

Rouhani, Erdogan and Putin—Masters of Geopolitics

An Interview with Ken Timmerman

by [Jerry Gordon](#) and Rod Reuven Dovid Bryant (November 2019)



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There are unfolding troubling geo-political developments in the Middle East with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Israel, Russia and Turkey, while President Trump appears to be withdrawing the US from the region. The bottom line: Iran intends to achieve its goal of controlling the area between the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and the Mediterranean supplying more

than 25% plus of the world's oil supply. All the while, Iran is perfecting its Shi'ite supremacist objective of surrounding and destroying Israel.

As Stephen Bryen [interview](#) with Iran's nefarious Quds Force Commander General Soleimani noted that, in 2006, Iran didn't intervene in Lebanon against Israel as the US was engaged in War in Iraq, but now Iran and its proxies surround Israel on three sides and are seeking to fulfill Shi'ite supremacist doctrine of destroying Israel and bringing back the 12th Imam, Mahdi, to lead Iran and Islam to victory.

The Trump Peace Plan may be effectively over given the resignation of President Trump's Special Envoy Jason Greenblatt who said "there's no peace partner"—meaning the Palestinians.

Iraq may be falling apart racked by violent internal protests. Iran controls 100,000 Shi'ite Hashd al Shaabi Popular Mobilization Force militia fighters. Israel's air force has attacked their warehouses stocked with precision missiles. Iraq may be effectively a "province of Iran ceding sovereignty to its neighbor." The question remains will the US keep its remaining assets in Iraq at the strategic Al-Sad airbase near the Iraqi Syrian border?

Besides the Saudi failure to defend their oil facilities was the question of the Kingdom's war making capabilities against the Houthi Iran proxy in Yemen. The ability of Iran and Iraqi proxies to [send](#) 2,000 troops and technicians and additional anti-Missile systems, all funded by the Kingdom. The Houthi attack that destroyed a combined Saudi and Sudan force revealed this is really a war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We could possibly see more Houthi cross border raids seeking to disable the Saudi Royal regime.

Saudi royals appear divided over anti-corruption strong arm actions by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salam (MBS) and his taking responsibility for the murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, despite the latter's Muslim Brotherhood and support of Qatar. MBS is seeking reforms of conservative Sunni Wahhabism and diversifying economic reforms such as the languishing ARAMCO IPO. Some experts warn that Iran could play the Shi'ite card in the Saudi oil rich province through a network of Imams and Mosques. The takeaway is that the Saudis are not strong enough to take on Iran. Irony is that only the US, Israel and the UAE support MBS.

Erdogan's [committed](#) war crimes against Kurdish communities in the safe zone corridor that internally [re-entered](#) northeastern Syria to implement a plan announced by the Pentagon to assist Syrian Democratic Forces in dealing with a resurgence of ISIS and protecting oil fields in Deir Ezzor province against a possible Iranian takeover. Russia's Defense Ministry immediately [branded](#) the US action as "banditry."

The threat of a recent North Korean missile launch from a submarine just before another round of US denuclearization talks upended scheduled discussions in Sweden. Then there was the controversy over opposite positions held by former National Security Council advisor John Bolton versus President Trump on Korean Peninsula, Iran and Middle East US national security interests that prompted Bolton's resignation.

Against this background, and just prior to Turkey's attack against the Kurds in Northeastern Syria, Rod Reuven Dovid Bryant and Jerry Gordon interviewed veteran Iran-watcher, best-selling author and investigative journalist Ken Timmerman to address the question does the US have a Middle East strategy?

Rod: Welcome. Thank you so much for listening to *Beyond the*

Matrix. I'm Rod Bryant, along with my producer and co-host Jerry Gordon. Today we have as our guest Ken Timmerman. The reason we brought him back is we wanted to ask this essential question because you and I have been reading the tea leaves for several months: Has the United States abandoned the Middle East? When I talk about the Middle East, I'm not talking about the US relationship with Israel, I'm talking about Iran, Iraq Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Jerry: That's right.

Rod: Why don't you give us a synopsis of why we are bringing this up.

Jerry: We are bringing this up because events in the region have lent the impression that Iran is seeking to engulf and devour the strategic core of the Middle East in places like Iraq, where it has a hundred thousand Iraqi Shi'ite troops poised to do its will. It has the Houthi in Yemen attacking Saudi Armed Forces. It has Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria. It also has a clear path all the way from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean to Hezbollah in Lebanon and via the Houthi to the Red Sea.

Rod: It is on the point of surrounding Israel and possibly one day eliminating it, correct?

Jerry: Correct. That is Iran's objective.

Rod: One of the things our counterparts often underestimate is that this is not just bloviating by a crazy government. Iran has a serious Middle East strategy in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. I think that you and I have pretty much wondered whether the United States, NATO and the European Union really have a plan at all.

Jerry: Our colleague Steve Bryen says, “there is no strategy.” If you have no strategy, you can’t deal with these geopolitical threats that could basically undo you.

Rod: Ken Timmerman, Israel’s do-over election is stalled over the question of the character of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the pre-indictment hearings based on alleged bribery and corruption charges. Do you think this marks the end of Israel’s longest serving Prime Minister or do you think he could possibly survive this?

Ken: Well, he’s the cat with nine lives, isn’t he? He seems to be returning so many times from previous indictments and previous threats. What I will say, and what I think is far more significant, is that Bibi Netanyahu has shown—especially over the past four to five years—is that he has mastered the art of diplomacy. He has used the art of diplomacy as a real tool for Israel’s survival. He has averted a war with Iran when it would have been easy to have a war with Iran. He has averted angering the Russians when the Russians could have done Israel serious damage in Syria and in Lebanon. I think he has really played his cards very deftly in a way that is not obvious. I don’t see Benny Gantz playing those cards as skillfully as Bibi has done over the past couple of years.

Jerry: The problem with this do-over election is that the kingmakers are ironically the Arab Joint List and a former cabinet member of Bibi's, Avigdor Lieberman. They are in discussions about the possibility of forming a so-called Unity Government. If Avigdor Lieberman would add his eight votes it would put them at sixty-three mandates for the Knesset—finished and done. Well, it didn't happen and it might not happen. But the problem is, even if there is a so-called National Unity Government, will it maintain Bibi's strategic diplomatic and national security views for the survival of Israel?

Ken: I would hope it would. I don't have a crystal ball. I don't know the ins and outs of Israeli politics and what Benny Gantz wants to do or doesn't want to do; how big his ego is and what he wants to reserve for himself. I would say this is an extremely dangerous time for the State of Israel. You have the head of the Quds Force in Iran, General Qassem Soleimani announcing publicly in an extraordinary interview that the only reason Iran did not help Hezbollah during the 2006 war in Lebanon was because the United States was present in Iraq. Now, they have built a land bridge to allow them to help Hezbollah against Israel. The Iranians have surrounded Israel on three sides. They tell us day in and day out that they are going to destroy Israel in the next war—whenever that should start. I would take them very seriously. I think the Iranians really do intend to have an end times war with Israel. It is in their eschatology. They believe that this will bring the return of the Twelfth Imam.

The Iranians have this habit of fighting in Lebanon until the blood of the last Lebanese. Fighting in Iraq to the blood of the last Iraqi and, in Yemen, until the blood of the last Yemeni. They don't like to lose their own people. However,

they have been losing people in Syria. They have been losing people in Lebanon, and in Yemen recently. I think the Iran threat is so dire and so serious that I would hope Benny Gantz and the rest of them would recognize Bibi's strategic asset as the person who can pull all those things together. He can deal with Putin on a personal level. He has built that relationship. He has deconflicted with the Russians in Syria for the past three years and has been successful. Israel has been able to pretty much do whatever it wants in Syria with its Air Force. He has been able to even deal with the Europeans who have never gotten over their anti-Semitism. You still have European parties who see themselves as finishing off what Hitler started. It is extraordinary for me to even be able to say that. Unfortunately, it's true.

Rod: The idea that you were hoping—that some of those who oppose Bibi Netanyahu would say he's the best person for this. I'm just not sure that they have enough humility. They have such egos and disdain for Bibi Netanyahu. I'm not sure that it is even possible for them to come to that conclusion.

Ken: You might be right about that. I'm not the expert on Israeli politics to tell you that. What I can talk about are the threats Israel is facing. This is a very special time; it is a very dangerous time. Netanyahu has shown that he has special skills that have taken years to acquire and those skills are keeping Israel safe.

Rod: There is President Trump's "deal of the century" they have been working on. What possibly happens if Bibi Netanyahu is ousted and another coalition comes in? Do you think that survives?

Ken: I do. I don't see much problem there. Remember, President Trump's own envoy recently resigned. He resigned because there was no "Palestinian partner." The Palestinians weren't interested in the "deal of the century" and they are not going to be interested in the "deal of the century" if Benny Gantz becomes Prime Minister either. You know, our mutual friend Shoshana Bryen loves to say the Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

Jerry: Let's turn to Saudi Arabia which has had a couple of amazing developments—not the least of which was the swarming attack of drones and cruise missiles which Stephen Bryen said were originally launched from Iraq. The problem there are the billions of dollars of defense systems that we have shipped to Saudi Arabia. We couldn't find them, couldn't take them down. "No intelligence and no strategy" said Steve Bryen. What's going on in Saudi Arabia? It doesn't look good.

Ken: Technically, Steve would have a better answer as to why we did not detect the drones and cruise missiles. I will note that the Iranian President Rouhani in New York laughed about that in his interview with FOX News Sunday host Chris Wallace recently. Rouhani said, "For all those billions that you spent on Saudi Arabia, if by chance we really did launch those missiles *which of course I'm not saying that we did—how come you didn't detect it? If that is the case, it's even worse for you isn't it?*" It poses a serious question. Were the Saudis incompetent in their use of the Patriot missile, our radar systems, early warning systems, and the rest of it? Or did the Iranians find a route to launch those missiles in such a way that they evaded every radar net? There are gaps in almost every radar net anywhere in the world. What you are always looking for is

how you thread a needle through those gaps. It is just possible that the Iranians found a path. Let's say that they came in at ten meters above sea level, behind Bahrain for example. Nobody is looking to the north of Bahrain for cruise missiles coming in. We have an air base and naval facilities based in Bahrain. You wouldn't be looking from that direction for cruise missiles on their way into Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia. We would be looking in the other direction. So they may have threaded that needle, as well.

Rod: I completely agree with you. I would add another element to this, as someone who served there during the First Gulf War, The land south of the Iraqi border is as flat as a pancake. You could fly a UAV *nap-of-the-earth* and it would never be detected, unless you have people on the ground that could observe it. You could fly it across the desert and no one would ever see it. This is a vast wasteland from the Saudi Border to Bahrain.

Ken: From Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia.

Rod: Totally agree. However, it is still a failure of intelligence and the proper monitoring of these UAV and cruise missile threats—I know that from the Air Defense systems that I was involved in and their capabilities. If you don't have them pointed at the right level, and don't have something that can detect these low altitude threats, you are just done for.

Ken: Right, and now it looks like it was both cruise missiles and drones that they were using.

Rod: What has been happening with the Saudis and the Yemeni Houthi war-fighting abilities?

Jerry: In late September 2019, there was a series of reports about a Saudi column overwhelmed by Houthi rebels capturing several hundred Saudi and Sudanese mercenaries and sending them back across the border. What does that say about the war making capabilities on the ground of the Saudis?

Ken: Let's be clear about what's going on in Yemen. This is a proxy war being fought by Iran against Saudi Arabia. Yes, there is an internal civil war in Yemen. It has been going on for several years. It is very bloody with a high number of casualties, large number of refugees, and human tragedy, all of that. The key thing to keep in mind strategically; this is really between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We have not seen the Iranians commit ground troops on the frontlines the way the Saudis have. It is lopsided frankly favoring the Houthis with their Iranian masters pulling strings and guiding them, giving them intelligence and helping them to capture the Saudi column. I don't think that this is quite as dire as you paint it Jerry, a defeat for the Saudis. I think it's something that is going to happen increasingly. My guess is that the Saudis are going to take this in stride. They are going to realize that they are now targets of Iranian-backed forces and those forces are going to cross the border into Saudi Arabia. I think that is what is going to happen. You are going to have so-called Houthis going across the border into Saudi Arabia launching these attacks against the Saudis. The Saudis are going to be on defense. I suspect that they may do better inside their own territory than they do in Yemen. In Yemen they have not much to gain. If I were a Saudi tank commander in Yemen, I would be always looking for my way home as well as the way forward. I'm not particularly surprised that this incident happened and that the Saudis performed poorly in Yemen. Just remember that this is Iran versus Saudi Arabia. The Iranians believe if they can weaken the Kingdom and the royal family, they are two steps further to dominating the Persian Gulf

and its oil supplies.

Rod: Are you intimating that it is not about Saudi war making preparation or fighting capabilities as much as for their tank commanders to really commit in Yemen? What interests do they have there?

Ken: No, it goes beyond that, Rod. I'm suggesting this is a war about the regime in Saudi Arabia. The Iranians are trying to chip away at the regime. They are trying to make them look weak. They are trying to make them look vulnerable and they have yet to play their hand. The Iranians hold an awful lot of cards that they have not played yet. I think we are going to see Iran play these cards in the coming months. For example, the Shi'ite populations in Saudi Arabia that control some of these oil fields, near Abqaiq and Dhahran, haven't begun to provoke them to rise. They have been working on that, laying the groundwork for all of this for the past fifteen years. The Iranians have agents on the ground. They have built a network of mosques and religious leaders in Saudi Arabia that they have not even brought into this battle. This is just the beginning of the battle that Iran is waging to topple the Saudi monarchy.

Rod: What would be the reason why Saudi Arabia would not consider doing a full-court press against Iran by airstrikes, by involving themselves in Syria where Iran is operating?

Ken: After the Abqaiq attack they had very good justification to strike back at Iran and they didn't. The question is, why? I must conclude the Saudis do not feel strong enough to engage

in frontal combat with the Islamic regime in Tehran.

Jerry: A year ago, Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi was murdered by 15 Saudi operatives. Recently, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said in an interview that he took responsibility for it, but he doesn't know who did it. What is the likelihood that this young Saudi princeling will not achieve his objectives of creating a reformist vision for Saudi Arabia? A mutual friend said that raises a real question about the survival of the Saudi Kingdom.

Ken: Absolutely, there is a question about the survival of the regime. On Jamal Khashoggi: first, he wasn't a journalist. Let us get that out of the way. He was a Muslim Brotherhood operative. He wrote occasional op-eds for the Washington Post paid for by Qatar against the Saudi Regime. Just to be straight about that, he was brutally murdered inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. I think it is rather remarkable that Mohammed bin Salman has taken responsibility or says he accepts responsibility. I'm not quite sure what that means because he's still in power. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that he has said that. I think that maybe a first for the Saudi regime and the Royal family. Everybody is gunning for MBS; his older brothers, his uncles, the National Guard. Frankly, the only countries supporting him have been the United States and Israel and, to a lesser extent, the UAE. He is in a minority position hanging on by his fingernails as he is slowly dropping down this cliff, scratching on the rocks as he drops lower and lower.

Rod: Why do you suppose that Israel and the United States support him while the Saudi Army and many of his family members are against him?

Ken: He's a reformer. He is somebody who truly believes in a more modern version of Islam that sheds many aspects of Sharia law that those of us in the West who follow these things find reprehensible and antithetical to freedom and democracy. He is in favor of a limited version of women's rights. Remember, we must put all of this in context as he is not a Jeffersonian democrat. However, he is in favor of significant reform inside Saudi Arabia in favor of opening the economy to some forms of competition and investment. He wants to privatize Saudi ARAMCO which would be a huge shift in the way the economy operates. Instead of just being the royal family's privy purse, he would have to render value to shareholders many of whom might be in the United States and Europe. The company would then have to report on its operations and finances to the SEC which would prohibit him from legally allowed royalties to the Saudi Royal families. All these kickbacks and slush funds would go away. These are huge reforms. He is literally going everybody's ox in Saudi Arabia. I really think it is a wonder that he's still in power. God bless him for most of what he's doing. I must say he's a breath of fresh air in Saudi Arabia.

Jerry: Ken, let's switch to a place that seems to be falling apart: Iraq. There were economic protests with people getting killed in Baghdad. You also have the question of whether there is a resurgent ISIS in certain sections of Iraq. Israel's air force and drones are attacking warehouses of the Iran-controlled Hashd al-Shaabi Shi'ite Popular Mobilization Force. Is Iraq as a nation going to survive?

Ken: Very good question. Remember how we got here. We basically won the war in Iraq in 2008 with the surge. It was over. We defeated Al Qaeda in Iraq. However, we placed in power a duly elected Iraqi government which was thankful and recognized America's contribution to their sovereignty and

their freedom. Then President Obama came along in 2009 and threw all of that away because he made a campaign promise. Now I'm all for Presidents making good on their campaign promises. President Trump is doing that as well. He made very different campaign promises than Obama. With this said, Iraq is falling apart at the seams, as you have said, and that has been a perfect occasion for the Iranians to jump in. Today, I think we must consider Iraq as another province of Iran.

Rod: Ken, you were talking about what Iran is doing with their proxy war and where all their assets are in the region. Could you provide us with some details?

Ken: They control much of the Iraqi central government. They control a force of hundred thousand Shi'ite men on the ground, the Hashd al-Shaabi or the Popular Mobilization Forces as they are sometimes called, the PMF. Those are Iranian owned, armed and controlled. Iraq is a country which has ceded its sovereignty to its neighbor, Iran. It is Iranian occupied territory.

Rod: Do you think that other nations and the United States will wash their hands and walk off?

Ken: This is always the temptation.

Rod: Right, Iraq remains a military asset because we have operations going on there all the time. Is US support of Iraq a toss-up?

Ken: It is not a toss-up at all. Either you recognize that there is something worth fighting for—the United States in the Middle East—or you say there is not. It doesn't matter. Whatever happens there, we can let the Iranians take over the entire region and that's okay because that is going to happen. However, if you leave the region and you want Iran to take over, they essentially will control twenty-five percent of the world's oil that goes through the Strait of Hormuz. They will be controlling vast oil reserves in Saudi Arabia. They will be surrounding Israel on three sides. They will be owning all the territory between Iran, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. I mean it's an extraordinary piece of geography and, if you want to cede that to the Iranians, then go ahead. This is all about where America's strategic interest is in this fight.

Rod: I completely agree with that. My sons have fought and continue to fight in the Middle East. Their friends have died, their blood is spilled on those grounds. Many Kurds and other Iraqis have died working with the United States and the coalition to defeat ISIS and we just walk away. The US faces a very hard moral decision when you realize that we have paid such a hard price in terms of these lives lost. Forget about the money. We spend trillions over there and nothing to show for it. It really is a shame to me.

Ken: You have a great point there. The reason why this has happened is we have no national strategy. We fought a war in Iraq over a pretense which, in the end, did not turn out to be true. We are now, kind of in, kind of not, in Syria. We don't know what we are doing there. I believe that the President should announce our strategy. Our strategy is to contain the Iranian regime where we can and to smash it where possible. I

have long said that we should be helping the Iranian people to get rid of the regime because that is in our strategic interests. That makes all that blood and treasure and human lives worthwhile because then we can say we have obtained a strategic goal. That all those people did not die in vain. They died for a purpose to make America safe.

Jerry: We have another tyrant across the border from Iraq, Turkey's Erdogan who crafted a deal to create a safe zone across four hundred kilometers of Syrian Kurdish territory in the Northeast. The danger there is that, if he completes this foray, he is going to pour two million Syrian refugees back into the country—probably reigniting ISIS—and the US will be forced to leave. What is your view, Ken?

Ken: Let's look at Erdogan's goals from his point of view. Number one, he wants to smash the Kurds. He does not want any Kurdish entity in the Middle East—whether in Syria, Turkey, Iraq, or Iran to thrive and exist. Number two, for years he has been the main patron of ISIS. People forget this. ISIS is a Turkish creation much more than it ever was a Saudi creation. Many documents have come to light over the past four to five years. Erdogan's family, his intelligence service, his military are up to their eyebrows in ISIS. ISIS would not have existed and would not have swept over Northern Iraq in 2014 if it hadn't been for Turkey's support. Today you have this gigantic camp at Al-Hol with 70,000 in the Northeastern Syria controlled by the Kurds, filled with ISIS fighters and their so-called family members. Erdogan would like to set those people free, get them back on the battleground in ways that he could use them, now directed against the Kurds more than against the Syrian regime.

Jerry: Ken, North Korea recently launched a missile from a submarine just prior to meeting with US diplomats to discuss denuclearization. What would your friend John Bolton say about that?

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Ken: I think John has consistently warned about the North Korean threat. He never believed that the North Koreans were sincere about giving up nuclear weapons. In the long term he might be right. Where the President has been right is that he has at least bought time and to delay the advancement of their program. The President wants to put a cap on the nuclear program and their aggressive military activities. His goal is to stop North Korean expansionism, North Korean aggression, and eventually to walk it back. John Bolton was more skeptical that was possible. He favored the sanctions the President has implemented. Trump continues to impose sanctions. He really is a Jeffersonian in this sense— Jefferson was the one who said sanctions are the only alternative between appeasement and war. This President does not want war and he certainly is not going to appease either North Korea or Iran. He has been focusing on sanctions.

Jerry: Ken, there is a problem about a Whistleblower complaint with alleged ally, Ukraine, that may upset the 2020 Presidential Race.

Ken: You know, Donald Trump was right. He said he is the real Whistleblower here. He is blowing the whistle on the deep state. This is another attempt by the deep state to sabotage this President, to undo everything he has done in the past three years and to get him out of office. They never expected that Trump would release the actual text, the transcript of his talk with the new President in Ukraine and there is nothing there. There is no quid pro. It could backfire on the Democrats.

Ken: What happened is that Representative Adam Schiff found somebody—together with a lawyer who I happen to know, a very good guy Mark Zaid—and concocted this complaint. If Schiff said he had nothing to do with drafting the complaint, it's probably true. However, it was not the Whistleblower's initiative. I think the person was spotted and then recruited by Schiff. I think we are going to find out at the end of the day and that is what Schiff does not want us to know.

Rod: You mentioned in our last interview that you were in the process of completing a memoir on your career as an investigative journalist. Are you also writing a novel about the 2020 election? Can you talk about that?

Ken: This is going to be a two-book deal coming out hopefully around June of next year. The first is my memoir, my life. How I became a PLO hostage, arms dealer and an Israeli spy. The second book is a novel about how the 2020 election was stolen.

Rod: Ken, we are waiting with bated breath for you to finish these books. Until next week, we say shalom from here on

Beyond the Matrix.

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