelligence is always a little bit wonky if you don't have people on the ground. You're not looking at them in the eye. You don't know if you have the right people. You may launch an attack and end up killing the wrong person or you're not killing anybody just

missing targets, especially with cruise missiles. I think that Biden's policy, if that's what you want to call it. It is not much of a policy.

**Jerry Gordon:** Does the US really have any "eyes or ears" on the ground in that vicinity these days?

**Stephen Bryen:** We must have some. However, I think it is less than we would like. Unfortunately, a lot of intelligence has shifted to technology: Spy satellites, overhead cameras, sensors. Not what we call Human intelligence, which is all important. One of the things the Israelis have obviously specialized in is HUMINT. That is why things blow up in Iran that we would never dream of trying to do, because we don't have the intelligence, they do it.

**Jerry Gordon:** How badly did the Biden administration Afghanistan withdrawal go in terms of poisoning US relations with key allies in the region?

**Stephen Bryen:** That has been going on for a while. The loss of Afghanistan, the walk-out. I would call it the abandonment, just told everybody what they already knew, that the US is not very reliable. You can't trust the United States. I think that was the message. Look, the Biden administration pulled all the air defense missiles out of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan to appease Iran, that's all it was about. That made it much easier for the Houthis in Yemen which is a proxy of Iran, to launch missiles and drones against Saudi Arabia and UAE which they've been doing. We are trying to flatter the Iranians. We also declared that the Houthis weren't terrorists. They just executed nine people in cold blood in terrible shootings for no reason in public! I mean these are blood-thirsty people, and they are terrorists, but Biden doesn't think so.

I think it's going to get worse. This is leftist nonsense ideology, which is getting us into a lot of trouble by leaving our allies like Saudis, the UAE on their own. The Saudis are

talking to the Russians, they have already made a Defense Agreement with the Russians that would be unheard of in the past, because they see the handwriting on the wall. In the Middle East, the US posture is very damaged. Not only in the Middle East but in the Indo- Pacific area. It has created a very great nervousness. None of our allies think the US will defend American interests in the region, whether it's Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan. I'm very skeptical that we are going to defend any of them. I don't mean about words. There is a tendency in this administration to speak a lot and do little. Essentially carry no stick and have a big mouth. That is the danger, it's very dangerous.

**Jerry Gordon:** You've written recently about the Quad Washington meeting with Japan, India, and Australia. It is relatively bizarre, because the Japanese Prime Minister looks like he is being replaced by his own party.

**Stephen Bryen:** The Japanese Prime Minister has already resigned. He is just waiting for the party to choose the next leader. You know there is a contest going on in Japan. He has no authority whatever, so why did he come here? What's he doing here? Australian Prime Minister Morrison's country is in an uproar over the COVID business. There were reports of shootings by the police against protesters recently in Melbourne. It's very nasty. He should be there not in Washington when he has this kind of crisis at home? Then there is the submarine deal which he's made with the US and with the UK, is very controversial and not well accepted in Australia. Of course, the Chinese hate it, not that it is going to make any difference to China. The French are very angry, as they lost billions of dollars in jobs and work. They are threatening to go through the EU seeking to cancel a trade agreement between the EU and Australia. If that happens, Australians are going to suffer because 50% of the wine that Australia produces is consumed in the EU, not to mention lamb mutton and beef, all coming from Australia. There were more

clever ways to do this. The way it's been done is improper because they did it secretly, they quickly reached this agreement. The Australians quickly threw out the French with whom they had a contract and said, "We're not doing it with the French, we're doing it with the US and UK." I mean, I don't really blame Macron for being very unhappy. It doesn't do much for Australia, it doesn't do much for the US, the UK I'm not so sure, but it doesn't really do much for them either. It could be a catastrophe for the Australians on both sides of the coin, and they really shouldn't be having a tea with Mr. Biden, it doesn't make sense.

**Jerry Gordon:** The other member of the Quad India's President Modi is also in a geopolitical trap as well.

**Stephen Bryen:** Mr. Modi. Yes, the problem for India is looming. Because with the Taliban taking over in Afghanistan, what the Indians are worried about is the Taliban will, again, cooperate with the Pakistanis to stir up trouble in Kashmir and other places on the border threatening India. Kashmir being ultra-sensitive for India. The other problem is that the US now has no more bases in Afghanistan. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in central Asia are afraid of getting involved anymore with Washington, because they don't want to be left holding another bag, especially since they live next to Russia not next to the United States. The US is looking for someplace to put its troops, airplanes, and weapons. What the Indians are afraid of is the US is going to ask India for base rights. India should refuse, of course, but it presents a problem. India is also involved with the Chinese; it is not just a one-sided affair. You have the Quad on one side, and you have the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, on the other which is run by China and includes Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. I'm not sure they know what they're doing but, in any case, it makes this Quad look sillier by the minute.

**Jerry Gordon:** We have another problem in the Indo-Pacific region with Taiwan. I note that former National Security

Adviser, Bob O'Brien, and co-author, Alexander Gray, have written a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed about "[How to deter China from invading Taiwan.](#)" They suggested a so-called "porcupine" strategy and the acquisition of US Naval Strike Missiles, tactical vehicles, and sea mines. You also have a new book by Elbridge Colby, [The Strategy of Denial](#) in which he says categorically, "The US should defend Taiwan." He proposes positioning US naval forces and even troops in Taiwan.

**Stephen Bryen:** Right. I think that they may be right in principle, but the chances of that happening are just about zero. The US has no diplomatic relations with Taiwan officially. We treat them as a private company, we send private company people to represent us there. It is a lot of nonsense but that has been the situation since 1979. The "porcupine" approach with all these systems, by itself, it's not a bad idea. Those are good weapons, they would probably stop an invasion from the sea, and sink a lot of the Chinese craft coming and challenge the Chinese navy, which is now a big Navy. Those things make some sense, and I am all for them. However, there is a deeper problem. I think that it is unlikely under any military scenario, that little Taiwan with 25 million people can defend itself against China, with over a billion people and with a huge military, compared to what Taiwan has. It doesn't work. The best that can be hoped for in a conflict is that Taiwan can hold out until others can come in and help it.

That is the thesis. Taiwan has no security agreements with the United States and Japan. There is no security agreement with any country. There are no promises from anybody in writing, perhaps oral promises at best. Taiwan is essentially operating on a hope and a promise that the US will come and help as it did in 1996. I was in Taiwan during the 1996 Missile Crisis with China. It took two weeks to get US carriers deployed because the Clinton administration initially didn't want to. It was only when the Chinese started to mass troops ready to

load them on ships to head for Taiwan that Clinton thought it might be a good idea to send the carriers. It was a very frightening time. I was in Taipei during all of that. I went with Jim Woolsey, who was the former head of the CIA, and Admiral Bud Edney. The three of us were on the phones pleading with Washington, "Come on, you can't let this happen." In 1996, when this happened, the Chinese backed off, because they were afraid of the US carriers, and in a battle, they thought they would lose.

What did they do in those intervening years? They developed anti-carrier missiles, so they could destroy our carriers, 1,000 miles away, and that is frightening. Now, there is a debate about how effective they are, no one knows. The US Navy says, "Well, it's not a problem." Meanwhile, you might say that as you're sitting in your rubber dinghy with the carrier is sinking off on the horizon. The truth is we don't really know. What we do know is the Chinese have prepared for that kind of contingency. The President of the United States would have to take that into consideration at much higher risk than he did in 1996, if in fact he wanted to do it. It is not clear to me that the Biden administration would want to do it. I think that the Biden administration would rather force Taiwan into some accommodation with China and walk away, because that is their modus operandi. Same with Iran, they don't want to have an argument with Iran, "We'll make a nuclear deal, we'll all be happy." Tell the Saudis, Kuwaitis, the UAE. Jordanians and the Israelis to forget it. We are just going to make a deal with Iran.

If the Biden Administration is willing to do that in the Middle East, they're likely to do the same thing with China given the chance. What is counterbalancing that is the Congress, including a lot of Democrats. Biden doesn't have a free lunch, not yet, and maybe he never will. However, I think that the possible danger of it is there, especially as things are getting tenser by the day with the Chinese sending



fighters, surveillance airplanes and bombers around Taiwan and circling the island violating the ADIZ, the air defense identification zone around the island on a regular basis. What does Washington say about it? Nothing, not a word, not a peep, nothing.

**Jerry Gordon:** Have you heard anything?

**Stephen Bryen:** I haven't. They're just silent, and that is very dangerous, Washington should be raising holy hell about it but not a word. I think that is a harbinger of what we're going to see. The Pentagon has run simulations of what would happen if it intervened. In every case, the simulations seemed to say that we would lose, that we would not be successful in defending Taiwan. That our forces would be badly mauled and defeated. The Pentagon is not enthusiastic in the least about getting into a conflict with the Chinese. If called upon they would be advising the President, "Well, Mr. President, we can't be sure we can be successful, we may lose 5,000-10,000 guys in trying to do this, and we it could be worse than that. We may lose Japan, we may lose Okinawa, do you really want to do that." That is the kind of advice the President would receive from the Pentagon.

**Jerry Gordon:** Steve that brings me to a question regarding the actions of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley during the transition period, reaching out to his Chinese PLA counterpart, General Li Zuocheng to allegedly tell him , "No, we're not about to attack you at this point in time." There is a scheduled hearing coming up on September 28, 2021, before the US Senate that intends to ask General Miller as to whether that was an appropriate action on his part.

**Stephen Bryen:** The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is supposed to report to the Secretary of Defense, that is his job. He doesn't act unilaterally. We used to have that responsibility of command, until this administration. We have a civilian leadership in the Pentagon for that reason. The

Secretary of Defense reports to the President, that's how it is supposed to work. General Milley apparently did all this on his own without reporting to the Secretary of Defense at the time who said he never heard about it. Milley did this on his own. I think it was inappropriate and wrong. I think that he was not following civilian authority properly. Thus, he was not doing his job properly. I think that is what the Congress is going to investigate.

**Jerry Gordon:** According to Israel and Iran, there was a recent article by *New York Times* and many Israeli publications, particularly *Ha'aretz* about an alleged Mossad hi-tech AI remote machine gun attack that killed the father of the nuclear weapons development program Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

**Stephen Bryen:** Yes, the myth of the one-ton robot who killed Fakhrizadeh. Well, isn't true. Let's start there. My mother would say, "It's a *bubbemeiser*"—an old lady's story in Yiddish. It was first reported in February of 2020 by the *Jewish Chronicle* in London. As a world exclusive, the *New York Times* has essentially stole the story from a year and a half ago from this London Jewish newspaper and added a few interviews with anonymous people and wrote this story. It was really a story intended to take up the position that the Iranians had originally promoted, that this was done remotely by this hi-tech robot. That was not the first story the Iranians put out. The first story was he was assassinated, but not by a robot. Then they didn't think that wasn't good enough, so they invented the robot. It was really Iran's Revolutionary guards that created this myth that an Israeli robot, somehow did this.

There are only two pieces of physical evidence that we have. One is the car which has been photographed sitting in the middle of the road with three bullet holes through the windshield, which would go right through the head of Mr. Fakhrizadeh killing him. But then there's no blood. Anyone knows when you shoot someone in the head, there is going to be

blood all over the place. However, there is no blood. Moreover, the *Times* story said there were 13 shots, but there's only three holes. In fact, Mr. Fakhrizadeh and his wife weren't in that car either. They put the car in the middle of the road and took a picture of him after they shot three holes in the windshield. That's my best understanding. We also have the second piece of evidence, which is Mr. Fakhrizadeh's body, which has been photographed lying in state. No holes and he looks like he just fell asleep. So, what's going on here? Even more interesting on the 22nd of the September, the Iranian government said, "Oh, there wasn't any robot."

That's all nonsense. Of course, if you want to believe these guys about anything, good luck, because they never tell the truth about anything anyway. In any case, I don't think Fakhrizadeh died because of being shot by anybody, certainly not in the head, and certainly not by a one-ton robot. By the way, there's a real undertone here of anti-Israel, or anti-Semitism, because the idea that these crafty Jews sitting in Tel Aviv working from satellites, running this robot, were able to kill their top nuclear scientist of Iran, isn't that horrible? These are the horrible people you can add in all you want. That was the idea.

That is what the *New York Times* was pushing. They kept saying, "Oh, this Fakhrizadeh was a great lovely man, used to take his family to the seashore, do nice things" while he was building weapons of mass destruction intended to obliterate Israel. Come on, give me a break. There are a couple of possibilities, one is he was at that age where sometimes people get a stroke or have a heart attack and die. It is very possible he just fell over dead. It's also possible someone killed him. Maybe he was leaking information to those horrible Israelis or Americans, the great Satan. Maybe he got caught and sort of like German General Rommel during WWII who was caught plotting to kill Hitler. The Nazis asked him to take poison—cyanide—and

he did. Then they gave him a big state funeral. It could have been similar. I don't know the answer. However, I do know that there wasn't a one-ton Israeli robot that took Mr. Fakhrizadeh's life in Iran.

**Jerry Gordon:** The latest controversy that erupted concerned the US House of Representatives Democratic Progressive Caucus knocking out temporarily a \$1 billion dollar appropriation to fund replenishment of Israeli Iron Dome interceptor rockets from a Continuing Resolution to finance the government. The Democratic Progressives action caused consternation with "Centrist-moderate Democrats" and the GOP in the house. A standalone bill to fund Iron Dome passed with overwhelming support except for those so-called Progressives in the house.

**Stephen Bryen:** Alright. Appropriation bills originate in the House. When we looked at the bill, we can't find a billion dollars there for Iron Dome we found \$106 million not \$1 billion. It may well be that Ms. Ocasio-Cortez looked at it and mistranslated the three zeros and said it was a billion dollars when it was \$100 million, be that as it may. The Democrats have introduced legislation, which they quickly passed for \$1 billion for Iron Dome. Israel may come out the winner here. I mean, with a large profit, if it stays that way, it is a two or three-year appropriation. I want to point out that this is a defensive system, this is one of the reasons Israel hasn't gone to war and just sent its army into Gaza killing Hamas operatives and possibly civilians. Because of Iron Dome, Israel has been able to shoot down Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad rockets, missiles and drones threatening population centers.

There was also money in the same House appropriations bill for the Israeli Arrow-3 anti-ballistic missile defense system. The Iron Dome is perhaps the most successful missile defense system ever built in the world. Nothing ever has performed that well. Israel has shot down over 2,500 missiles with this fabulously successful system. The funds in the House bill were

primarily for the purchase of the Iron Dome interceptor rockets that are made in the United States. Thus, it is for American jobs. It is not for Israeli jobs. Pelosi should never have allowed it. She made a foolish mistake allowing something like this to happen. The outcry against the progressive Democrats is universal, it is not just Republicans.

The Democrats themselves are petrified because they get a large part of the Jewish vote in this country, and Jewish campaign contributions. All that came at risk. If they don't get this money and put it back, they will never get another nickel and they know it.

**Jerry Gordon:** Iron Dome is, as you put it, one of the most successful missile defense systems why in recent tests in New Mexico, did the US Army go out of its way to reject possible acquisition of Iron Dome?

**Stephen Bryen:** The US army didn't reject it based on the test, because the Iron Dome performed flawlessly in the test. They know that. They rejected it because they didn't want it. They never wanted it, and they still don't want it. The Army wants to spend a lot of R&D money and create a lot of Army jobs building this system that may not work. If you put a successful piece in it, which is probably two-thirds of what they need for what they had in mind, then you can't spend all that money. All these Majors and Colonels who want to leave the Army and obtain jobs in the industry won't be able to go. I think the Army's handling of missile defense as a general proposition has been a total mess. They not only killed Iron Dome for US defense, but the Army also killed another program called MEADS, the Medium Extended Air Defense System, which was intended to be used in Europe by the US and NATO. We put a couple of billion dollars into that, and one day they canceled it. Just, gone. Why? It looks like a good system and great success. We just walked out.

**Jerry Gordon:** You mentioned the Arrow-3, a jointly developed

Israel US ballistic missile defense system—the subject of a test in Alaska. What were the results?

**Stephen Bryen:** Yes. The Arrow-3 Interceptor was used in Alaska with the ground-based interceptor (GBI) system that we have, that has not performed very well. The GBI had just gone through a test that was less than 50% satisfactory. The Israelis were invited to bring the Arrow-3 to Alaska and test their interceptor using our radars and control systems. By the way, integration of these systems with Arrow -3 was no problem. The Army put out this nonsense that, “Oh, it’s going be so hard to integrate it, they won’t give us a source code, it’s really a mess.” Didn’t take but a week or so to get it accomplished. They fired the A-3 at two ballistic missile targets high in space and then they killed them both. Netanyahu was up there when this test took place, by the way. It was a great success. The Arrow-3 is a good system. We have 44 of the GBI based at Vandenberg in California and Fort Greely in Alaska. The GBI is not reliable. It is an Air Force program. The Air Force was looking to possibly design a new interceptor missile when they could just buy the jointly developed Arrow-3. I don’t have an answer for that. They probably should have. It would have been at least an interim solution, and far better than what we have with the GBI program. Half of the Israeli A-3 system is made in the US built with US money. So why not just take it and use it? Missile defense is very difficult, particularly as missiles have decoys multiple independent targeted warheads, and they are very hard to kill. I think in the end, we’re going to have to go to space-based defense, which is what President Reagan had proposed in the SDI Program in the 1980s. I think that is the only way we have a chance to have missile defense. The reason we have so little of it is because the American scientific world is largely opposed to having missile defense in this country.

If they lived in Israel they’d have a different attitude,



since they would have to decide whether it's their home, or the missile defense. I think they would choose the missile defense. Why are they opposed? Because they believe in the MAD doctrine, MAD stands for mutually assured destruction. Meaning that if we would try to destroy Russia, they would destroy us. Because of that doctrine, neither of us would ever use a nuclear rocket. Really? Maybe with Russia it is an argument you could make that has worked to some extent. Remember when in 1962, the Russians moved missiles into Cuba. That was very frightening and could have changed the mutual deterrence balance. They could have struck first, and we would have been wiped out.

The MAD doctrine is open to question now with China expanding its nuclear arsenal significantly. We have no nuclear missile treaties, no strategic arms limitation agreements with China, Iran, North Korea which have ICBMs and possible nuclear weapons. We need missile defense. Unfortunately, in the last 20 years we've made almost no serious progress. It is a very dismal prospect because, in my opinion, it endangers the whole world.

**Jerry Gordon:** It is not only your opinion but others including Uzi Rubin, the talented designer of the Israeli triple layer ballistic missile immediate range and short-range defense system.

**Stephen Bryen:** Yes.

**Jerry Gordon:** Having written about him over a decade ago, he was very concerned about the ability of Iran to eventually threaten all continental Europe, not only with possible nuclear warheads, but as he said at the time with missiles having conventional warheads, not unlike what Nazi Germany had during World War II.

**Stephen Bryen:** Right, but you never know what that missile has in its warhead.

**Jerry Gordon:** Correct.

**Stephen Bryen:** How are you going to find out? You can't, there's no technology like that. When an ICBM is flying toward you, you must assume that is the worst. If the Russians launched rockets at France, I don't think the French would hesitate one second to retaliate using their nuclear deterrent against the Russians. They have no choice.

Jerry Gordon: Was Iran doing that too?

**Stephen Bryen:** That is an interesting question. It depends on who the target is. I mean the Israelis are going to be faced with that same dilemma.

**Jerry Gordon:** Yes.

**Stephen Bryen:** Once they confirm that Iran has nuclear weapons and are deployable. I think they already have them, by the way. I might be the minority on that, but I think they already have them. I think they've been running tests with the North Koreans. I think the reason the North Koreans have started up their reactors is not to make more weapons for themselves, they want to make them for the Iranians. That is my humble opinion. I could be wrong, but it makes sense to me. I know they cooperate on missiles and nuclear tests. I don't see any reason why they wouldn't cooperate on that. Moreover, North Korea needs the money because they are broke and in bad financial shape. If the Iranians said, "okay here is \$10 billion, can you make a dozen of these? Sure, why not, just don't put our name on it".

**Jerry Gordon:** Given the Iron Dome discussion the question arises as to whether Israel should be self-reliant when it comes to these threats.

**Stephen Bryen:** Yes. This has always been the case. It was the case with tanks years ago. Israel developed its own tank, the Merkava. It was the case with the airplanes, so they tried to

build their own Kfir fighters and then the Lavi but couldn't afford it at the time in the 1980s. The problem is that Israel is quite a small country with extensive investments in development and the manufacturing and all the rest of the national security burden which is very great. I don't know if it is realistic, except in specific categories, to go on your own. As regards Iron Dome, an already developed system funded with US funds. Israel could improve it and integrate it and they can do different things. What Iron Dome needs is ammunition, and it's expensive. Every time you shoot down a \$20 rocket with a \$16,000 missile, it starts to pinch. When they shoot down 2500 of them, which means about 5,000 missiles were launched by Israel against the threat. That is 5,000 times \$16,000. You figure out the math, it is a big number. That doesn't count all the other components that are involved in maintaining such systems, personnel and training and replenishment and all the rest. How is Israel going to carry that burden by itself? Even if it could, even if it could make its own interceptor missiles, which it could. It is going to take a huge industrial effort when there is no reason for it. I think any country in the world worries about being dependent on somebody else. If you don't have to be dependent, it's a great idea. The people will say, well, the US isn't dependent on anything. Oh yes, we are. We're dependent on integrated circuits that come from Taiwan, Japan and Korea. We are dependent on rare earth materials that come from China. We're dependent on titanium that comes from Russia.

We have a lot of dependencies, even though we're a big and powerful country with a huge workforce and all kinds of assets. Take the example of the international space station which has been supported by Russian rockets up until recently. Okay. The latest replenishment launch from Virginia used a US rocket that had two Russian engines. It was successful, and they worked fine. The astronauts in the international space station are dependent on those deliveries. I think it's a very difficult question and hard to answer. Wherever you can be, it

depends on where you can have a strategic reserve or where you can have strategic manufacturing, you may want to do that. But for Israel it is very burdensome for a small country.

**Jerry Gordon:** I want to thank you for this wide-ranging discussion on issues I think that are vitally important for the world, the United States, for Israel, for Taiwan, and Australia. Please give our best to your lovely wife, Shoshana, and we'll look forward to hearing back from you.

**Stephen Bryen:** Thank you Jerry. Take care of yourself. Bye.

**Jerry Gordon:** You too. Bye.

Watch this YouTube video of the interview with Dr. Stephen Bryen by Jerry Gordon of *New English Review*.