

Stalemate in the Middle East?

by Jerry Gordon and Mike Bates (April 2014)

With Shoshana Bryen and Dr. Daniel Mandel



Mike Bates in Jerusalem March 2014

As the Persian New Year Norwuz dawned, the Middle East was upended by developments that have thrown into question international efforts to reign in Iran's quest for nuclear hegemony and the Obama Administration's quest for a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Overarching these objectives of the P5+1 and US Secretary of State Kerry was the [seizure](#) from the Ukraine and annexation of Crimea by Russian President Putin unsettling these agendas. Putin had formed an alliance with Shiite Allies, the Assad regime in Damascus and Iran. He is backing the former in the three year old civil war with weapons to thwart Sunni support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates for rebel militias. Putin wants to [stifle Sunni irredentism](#) in the Southern Russian provinces of Chechnya and Dagestan. As American Enterprise Institute (AEI) Scholar, Michael Rubin [observed](#), "Putin sees international relations as a zero-sum game in which for Russia to win, everyone else must lose."

Israel is vitally concerned about the Iran threat with evidence unveiled on March 10th in the port of Eilat by PM Netanyahu. On display was a [secreted cargo](#) of Syrian made rockets, mortars and large caches of ammunition seized by Israeli Naval commandos from a Panamanian flagged cargo vessel, the *Klos-C* in the Red Sea off Port Sudan. He [said](#):

The international community wants to ignore Iran's continued aggression and the part it plays in the execution of the massacre in Syria. They want to delude themselves that Iran has abandoned its intention to obtain nuclear weapons.

Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif [scoffed](#) at Netanyahu's claims that these weapons were destined for terrorist proxies in Gaza. Netanyahu suggested that this was evidence to the world that Iran could not be trusted in any agreement that the P5+1 might possible conclude.

Iran's revolutionary guard on March 5th [disclosed](#) its alleged development of MIRV warheads for ballistic missiles that it successfully excluded from the negotiations agenda. EU Foreign Relations Commissioner Ashton after meeting in Tehran with Foreign Minister Zarif offered dour prospects of achieving any agreement [calling](#) an ultimate deal, "challenging." There is [no](#)

[guarantee](#) of an ultimate deal. P5+1 concluded the second round of discussions at the UN calling them “useful.” Notwithstanding Putin’s takeover of the Crimea from the Ukraine, the P5+1 will [continue discussions](#) in Vienna in April. 7th. There were also [disclosures](#) that Israel has set aside nearly \$3 billion to finance a possible attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities should an agreement fail to eventuate. At the AIPAC Annual Policy Conference on March 4th both US Sen. Bob Menendez and Israeli PM Netanyahu argued for [passage](#) of the standby sanctions legislation threatened by a Presidential veto. Virtually on the heels of Netanyahu’s Eilat press conference, on March 12th Iran’s proxy in Gaza, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad [unleashed](#) over 40 rockets against Southern Israel. Israel’s Air Force instantly retaliated against 29 suspected launching sites in Hamas-controlled Gaza. That gave rise to comments from Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman that perhaps it was time to [retake](#) Gaza. To which Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh [said](#) at a large rally in Gaza City on the 10th anniversary of the Israeli assassination of Hamas founder Sheik Yassin that Israel would pay “a very high price.” Israel’s Lebanese and Syrian borders were equally unsettled. The IDF [shelled](#) Hezbollah positions in Southern Lebanon following a bombing of an IDF patrol on the northern frontier triggered by another IAF attack against weapons convoys from Syria. On the Golan frontier with Syria, IAF [sorties were made](#) against Syrian army positions near Quneitra following a bombing of an IDF patrol. The IDF is also vigilant about al Qaeda militias penetrating the Golan.

The prospects of obtaining a final status agreement between Israel and the PA were dimmed as President Obama held Oval Office meetings in separate sessions with Israeli PM Netanyahu on March 3rd and PA President Abbas on March 17th. Obama was seeking tough concessions from both sides. One of the demands by Israeli PM Netanyahu is recognition of Israel as a Jewish nation. That is rejected by PA President Abbas and his Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat. They have concluded that the final status discussions, orchestrated by Secretary Kerry, are deadlocked. Should no final agreement be achieved by the deadline set by Kerry, April 29th, the PA will return to their [diplomatic offensive](#) seeking support for accession to statehood at the UN Security Council. The PA may also file a case against Israel for “crimes against humanity” before the International Criminal Court at The Hague. Nor is it clear, based on a *Bloomberg* [interview](#) with President Obama by journalist Jeffrey Goldberg that the US might not veto a PA statehood application at the UN Security council.

Secretary Kerry in separate remarks [accused](#) Israeli PM Netanyahu of being obdurate about the condition that the PA recognizes the sovereignty of the Jewish nation. That led to Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon during a Tel Aviv University address [accusing](#) the Obama Administration

of being weak on Iran and questioning US commitments to Israel's security. Ya'alon indicated that Israel cannot rely on the US to destroy Iran's nuclear program and that it would likely have to do it alone. In January, Ya'alon had characterized Kerry's role in trying to fashion a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians as "obsessive" and "messianic." Kerry expressed strong disagreements with Ya'alon remarks in private phone conversations with Israeli PM Netanyahu. Ya'alon subsequently apologized, for the moment. There are [indications](#) that the Obama Administration had undertaken back channel discussions with coalition Finance Minister Yair Lapid, leader of the Yesh Atid party, as a possible replacement for Netanyahu as PM in any future election. The Administration apparently failed to win over coalition cabinet member Justice Minister Tzipi Livni of the Hatnuah party, who is Israel's lead negotiator in current peace discussions with the PA.

A long sought bill for a modified draft of Haredi Orthodox Jewish young men was [passed](#) by Israel's Knesset by a vote of 67 to 1. It represents a victory for man in Israel who sought the legislation as a commitment to "shared sacrifices" by all Israelis. This despite huge protests in Jerusalem and New York by members of the Haredi community.

Israel's neighbor, Jordan King Abdullah II who met with Israeli PM in mid March is apparently [upset](#) with Kerry and his team over security proposals for loss of IDF control of the Jordan valley approaches that have been proposed in any final status agreement. His government is concerned about a Palestinian state gaining access to the Kingdom of Jordan with a restive Palestinian majority.

In Egypt, the interim government [resigned](#) clearing the way for a Presidential vote with strongman Gen. Al Sisi as a leading candidate. Cooperation between Israel and Egypt, abetted by Jerusalem granting permission under the Camp David Accords, has allowed Egyptian forces to conduct counter terrorism operations against Salafist terrorist groups in the Sinai supported by Hamas in Gaza. The Obama Administration has [rejected](#) requests from Egypt for Apache helicopters to assist in these counterterrorism operations ceding the ground to Putin's Russia which has extended the sale of equivalent Russian attack helicopters. Egypt has [jailed](#) more than 16,000 Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members and is currently trying ousted President Morsi and other leaders in the fundamentalist Islamic movement. On March 23rd, Egyptian courts [handed down](#) death sentences to more than 529 MB members accused of murdering a police captain during riots in August 2013. This raised human rights concerns in the West which might lead to commutation of many of these sentences.

The MB was [listed](#) as a terrorist organization by Saudi King Abdullah roiling the Gulf Cooperating Council composed of the Kingdom and several Emirates. The edict effectively

isolated gas-rich Qatar that has financially supported the MB in Syria, Egypt and Gaza. Egypt has [barred](#) both Qatar and Turkey from attending a major Islamic Conference in Cairo during the final week in March. At the conclusion of a two day summit of the Arab League in Kuwait the group [issued](#) a statement rejecting Israel's demand for recognition as a Jewish nation and accusing it on intransigence in the peace discussions. Their communiqué stated:

“We hold Israel entirely responsible for the lack of progress in the peace process and continuing tension in the Middle East, We express our absolute and decisive rejection to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state.” The statement blamed Israel for “the continuation of settlements, Judaization of Jerusalem and attacks in its Muslim and Christian shrines and changing its demographics and geography.”

This bolsters the Palestinian position and hardens Israel's position making Secretary Kerry's achievement of a final status agreement by the deadline of April 29th unlikely.

Turkey's Islamist Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is in the midst of campaigning for his AK party in the municipal elections scheduled for March 30th. Erdogan was caught in a web of roiling scandals and protests accused of money laundering by his family, bid rigging on construction contracts, passing laws curtailing human rights, [muzzling free speech](#) and an independent judiciary. Erdogan has accused a former ally, ex-pat Sufi Sheikh Mohamed Fethulleh Gulen, living in eastern Pennsylvania, of fomenting a campaign against his regime. The weekend prior to the Turkish municipal elections Erdogan at a political rally [announced](#) the shooting down of a Syrian Mig-23 Fighter by a Turkish F-16 near a border crossing in Syria.

AEI's Rubin when queried about Erdogan's election prospects [said](#), “One question will be whether elections in Turkey will any longer be free and fair?” On the split with Sheikh Gulen, he [noted](#), “Autocrats don't mind sharing power during the ascendancy, but they're loath to share power once they believe themselves at the top.”

Against this background we convened another in our periodic Middle East Round Tables. The panel on this occasion featured Shoshana Bryen, senior fellow of the Washington, DC-based Jewish Policy Center and a guest panelist, Dr. Daniel Mandel, Director of the New York – based Center for Middle East Policy of the Zionist Organization of America. See our *New English Review* interview with Dr. Mandel [Will There be a Peace Agreement between Israel and the Palestinians? An Interview with Daniel Mandel](#) (November 2013).

Mike Bates, general manager of [1330AMWEBY](#) in Pensacola returned from his first visit to Israel just prior to this Round Table discussion. As a result he is motivated to apply for the

[American Voices in Israel](#) program sponsored by the [Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations](#) to interview Israeli personalities and broadcast from a studio in Jerusalem.



Mike Bates: Good afternoon and welcome to Your Turn. This is Mike Bates and we are having one of our periodic special edition round table discussions about the Middle East. Joining us in the studio is Jerry Gordon, Senior Editor of the *New English Review* and its blog the *Iconoclast*. Jerry Gordon is also the author of *The West Speaks*. Jerry, welcome to Your Turn.



Jerry Gordon: Glad to be back.

Bates: Joining us by telephone, Shoshana Bryen, Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center in Washington. Shoshana, welcome.



Shoshana Bryen: Thank you.

Bates: For the first time we have a new panelist, Daniel Mandel, Director of the Zionist Organization of America's Center for Middle East Policy in New York. Daniel, welcome to Your Turn.



Daniel Mandel: Thank you very much.

Bates: Daniel, my first question is for you. President Obama met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on March 3rd and with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on March 17th seeking tough concessions from both sides in this peace process discussion. One of the demands by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu is the recognition of Israel as a Jewish nation by the

P.A. Why does the Palestinian Authority reject that demand?

Mandel: The Palestinian movement has never actually accepted the right of the Jews to a nation state of their own. To accept the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state would be tantamount to conceding that they were wrong, morally and practically, in opposing Jewish statehood in 1948. The Palestinian Authority (PA) officially recognizes Israel, but none of the constituent Palestinian movements, including Fatah which controls the P.A., have ever done so. To the contrary, Fatah spokesmen from Mahmoud Abbas down have publicly admitted or even boasted that Fatah has never recognized Israel and denied that there is any need for it to do so. Abbas said this clearly on Palestinian television when he remarked, "there is no requirement for Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad or any other group to recognize Israel." He simply said the P.A. had to do so as to be able to negotiate. No one else was required to do so. It is one thing for the PA to tactically recognize Israel for the purposes of negotiation. It is another thing entirely for it to say that it recognizes the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state and that they are going to conclude a peace agreement with it. Secretary Kerry will discover that is not going to happen.

Bates: Secretary Kerry's recognition of Israel as a Jewish state is a reasonable prerequisite to talks. According to Secretary Kerry Yasser Arafat once said that it's a Jewish state so why do we have to do so now? Does that claim have any merit?

Mandel: No, the first disconcerting aspect of it is that the Obama Administration is wobbly on a number of Israel's vital security interest agenda items. Now we see the backtracking with specific regard to Arafat in 1988. I think people ought to remember when Arafat said that at a press conference, he was simply quoting the original United Nation's 1947 Partition Resolution which spoke of an Arab state and a Jewish state. Arafat was pushing the envelope attempting to get somewhere without saying anything specific and that is how the Americans looked upon it. They were keen to open up a dialogue with the PLO, but they found his statement insufficient. Arafat later had to make other statements before they embarked on the course of limited negotiations with the PLO by US Ambassador in Tunis Robert Pelletreau. Perhaps far more important than tinkering with history is that the actual Israeli/Palestinian relationship as it exists now based on Oslo and the Oslo Accords, has no reference to the Jewish state. That is precisely what has come to be recognized as the problem. Neither in the exchange of letters between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin in September 1993 nor in the actual Oslo agreement that the two parties signed is there have any reference to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. It had been a tactical recognition, an obvious prerequisite for the purpose of negotiation.

Gordon: One point of observation. There is another reason why the P.A. basically will never recognize a Jewish nation called Israel and it has to do with Islamic doctrine. That is any territory previously conquered in great waves of Jihad is part of a Waqf, a trust, an endowment by their god Allah in perpetuity. That has been expressed a number of times particularly by Hamas and other terrorist groups.

Shoshana, speaking about somebody next door to this problem, King Abdullah, why is he particularly nervous about the security arrangements in the Jordan Valley that Secretary Kerry and his advisors have been discussing regarding final status negotiations?

Bryen: He's not nervous. He's adamantly opposed and he told Secretary Kerry that he was adamantly opposed. Nothing says, "I love you" more than an Israeli security presence along the Jordan River. The King is worried about Palestinians who want to take over the Kingdom or want to reconnect the West Bank with the East Bank. Remember that the original 1964 Charter of the P.L.O. called Jordan part of Palestine. There has always been a Palestinian element that wants to get rid of the King. They have never renounced that claim. Remember too, that the Palestinians on the West Bank used to be Jordanian citizens. When King Hussein gave up his claim to the West Bank in 1988 he yanked their passports leaving hundreds of thousands of West Bank Palestinians in limbo. They don't want to be there so there is an intense desire among a certain element of the Palestinians to reunite with their cousins on the East Bank and to get rid of the King and the only thing that prevents that is Israel.

Bates: But isn't there now a feverish pitch of Palestinian nationalism, that the Palestinians in the West Bank see themselves not as Jordanians but as Palestinians? The whole concept of Jordan being involved governmentally on the West Bank is completely out the window. The goal is a Palestinian state period, with influence and involvement from no one else.

Bryen: Yes, precisely which is why they would like to get rid of the King who anyway is from the Hejaz in Arabia. They are not looking for Jordanian citizenship. They are looking to strip Jordan of its Jordanianness. They expect Jordan to be part of the Palestinian states. For them, Palestine is not the river to the sea. Palestine is the Iraq border to the Mediterranean, the original British mandate for Palestine. They want it all.

Bates: Well Jordan is not going to go along with that and I don't see the United States going along with that either.

Bryen: Not deliberately but you have a government in the United States right now which isn't very clear on what threatens people we like – including the King of Jordan.

Bates: Daniel, I have a question about the perceived obstinacy on the part of Israel. It seems like Israel is always the party that gets blamed when there is no progress in these peace talks. Secretary of State Kerry has suggested that it is Israel's obstinacy that is thwarting the acceptance of a U.S. developed framework for a final status agreement. There has been the veiled threat of possible EU and other economic sanctions against Israel. Given the looming deadline at the end of April, what will the Palestinian Authority likely pursue if that red line is in fact breached?

Mandel: The problem is inherent in the entire Oslo Process. Prior to Oslo, Israel said the Palestinians weren't interested in peace. That they wouldn't be satisfied with a Palestinian state. With Oslo, the paradigm changed. The Israelis themselves said, "No, they're serious now and we're going to make peace with them." That certification turned out to be a durable problem, because it's very hard to convince anyone else that this core assumption should be revisited. In other words, what if it turned out that the Palestinian movement actually continued to adhere to the 1974 policy of stages, by which it would engage in negotiations with Israel in order to obtain territory which could then be used to wage further war on Israel? This is what occurred.

When negotiations go nowhere, the U.S. is inclined to lean on Israel, which seeks peace, to make further concessions, rather than the Palestinians, who will simply say no. Just to get talks moving last year, Israel was pressured to free jailed terrorists, who were welcomed in the PA. However, the P.A. wasn't under pressure to do anything to get negotiations going. They say after April 29th, they will pursue a course of international action aimed at enhancing their UN non-member status and delegitimizing Israel, but they have been doing this for several years.

They've already achieved non-member status with the United Nations. The only reason they are not sitting in the UN as a fully accredited state is that they cannot clear the Security Council where any US Administration is bound to veto. Obama has said that the U.S. will hold the PA accountable for incitement. He never has. Even Obama under pressure from Congress, has said that the U.S. will withhold money from the Palestinians. At this point the PA has gotten around that by seeking membership in UNESCO. This complicates the situation with Washington. American policy is to defund UN agencies that accept Palestine as a state. If more UN organizations do that then they may have to choose between American money and accepting a Palestinian state. America will find itself in a difficult and unwanted situation of having to defund UN agencies.

Bates: Shoshana, I have a question for you about the American government in these

negotiations blaming Israeli intransigence for there not being progress. I read an article very recently that speculated that the United States government was trying to undermine the popularity of Benjamin Netanyahu in order to replace him with a prime minister that would be perceived as more agreeable to Washington's terms for a Palestinian state. Is there any truth to that? Is the United States trying to destabilize Benjamin Netanyahu?

Bryen: Yes, they have been for a long time. Before the last election the president made clear his interest in dealing with the opposition with Tzipi Livni, specifically hoping she would be able to put together a coalition to govern Israel but she did not. Netanyahu won and he won fairly big. The American government now prefers talking to Shimon Peres and never misses an opportunity to say how wonderful and peace-loving the President of Israel is. They have made great overtures to Livni, none of which worked by the way. The Israeli public by and large and specifically on the subject of the peace process likes Netanyahu.

Bates: Netanyahu is certainly speaking from a position of strength and when you are in Israel being threatened by your neighbors who want to drive you into the sea and exterminate you it seems to me you want a strong leader. Benjamin Netanyahu is speaking to that very understandable position.

Bryen: His problem is there are people who think that he's not tough enough and that he will cave to the President of the United States. That is his biggest problem, not that he is going to be undermined by the Israeli public.

Bates: Jerry Gordon, my question is for you regarding the negotiations. There was Saeb Erekat who is the Chief P.A. Negotiator. He was confronted on an Al Jazeera program, *Head to Head* at the Oxford Union about violation of human rights and corruption within the Palestinian Authority. How severe are those problems and is there any evidence that there is really no possibility of a Palestinian state because of all of the corruption and human rights violations?

Gordon: Firstly let's tell the listener audience that Mr. Erekat believes that his ancestors were in his hometown of Jericho, nine thousand years ago and that these Jews who came across the Jordan and burned down his hometown like Joshua and the rest of the Hebrews were upstarts. That is part of their national narrative these days. More pointedly Erekat was confronted at this Oxford Union Debate with allegations that the P.A. has actually imprisoned more than 650 people who have objected to the PA leadership. He alleges when it comes to corruption charges there is a Corruption Court where people can take petitions. Moreover when people talk about economic development in the P.A., some of the so-called Palestinian entrepreneurs there have

been jailed because they objected to certain payoffs. Shoshana, why is this evidence of a failed state?

Bryen: Deep levels of corruption are indicative of a failed state. And I would add to that that among the things the Europeans are discovering is enormous amounts of money they have poured into the P.A. being wasted and stolen. An EU auditor just announced they have been paying the salaries of 61,000 Palestinian civil servants in Gaza since 2007. Now that wouldn't be so bad except that since 2007 they have not come to work. As a result, the EU and Norway are cutting off some parts of the money because they have had it proven to them by Norwegian journalists that money they gave for education in the Palestinian Authority is being used for raw anti-Semitism. As the Europeans discover more of this and as they have to balance their own budgets they will begin to withdraw their money. Which means that the Palestinian Authority, which never has balanced a budget and never has been a productive organization, will find itself heading straight down the tube. It couldn't happen to nicer people.

Bates: How much Shoshana, do you think corruption is to blame for Hamas having won elections in Gaza? I have heard the narrative that they bought votes; however that may or may not have their intention. Hamas providing hospitals and schools and social services that the P.A. was not providing, may have led to Hamas' election to govern Gaza.

Bryen: I'm not sure that is corruption. The Muslim Brotherhood did the same thing in Egypt and it was one of the reasons they got so many votes. When they are out of power they provide services for people who otherwise don't get services. I think Palestinians in Gaza looked at Hamas as relatively uncorrupt and – possibly because they were looked at them as religious – incorruptible. They knew the Palestinian Authority. They knew that Arafat was corrupt. They knew that Mahmoud Abbas was corrupt so they voted for what they thought would be a less corrupt organization which was Hamas. Now I don't know if building hospitals and schools qualifies as a different kind of corruption. I think it's what people do. However, once they got into power they did those other things that people do. They became dictators and then they became corrupt. Now they steal money just like everybody else.

Bates: Just as importantly in terms of the security of Israel, Hamas is firing rockets nearly every day into Southern Israel. There was a recent report of the interception of the Iranian rockets that were being shipped into Gaza and were significantly more powerful and with longer range. That is certainly a threat.

Bryen: The rockets that were intercepted by the Israelis are actually a very interesting story in that they were produced in Syria. They are a Russian design. They were flown from

Syria to Tehran and from Iran they were put on a ship and sent forward toward Gaza. Which raises all kinds of questions or it should about what the Syrian government is doing. It was a vast increase in the sophistication of missiles that would have been in the hands of either Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Bates: Do we believe that the Israeli Navy intercepted all of them or do you think some of them made it through and pose a threat?

Bryen: I suspect they intercepted all of them on this ship. However the Iranians are sending ships out all of the time so if the Israelis got this shipment, they may not get the next one. By the way, another country that has a problem with this is Egypt because some of those missiles are destined for Jihadists in the Sinai. The ones the Israelis caught, had they been fired from Sinai into Central Cairo would've created a disaster. They have the range. They don't have to start near Cairo.

Bates: How accurate or do they just indiscriminately fire them?

Bryen: They are not very accurate, but if you aim at a city with a population of almost 8 million you are likely to kill a lot of people.

Bates: When Hamas does this they can't exactly claim they are going after military targets. They are just shooting in the direction of where they think the so-called enemy is going to be.

Gordon: Dan, at the AIPAC Policy Conference both Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu plumped for passage of the so-called Stand-by Sanctions Legislation that is threatened by a presidential veto. To your knowledge, has Iran already violated the interim P5+1 negotiation and shouldn't that trigger new sanctions?

Mandel: It is worth noting that the State Department [said](#) this week that Iran violated UN sanctions on procurement for both its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act, known as the Menendez-Kirk legislation, aims at tightening sanctions in the event Iran fails to observe the Geneva Interim Agreement or fails to reach agreement on dismantling its nuclear weapons program. President Obama has vowed to veto the act if it is passed by the Senate. Now the trouble with the Interim Agreement is it requires very little from the Iranians. They are able to retain all the vital elements of a nuclear weapons program. They can still even manufacture centrifuges. They can't start using them. They can construct the parts for the Arak plutonium plant, but they can't complete the facility. They can continue with its intercontinental ballistic missile research and weapons development.

Effectively, Iran can adhere to the letter of the agreement without causing a serious breach. The question remains what sort of agreement are we going to have in the future? Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif said Iran does not expect to reach a permanent nuclear deal. They are blatant about it. The important step represented by Kirk-Menendez is should there be no agreement, then further sanctions come into play. That would strengthen President Obama's hand, yet President Obama has vowed to veto it.

Bates: How realistic is it Daniel, to reimpose sanctions once they are lifted? Companies in the European Union appear eager to do business with Iran. Are those governments going to go along with sanctions that may hurt the economic interests of their own industries?

Mandel: You are quite right. The Geneva Interim Agreement provides Iran with sanctions relief which the Administration said initially was insubstantial – six to seven billion dollars. Then they admitted shortly after that it was really \$20 billion plus. President Obama said the Geneva deal left us “no worse off” in terms of sanctions. That is not correct. The sanctions we abandoned in Geneva cannot be reinstated let alone strengthened. Geneva was the death knell of the sanctions regime. Even with hard work and good luck, severe sanctions cannot be reinstated if Iran was found in breach. It would take many months for this to be discovered. Moreover, It would take many more months for renewed sanctions to take effect on Iran's economy. In other words we have lost a year, if not more, and Iran may be within weeks of going nuclear.

Gordon: Shoshana, recently there was a bombing of an IDF patrol by Hezbollah on Israel's' border with Lebanon. What triggered the Israeli response and can we expect some more hostilities with Lebanon?

Bryen: You'll never expect less hostility with Lebanon. Let me be clear. Hezbollah oddly enough has not taken credit or blame for that shooting incident – which is very unusual for them. They had said they were going to pay Israel back for the air strike on their missiles. They had said they were going to take the fight to Israel. They were very loud in their threats. When something actually blew up, they withdrew and they did not claim credit. It is possible that they did it. But I do not think Hezbollah wants to open a Southern front right now. They are in deep trouble inside Syria. They are in deep trouble inside Lebanon. The war has come to Lebanon. That is one of the other things missing from the press. Lebanon is back to being at war. Now, the only thing that Hezbollah used to maintain its position with the Lebanese people is to say, “We are guarding you from the Zionist enemy.” Occasionally they needed to shoot at the Zionist enemy to stay credible, but basically I think Hezbollah right now would be terrified of a Southern front and maybe that is why they didn't take credit or

blame for the attack.

Bates: There is increasing concern about Al Qaeda affiliated militias that have been penetrating Israel's border with Syria on the Golan. It's relatively sparsely populated in terms of civilians, heavily patrolled by the IDF. What is the IDF doing to address that threat out of Syria on the Golan Heights?

Bryen: They're doing what they always do. They are patrolling their watch and they are being careful. They're much more careful nowadays than they were before. Even in Syria, there's a great hesitance about starting a Southern front. Everybody is up to their elbows in the current fight so some of this is stray fire. Some of it is Al Qaeda looking to see if they can bring the Israelis into the civil war. However, the Israeli response is always extremely targeted and I don't think that they will rise to the bait if that's where Al Qaeda is going. From the Israeli point of view all you can do is more of the same. Watch it and kill it.

Gordon: Shoshana, there has been a rather interesting development in Israel. The Knesset passed a bill requiring a military draft of extreme Orthodox Jewish men and that was protested. What was the impetus behind this dramatic change and what was the prior history?

Bryen: The impetus behind it is this notion that all Israelis need to serve the state and some people weren't serving. That is the platform that Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid ran on and it was a very popular one. Shared sacrifice. That means shared between the rich people and the poor people, between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim and between the religious people and the non-religious people. Religious people do serve in the Army. The National Orthodox serve of course, but there was this feeling that a group of people did not have the same obligation to send their sons off at the age of 18 as other families. That was not shared sacrifice. Therefore they have created a mechanism by which they would draft these people. It has become an interesting fight inside the Haredi community. There are many young men who understand that the army is a mechanism by which they will get skills to enter the actual workplace, which is necessary. There are Rabbis who strongly encourage this. Judaism is not a pacifist religion. Rabbis understand that if someone threatens you have to go to war but there are other Rabbis who see this as undermining their absolute control of their own constituents. Once you send a young man off to the Army and he sees the real world, you remember the old song, "how you gonna keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris (pronounced Paree)." The Rabbis are afraid that the young men will learn something about the rest of the world and they will want to try it out. That would be a huge hit to their almost untrammled power inside the State of Israel and that is what they are afraid of.

Bates: There were huge protests earlier this month right outside the old city of Jerusalem. In fact I was actually in Israel when these protests were going on although I was not in Jerusalem at the time. I was up in Tiberius and on the Golan Heights that particular day. There were so many of these ultra-Orthodox Jewish men protesting that it basically shut down access to the Old City. They were protesting in Jerusalem because that's where it's happening. However there were huge protests in New York City by Hasidic Jews protesting the Israeli government plan to draft Hasidic men into the Israeli military. That struck me as a little odd. I completely get Shoshana, why they are protesting in Jerusalem. Why are they protesting in New York?

Bryen: Because they are all the sons and cousins and aunts and uncles of the people in Israel. It's actually quite understandable. Some people have dual citizenship. Some people have relatives. It's understandable.

Bates: And is the Israeli government, are they influenced by the protest in New York?

Bryen: No.

Bates: Or for that matter in Jerusalem.

Bryen: Yes, because a lot of those people are in fact Israeli citizens but I think this has gone on too far now. I don't think the Israeli government plans to be influenced by anything. I think they plan to make this work.

Gordon: Shoshana, who is to blame for this predicament that fostered the new Knesset bill?

Bryen: If I said David Ben-Gurion we probably don't have time to go that far, right?

Gordon: Correct.

Bryen: It's not blame. It's people who ran on a platform of shared sacrifice in the State of Israel. It's basically Yair Lapid who wanted it and he found that there was an awful lot of support for that idea that everybody's son has to go into the Army. That is one thing that Israelis all do. Sons and daughters, they go in to the Army and it's very difficult and very complicated to send your child at the age of 18 off to the Army. People thought it was unfair that they had to do it and these other people didn't.

Bates: Shoshana, we are not going to have time for detail of David Ben-Gurion as being the answer but can you give us a thirty to sixty second answer of what you meant by, it's probably David Ben-Gurion's fault?

Bryen: Yes, the thumbnail is that in the early days of the State of Israel Ben-Gurion started these exemptions for ultra Orthodox men from the Army. Ben-Gurion thought that it would only last a generation because he believed that people would become more secular the longer they were in the State of Israel and that the Haredim would die out. He thought that there just wouldn't be that many and it didn't really matter and he was wrong because as somebody says, they have lots of babies. It was a strategic mistake.

Bates: Isn't the Chasidic community pretty much feeding out of the public trough? They get support from the welfare state in Israel?

Bryen: Well, but everybody does. Everybody who has babies gets support from the State of Israel so it's not just them. They happen to get more of it because they have more babies so it's a logical outgrowth of the fact that they have more kids. I think one of the reasons some of the Haredim are interested in joining the Army is they understand that those subsidies are going to shrink inevitably because the state won't be able to afford them for everybody in the future. They need to figure out what to do before it happens to them.

Gordon: Daniel, prior to President Obama's meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu early in March, Bloomberg journalist Jeffrey Goldberg held an interview with the President. What messages did the President convey through the interview to Prime Minister Netanyahu?

Mandel: First, he threatened Israel with isolation, if it fails to follow his negotiating dictates. He also gave Mahmoud Abbas a free pass saying, the problem was not Abbas refusing to accept Israel as a Jewish state or sign an end of conflict deal or implement the Oslo Agreement – no, he called him a peacemaker. So I think you can conclude that President Obama was setting the groundwork to blame Israel for the inevitable diplomatic failure that lies just ahead. America has quite a few tools with which to deal with diplomatic offensives against Israel. Jeffrey Goldberg indicated that he took what Obama said as a veiled threat against Israel. Obama didn't say that the U.S. would oppose Israel's isolation. He didn't try in any way to tamp down expectations that this would be accepted by the Administration. He didn't say the administration would lobby allies to oppose these actions. When the Palestinians moved to obtain non-member statehood at the UN, there was no American campaign to lobby allies thereby enabling the resolution to pass with an overwhelming vote. That starkly contrasts with the threat to defund UN agencies that the George H.W. Bush Administration made in the early 1990's when the UN appeared on the brink of approving Palestinian statehood. With the Bush I resolve, the Palestinian statehood campaign died. President Obama could have done that in 2012 – but he didn't.

Gordon: Daniel, what can Israel expect from strong man General Abdel Fatah El-Sisi in Egypt in terms of protection of its border with Israel?

Mandel: It is an extraordinary situation. You have a welcome and seemingly surprising development, an unprecedented level of Egyptian and Israeli cooperation on securing the border. In the past, under Mohammed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood-backed government and under Mubarak before the Arab Spring, there was continual smuggling of weapons and material into Gaza from Egyptian-controlled Sinai. Israel resorted to altering the security annex of the Camp David Treaty in 2011 to permit Egypt to deploy 2,500 troops. That was a substantial increase over the 700 originally allowed in the border area. The reason was quite obvious. The Egyptian forces were too much in sympathy with the terrorists and too reluctant and unwilling to clash with Hamas and engage in terrorist suppression. That has changed because Salafi jihadist groups operating in Sinai have attacked Egyptian forces with support from Gaza. Egypt was bound even under Morsi to try and rein them in. Egyptian security interest was heightened by attacks on security forces in the Sinai since the Israelis had completed their security barrier along the Egyptian frontier. Because of the mutual threat to both Israel and Egypt there is now consideration cooperation in counterterrorism activities in the Sinai including destruction of smuggling tunnels.

Bates: Shoshana, did the U.S. play any role in the Egyptian Spring either fostering or supporting it once it started? Did the administration play any active role in the overthrow of the Mubarak government?

Bryen: You have to parse that question. The Obama Administration starting with his first speech in the Arab world in 2009 brought the Muslim Brotherhood out of the shadows into the sunlight and made it clear over Mubarak's objection. Obama made it clear that the Muslim Brotherhood was an organization with which the U.S could work. To that extent the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian Spring started with that speech and started with a clear indication that the Obama people liked the brotherhood. On the other hand the Egyptian Spring that brought down Mubarak was not entirely a Brotherhood operation. Do I think that the Obama administration was out there helping the opposition? No, they were not giving support and comfort to the masses of young Egyptians who were educated but without jobs, without a belief in their own future, unhappy with corruption. I do not think the Administration was helping them. It was very definitely encouraging the Muslim Brotherhood.

Bates: O.K. Very good. Well we are out of time not out of questions though we will do this again. These are always very interesting and informative discussions these Middle East round table discussions that we have. With Jerry Gordon, Senior Editor of the New English Review and

it's blog "the Iconoclast," with Shoshana Bryen, Director of the Jewish Policy Center and Dr. Daniel Mandel, director of the Center of Middle East Policy of the Zionist Organization of America. This is Mike Bates for 1330 WEBY.

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