

Is there a Future for French Jews? An Interview with Michel Gurfinkiel

by Jerry Gordon (February 2014)

In September 2006 I attended a lecture at the Davenport residential college at Yale University given by [Michel Gurfinkiel](#). Gurfinkiel is the founder of the conservative Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute in Paris. He is a governor of Consistoire, the National Union of French Synagogues, and a member of the board the political committee of *Crif-Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France*, the central French Jewish representative council. Gurfinkiel is a much sought after commentator on French, American, and European Jewish communities, as well as, Israel issues of the day. He is also a Fellow of the Middle East Forum. Articles by him have appeared in [Commentary Magazine](#), [Mosaic](#), [The](#), [The Wall Street Journal](#), [PJ Media](#), [The New York Sun](#), [Politique Internationale](#), [Le Figaro](#), [The Times](#), [The Middle East Quarterly](#) and [The Jerusalem Post](#) among others.

I attended the Yale lecture by Gurfinkiel in the company of NER contributor, Dr. Richard L. Rubenstein and others. Dr. Rubenstein knew Gurfinkiel's French publisher. We had been invited by Rachel Bayefsky, then a Yale undergraduate and the daughter of UN watcher extraordinaire, [Anne Bayefsky](#), editor of [Eye on the UN](#) and former Senior Fellow of the Hudson Institute. Rachel at the time was the co-President of the Yale Friends of Israel. Gurfinkiel we learned at the Davenport encounter has American cousins in Connecticut. We were drawn to attend his Yale lecture as the status of French Jewry was very much on our minds. We had the writings and lectures by NER contributor [Nidra Poller](#) about the attacks and highly publicized murders of Jews by members of the French Muslim émigré community. Then there were the lurid nightly video reports of car burnings in the suburban banlieues where émigré Muslims were threatening Jews who had fled from Islamic countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Gurfinkiel painted the picture of a dystopian world for metropolitan France. One in which the fate of more than 600,000 French Jews, the largest Jewish community on the continent was at risk. At the time we thought that French Interior Minister, [Nicolas Sarkozy's](#) actions against the nightly bonfires of the vanities might have represented a turning point in protecting this large and robust Jewish community. Subsequently, Sarkozy's policies implemented after his election as France's President in 2007 would prove a disappointment. Gurfinkiel at Yale in 2006 depicted a future France in the throes of a possible civil war pitting elements of the anti-Semitic Muslim

émigré community against the disenfranchised youth and members of the far right National Front. The party's leadership had been patently anti-Semitic at the time. That has recently changed under the leadership of Ms. Marine Le Pen. French policies towards Israel had worsened since President De Gaulle broke off support following the June 1967 Six Days of War. The hope that Sarkozy, who had a Jewish heritage on one side of his family, might change that did not eventuate. Then there was the 21st Century version of Dreyfus trial, the series of trials over the 55 second video footage from a news report by the France 2 TV channel in September 2000 of the staged purported death of a 12 year Palestinian boy, Mohammed al Dura. That pitted the young French Jewish mayor of the Paris suburb of Neuilly, [Philippe Karsenty](#), against France 2 producer Charles Enderlin and the French media establishment who refused to recognize the evidence of this blood libel hoax against Israel.



Flags of Muslim Majority Countries, Place de la Bastille, May 7, 2012

Election Victory for President Francois Hollande


Eight years on, the picture in France has not improved given the election of the Socialist coalition in the National Assembly led by President Francois Hollande. Pictures of the celebration in Paris at the Place de la Bastille on the night of his election on May 7, 2012 prominently [showed](#) flags of Muslim majority countries and Palestine hoisted by his constituencies from the far left and both African and Muslim émigré communities. Communities that spawned anti-Semitism, disavowal of the French national narrative of [Liberté, égalité, fraternité](#) and worse, denigrated all French culture and history. If anything the Hollande government in the Elysee Palace espoused new curricula in French public schools that would erase that legacy. The economic malaise of the last five years in France and the West, coupled with a resurgence of anti-Semitism has emboldened young French Jews and others to consider leaving la belle France for Israel and other havens in the West.

On January 26, 2014 a massive rally of upwards of 50,000 attended a "Day of Anger" in Paris. The rally covered what Gurfinkiel called a galaxy of left and extreme right groups drawn to protest the government of President Hollande. However, a contingent of supporters of comedian Dieudonne shouted out explicit anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial slogans, "Jews, France does not belong to you" and "the Holocaust was a hoax." Gurfinkiel in an interview commented, "this was an additional warning to French Jews that things are getting very unpleasant for them in this country." Gurfinkiel found it "shocking" that no one, the rally organizers, demonstrators nor bystanders intervened to remove anti-Semitic protesters in violation of French hate speech laws; not even the police. Further, he noted ominously "this is the first time since the end

of World War Two you had compact groups shouting explicit and violent anti-Semitic slogans on the streets of Paris.” He said, “France, a founder of the EU, may be joining the league of fringe anti-Semitic countries in the EU – Romania, Hungary and Greece.”



[Watch](#) this JNSS video of the anti-Semitic slogans and quenelle salutes at the ‘Day of Anger’ protest rally in Paris and listen to our interview with Gurfinkiel, [here](#).

Against this background we reached out to Michel Gurfinkiel for his unique and Cassandra-  like view of the future of both France and its Jews.

Jerry Gordon: Michel Gurfinkiel, thank you for consenting to this interview.

Michel Gurfinkiel: Thank you for inviting me.

Gordon: France has the largest Jewish community in Europe. How does that compare with the other Jewish communities in the U.K. and other European countries?

Gurfinkiel: The French Jewish community in Europe is probably half of European Jewry today and the majority of the French Jews tend to live in four or five big cities starting with metropolitan Paris. Then you have the U.K. which is a case unto itself. And the very interesting, if ambivalent, phenomenon of a new Jewish community in Germany. The rest of Europe is made of small communities.

Gordon: Demographically what made the French Jewish community the largest and perhaps the most robust in Europe?

Gurfinkiel: Let me try to explain what happened in France. France used to be a country with Jews but no Judaism. The French way of life as it evolved at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th Century was not very helpful or conducive for a traditional Jewish life. Just to give you one striking example, the French, including executives and businessmen, used to work on Saturdays until the 1970's. It was common to work on Saturday unlike in England where you had the English weekend. You had almost no possibility for any French Jew to avoid work on Saturday. Also there were problems regarding schools. Even children from observant families had to go to school on Saturday. There was an arrangement they were allowed not to write but I mean this was very far from a traditional Jewish life. By and large they were Jews but Judaism was almost non-existent. In the 1950's and up to the early 1960's you had only two percent of the Jewish youth that attending a Jewish school. Today, you have about

50 percent of the Jewish youth in France attending at least for at least for a few years a Jewish school. Over 30 percent are attending their entire school years at Jewish schools and this makes an enormous difference.

What happened in France? The most important change was demographic. You had about 300,000 Jews in France in the '50's. In addition you other Jews that were living as virtual Marranos who had no link with any Jewish Institution but still retained a memory of being Jewish. What happened was that throughout the 1960's you had an enormous influx of refugees from Islamic countries. First and foremost the Jews from Algeria who were French citizens had no choice but like other ethnic French residents of Algeria to leave that country after independence, leave everything and come to metropolitan France as refugees. Then you had Jews from Morocco and Tunisia, many of whom opted for Israel. Others opted to go to Canada but a large proportion of them opted for France. You also had Jews leave Egypt. Many of them were culturally French. Some of them were even French citizens and they came to France and were welcomed. France had a comparatively liberal attitude towards these refugees at that time. It was easier to come to France than to the United States. You had Jews who came from Turkey. 90 percent of the Jews from Turkey left over the period from 1948 up to the 1980's. Many of them went to Israel and the rest went to France. When I was a little boy in the '50's, one of the most popular singers in France was known as Dario Moreno. Now Dario Moreno sounds like a Latin American name and he was singing a lot of Latin American songs. In fact he was a Turkish Jewish refugee and like many Turkish Jews he left after the Crisis of 1955. There were terrible problems not so much directed at Jews but rather at Christians. Nevertheless many Jews left. In the late 1940's many Jews had left Turkey because they had memories of the attitude of the Turks during WWII with special laws that were mounting in case Germany succeeded rather than the allies. Nobody can tell what the fate of the Turkish Jews would have been. Turkish Jews, except the very rich or some very poor, couldn't move but most of them left Turkey and many of them came to France. You had Jews from Lebanon who came to France. You had Jews from Iran who came to France. All and all, the French Jewish community doubled and probably more than doubled. Jews identifying as Jews rose from 300,000 to 600,000.

You passed from a situation where you had Jews but no Judaism to a situation where you have a lot of Jews and a demand for Judaism. You had what I call a critical mass affect.

This combined with others changes. First there were changes in Europe and in France especially, French society was becoming a little bit more open, more flexible. The English weekend became the norm by the 1970's and so on. Also as in many western countries there was a considerable reflection about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. There was an effort from everybody to develop a positive attitude towards Jews including much more toleration for

Jewish religion, Jewish culture and so on. There was also a very important movement inside the Jewish community. All of these people who were expelled from Islamic countries were asking questions about themselves and what it meant to be Jewish and the result was that there was a revival of Judaism as a religion and of Judaism as a culture. You had at the same time the Chabad movement and the New Orthodox Revolution.

Last but not least you had years of triumph for Israel and French Jews were very close to Israel. They were close geographically, they were close politically. Moreover, until 1967 there was a sense that France as a country was a strong friend of Israel. The saga of Israel certainly helped the French Jews to be more assertive as Jews.

Starting in the '60's but strongly in the 1970's we had a complete change in terms of what it meant to be Jewish in France. All of a sudden people started to be religious. To be traditional. You had a revival of Orthodoxy which became extremely vibrant in France. The Orthodox revival brought about even a reform and conservative Masorti revival.

It was a very interesting chain phenomenon and in the end of the day I would say that by the 1990's French Jewry reached a fantastic level of vitality. There was feeling that it was O.K. to be Jewish and so on and I believe that the assertiveness of the hardcore of the Jewish community certainly induced many of the present day Marranos to come out again as Jews. Many of them were interested in fact into being Jewish again.

When you follow the demographic surveys of the Jewish population of the world issued by the Jewish Agency in Israel there appears to be in recent years a declining Jewish population in France. They estimate that the Jewish population of France dropped to less than 500,000 souls in 2012. When you look at different sources you come to totally different results. Since 1994 you have an annual survey on the religious attitudes of the French and this survey is conducted much in the same way as the Pew survey in America. This means that people are free to self define themselves as Jews. It is very inclusive. Intermarried couples are taken as Jewish couples. This survey covers everyone in France.

Now, what is extremely interesting is that back in 1994 one percent of all French citizens and residents in French territories declared that they were Jewish. And while the population of France has grown tremendously over – from 57 millions in 1994 to 66 millions today – you still have one percent of the French self-identifying as Jewish.

We have as a result activities including publishing books, Jewish days in schools, conducting Jewish radio or Jewish TV programs and you have a robust market. In cities like Paris and Marseille and a few other places you have a feeling of a very vital and vibrant Jewish

community.

Gordon: Why are Jews specifically dour about future prospects in France? Is it the return of anti-Semitism?

Gurfinkiel: Certainly there is a global feeling that things are not going to be as good as they used to be. There is a feeling that anti-Semitism is growing. That large parts of French society are in fact openly anti-Semitic and that a new generation is emerging for which everything associated with the Holocaust doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't mean that people don't know about the Holocaust, it means and this is even more frightening, that they don't care. They may even say that, well, the Holocaust was a good thing and maybe we should go on again with something like that. There is a feeling that things are turning the wrong way in France. Whatever the government is saying about the need to fight anti-Semitism and to protect the Jewish communities most of the French Jews have two kinds of reactions. One reaction is the memory of the catastrophe that they their parents passed through. Every Jew in France is either a survivor or the child of a survivor of the Holocaust or expulsion from Islamic countries. Every Jew in France has either personal or a very close family memory of a situation where overnight a good Jewish life is destroyed and you have to run for your life. So this is a very important psychological factor. When people see the rise of un-reconstructed anti-Semitism in large sections of public opinion in France or murders of Jews or attacks against Jews or hear about proposals to restrict essential tenets of the Jewish religion like ritual circumcision, French Jews say: "Wait a minute. We have already passed through such a situation. It's exactly what we had in our past or what our parents told us about so things are not good and we must do something about our future."

Gordon: What are the dynamics behind French immigration to other countries and potential mass aliyah to Israel for French Jews?

Gurfinkiel: Another factor, which is very powerful with French Jews is that having been through such a fantastic revival, such a golden age of Judaism in France over the past let's say 30 or 40 years makes it totally unacceptable to go back to the situation where you have to hide being Jewish. I have met young people in their twenties who have emigrated to Israel for that reason. Now, the motivation is not just to leave one place in France for a safer one in France but to simply leave France. In the case of the French Jewish community you have the option which is Israel because French Jews are very close to Israel. Everybody has visited Israel. Lots of people have family and relatives in Israel. There is a proximity and it takes only four to five hours to travel from France to Israel. That is very different from the American or Canadian situation, so a lot of French Jews are considering moving to Israel.

There is a real trend for aliyah, immigration. Over 20,000 people in the last twelve months applied for aliyah with the Jewish Agency. Upwards of 4,000 people have finalized their move and taken practical steps to move from France to Israel. This is an increase of almost seventy percent compared with two years ago. In addition you have many young Jewish people have not formally applied for Israeli citizenship but are conducive to moving to Israel. The Israeli government recently paid attention to the phenomenon. Previously, French Jews had a bad reputation in Israel. They had a reputation of talking a lot about aliyah but not doing much about it. Now, I think the Israeli government and the Israeli society at large has completely changed their view. They understand something is going on and they understand that an asset for the future of Israel now is at hand. The Israeli government announced they are taking steps to make it easier for French Jews to emigrate.

Now, of course, there are still French Jews who may be hesitant about Israel and might consider going to North America, especially the United States. Many of these people are buying houses in Florida or in other places in the US. Young Jewish professionals who are finding out that it is easier for a young person to be fully Jewish in many countries in the world besides Israel. Some for example are moving to London, other European countries and even amazingly Jewish clusters in East Asia.

Last but not least, even the non-Jewish French are considering emigration. France was never a country of emigration. Why should you emigrate from such a beautiful country where you had the best food in the world, where you had a fantastic welfare state and free medicine, and free education? There was simply no reason to leave. However, everything has changed. You have polls telling you that overall about 30% of the French would consider emigrating to another country. That 50% of the young people are considering emigrating. Even 50% of the French working class are saying that given an opportunity to work somewhere else they are ready to leave the country.

Gordon: What is the current French socialist government under President Francois Hollande doing about the rise of anti-Semitism in France? Emblematic of that is French stage comedian, Dieudonne who has become patently anti-Semitic.

Gurfinkiel: Dieudonne's real name is M'bala M'bala. He was born of a French mother and a Cameroonian father. He is known as a comedian by his first name Dieudonne. He used to be a good actor. He even had a Jewish partner of North African background in his original acts named Elie Semoun. They were engaging in a very controversial kind of humor. For example Dieudonne, who is multi-racial, would dress in Klu Klux Klan garb while Elie Semoun, who looks very Jewish, would appear dressed as a Nazi SS officer. You could like or not like. I was not

sure whether it was very good humor, or very bad taste. It worked for a few years until Dieudonne somehow started to take seriously what he was saying as a humorist and a comedian. Elie Semoun said, people when asked him, "I don't understand what happened. I feel like I've been married to a serial killer for years and I didn't know about it." Now, Elie Semoun is conducting his own professional life and has expressed shock and horror at what Dieudonne is doing. Dieudonne started engaging in a kind of bad taste humor about Jews and the Holocaust. Gradually it transformed into simply anti-Semitic attacks. The question was why French governments had not taken steps under French legislation to stop him? You have laws in France saying that if somebody is doing publicly something creating disorder or hatred he can be stopped. The present Minister of the Interior, Manuel Valls resolved to act. For the time Dieudonne's shows were banned by order of the French Court of the State despite attempts by his lawyers to overturn them in cases filed in towns on his current tour. Valls sent letters to the mayors of the cities where Dieudonne has scheduled performances asking them to ban the show. The conservative Mayor of Bordeaux in Western France, the former Prime Minister Alain Juppe, said yes, this is not a show, this is not comedy, and this is a political racist, anti-Semitic kind of meeting and had to be stopped.

President Hollande and his Minister of the Interior have also taken positive positions regarding Jews and Israel. Witness his recent state visit to Israel where he certainly expressed concern on the problems of an agreement with nuclear Iran. Hollande and Valls have certainly expressed sympathy for the Jewish community and a willingness to act against anti-Semitism. Now, the question is how far they will go and so far it's impossible to tell. We have a feeling that there are a lot of factors that are hampering this willingness of both Hollande and Valls to do something. The main difficulty for them is that their own constituency tends to be anti-Jewish and anti-Israel. It is a sad fact that large sectors of the left in France are not very clear on the Jewish issue or completely anti-Semitic and tend to be fanatically anti-Israel. To be entirely honest French Jews have been largely disappointed by the conservative parties as well. They also say that they want to protect the Jewish community. However, when it comes to practical matters things are not as bright as they are supposed to be. Sarkozy was elected as a friend of the Jews and a friend of Israel and at the end of the day many Jews were disappointed by his government's attitude in many respects. His Prime Minister Fillon disappointed many Jews in France by taking very ambivalent attitudes towards kashrut and limitations on other Jewish rituals. I believe that the French Jews are willing to appreciate any move by a government that goes in the right direction. However, they have to look at things as they are and ask as you would say in America, where is the beef? This is the question that French Jews are asking and a lot of people are not entirely convinced by the effectiveness of what is being done now.

Gordon: What role did French Jewish communal leaders play in the legal fight brought by the Neuilly Deputy Mayor Philippe Karsenty against France 2 regarding the al-Dura Affair?

Gurfinkiel: Richard Prasquier, the outgoing chairman of CRIF, the Representative Council of Jewish Organizations in France, was quite courageous and raised the issue of al-Dura as did other communal leaders. The problem in France is that the media establishment has not been willing to open any debate or discussion about the al-Dura case. In France and the West, everybody knows that there was something wrong with the France 2 report. The points made by Karsenty have been validated in French courts. Still, French establishment's attitude has been, no debate. We are not going to debate this issue and there is a democracy deficit in France. There are many reasons why the media in France are not as open minded and as willing to engage into real debates as occurs in other countries. One is that the French media world is much smaller than the English speaking one. Further many people in the French media feel very dependent on the views of their peers and are afraid to raise issues that will embarrass them. I am hopeful that at some point in the future there be a real debate.

One must always remember, France is the Dreyfus case country. One should also remember that 99% of the French public opinion during that episode was convinced that Captain Dreyfus was a traitor. Nevertheless a debate was started and at the end of the day, French public opinion campaigned for a revision of the trial and Captain Dreyfus was cleared. You can be disappointed with a lot of things going on in France, with the lack of courage of either the political or media establishments. At the same time you are amazed by the capacity of the French public opinion to engage in revisions of the established truth. For instance take the image of Israel, surprisingly the image of Israel is not as bad in France as it is in many other European countries. You may have 50% of French public opinion which is adamantly against Israel but you have another 50% which is not hostile at all. Sometimes you think that this country is politically schizophrenic when Israel is very popular in terms of culture, when know both Tel Aviv and even Jerusalem now are a popular destination for tourism. People in France are talking about Israeli food and Israeli chiefs. Can you believe that? Israeli science and technology has a very good reputation. But on the other hand, the French will blame Israel about the alleged failure of the peace process and about the "colonization of the occupied territories." This is a typically schizophrenic situation.

What I insist upon is that all in all there is a capacity of the French to a change their views and evolve in the right direction. One of my old teachers at school used to tell us that the main virtue of the French was to be a frivolous nation and this is very true and there is a good side to being frivolous. This means at one point you may say we were totally wrong on these issues and let's just move on. This is the nice side of French culture. I don't know

whether it's going to last because the demographic changes that are taking place in this country are tremendous and nobody knows whether our French culture as we have known it for decades is going to survive this change. Still, one never should be over pessimistic about France. One shouldn't ever be overly optimistic but one should never be overly pessimistic either.

Gordon: Has the Hollande government acquiesced to demands by the Muslim émigré community in France not to integrate?

Gurfinkiel: The problem in France is very real. Large parts of the socialist party and the left coalition that is behind the Hollande administration go very far in that respect. There has been a lot of controversy about a document which was posted on the Prime Minister's website and was subsequently withdrawn, which was totally provocative. France is a multicultural country and multi-religious country. In fact we don't know what lies ahead of us but certainly French culture has seen it all. When you look at the problems in schools you are certainly scared. You know every country tends to dwell a little bit about its national history. In the United States, as far as I know, you still teach about the American Revolution and the Civil War. You teach about American intervention in both world wars and an America that fought for freedom. This is the national narrative of America. Nobody is going to not teach about George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Now, what is very puzzling about France is that new programs in history are erasing the best parts of French national memory. The latest released programs for elementary and high schools are simply erasing Louis the XIV or Emperor Napoleon. Entire chapters of the French narrative are going to be replaced by learning more about the history of the world, whether empires and revolutionary wars in Central Africa and Imperial China. However, I believe that it is only legitimate for every country, and for France of course to retain a national narrative.

There is clearly a trend among the far left in France to simply destroy the national identity of the country. One reason for that is that the immigrant community has become their political constituency of the future. If this is so, then this could really become a case of national suicide. I am afraid that there is going to be a considerable backlash. The problem is that the French conservatives have not been very effective. Between the loony left and the non-effective right you have the populist far right National Front headed by Ms. Marine Le Pen. She has been attempting to be more moderate on some issues than her father used to be. She is trying to keep away from crude expressions of anti-Semitism. However, by and large, when you look at her program you realize that it is simply a classic far right program. This is not very helpful for the present situation of France. Sarkozy had almost overcome the entire issue of the far right in France at the moment of his election in 2007. He sounded a neoconservative

line. Once he became the president, he entirely forgot about it and he disappointed most of his supporters on most issues. It is difficult to say whether there is one real statesman in Europe besides stateswoman, Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany. The European population is aging and the way the European Union has been built it has been more bureaucratic than democratic. This is bad because there is only one argument for democracy. Democracy allows you to correct mistakes quite easily and quickly. The best of bureaucracies cannot do the same job and this is why a lot of systematic errors have spread over Europe. It's an open secret that most Europeans are just waiting impatiently for the Economic Messiah to come from America. The conventional wisdom is that when prosperity comes back to America with a change in leadership, European problems are going to be solved. I think this is also a fallacy. Europeans should think more seriously about their own problems.

Gordon: In your view has President Obama and his administration retreated from what Europeans valued as American exceptionalism?

Gurfinkiel: You know the Europeans love to hate America. They love to say that America has been bullying the rest of the world and especially Europe. But in fact, deep down in their hearts and brains, most Europeans know that the world as it has become since 1945 has been an American led world. They are scared by a potential brave new world with no leading America. I don't know what is going to happen to America in that respect. From the very first moment I viewed President Barack Obama's election as a catastrophe. I think the entire Obama administration has been a catastrophe for America and I trust that America will revive. I don't care whether it will be a good Republican administration or some kind of new and better Democratic administration. For the sake of America and the world we must end the Obama experiment. Europeans may have indulged in the Obamamania for a period of time. In fact they are scared by the new situation where America is not as powerful and central in world affairs as it had been for so many years.

Gordon: What is your view about a final agreement with Iran? Further, will our American Secretary of State achieve a so-called final status agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel?

Gurfinkiel: America cannot always be the arbitrator or the good sheriff of the world. I believe that most Europeans and most people in the Middle East have been totally frightened by the way the Obama administration has handled these problems. This includes Iran and the so-called peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This would extend to America's policies towards the Arab Spring, Egypt, Turkey, and Russia. There is simply no issue where you can give a rational explanation of what the administration is doing. You are

tempted to engage in very harsh and very radical judgments of what is being done. I believe that not just Europe but most of the Middle East is just waiting for this Obama administration to be over. Let's start with the so-called peace process between Israel and Palestinian Authority. What sense does it make to dwell so massively on that peace process when half of the Palestinian territories are not controlled by the Palestinian Authority? Iraq, Syria and Libya no longer exist as functioning states. In Turkey you have a mad government which now is opposed, not just by the traditional secular wing of Turkish society, but even a larger part of the Islamic society. Then you've have the problems in Russia. What is Russia today? Russia is non-existent. You have an emerging super power which may or may not become as powerful as America which is China. But Russia? What is Russia producing? Russia is still selling weapons, oil, gas and minerals just as in the last years of the Soviet regime, while China has become a real economic, military and potential space power. Putin's Russia is still in fact the declining Soviet Union. Why should America be afraid of Russia? It is really a paper tiger. We have this incredible situation of the Obama administration giving in, not just to Iran, but also to Putin's Russia and to most anybody except good friends of America.

This is a totally crazy situation. One doesn't know exactly why America came to such a point, but there is a lot of speculation. One speculation is simply that you cannot discard the fact that so often in history stupid leaders appear and make very problematic policies. Some questions must also be raised about the inner working of the Obama administration and who in fact stands behind many sectors of that administration. Those are questions which I am sure many American historians are already looking into and are going to write about.

Gordon: I want to thank you for this rather engrossing and wide ranging conversation.

Gurfinkiel: Thank you. It was my pleasure.

Also see Jerry Gordon's collection of interviews,