



ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

that publicly siding with Iran's dissidents will give the regime an excuse to blame the protests on foreign meddling or crack down even harder on dissidents. The government in Tehran will do these things no matter what, since a regime as threatened as Iran's is right now will take any steps in its power to deflect

Commentary...

The West Should Stop Dithering and Show its Support for the Protesters in Iran By Natan Sharansky

In recent days, Iranian citizens from various places and diverse walks of life have taken to the streets in protest against their clerical rulers. Outside of Iran, meanwhile, we have seen experts in the world's most powerful capitals insisting that their leaders should not get involved. The usual argument is that external support for the protesters will only harm their cause by tainting it with endorsement from the West.

As an opinion piece in the New York Times recently put it, the best way for the U.S. government to help the Iranian protesters is to "Keep quiet and do nothing."

Fortunately, President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have already shown themselves unwilling to follow this advice. Even so, it is vital to understand why failing to support the protesters at this critical juncture would constitute a moral and strategic mistake — one of potentially historic proportions.

Consider what happened in 2009, when Iranians came out in large numbers to denounce their country's rigged presidential election. The response they received from the American government was decidedly tepid. The priority of then-President Barack Obama was to reach an agreement with Tehran over its nuclear program, and he and his advisers feared that they would alienate the regime by vocally supporting its detractors.

Yet subsequent events have proved these views completely wrong. This policy of non-interference discouraged protesters and reinforced the regime at the very moment when the opposite could have led to genuine change.

My experiences as a political prisoner and my decades of involvement with democratic dissidents around the world have shown me that all democratic revolutions have some elements in common. It is the drive of ordinary citizens to free themselves from government control over their thought, speech and livelihoods — to shed the burden of having to conform in public despite their private misgivings and grievances against the regime — that has propelled dissidents and revolutionary movements around the world, from Communist Russia to the Arab Spring to today's Islamic Republic of Iran.

Any regime that refuses to respect its citizens' most basic rights, and especially the right to think and speak freely, can maintain its power only by intimidation and force. While some true believers may genuinely accept these official dogmas, others — I call them "double-thinkers" — question their government but are too afraid of retribution to publicly speak out against it. For these people, fear of the harsh consequences of dissent makes all the difference between silent critique and open protest.

Dissidents know the penalties of speaking out but are compelled more by the desire for freedom than by fear. They are willing to brave the consequences, including the loss of their livelihoods, physical freedom and even their lives, to gain the liberty to speak their minds. Revolutions take place when enough people simultaneously cross that fateful line between silent questioning and open dissent, between cowering in fear and standing up for freedom. Once they do so, the regime can no longer contain the upsurge of opposition and must either begin to liberalize or collapse.

This is why a policy of silence on the part of world leaders is so misguided. What matters to Iranians debating whether to cross this decisive threshold is how much they dislike their own government, as well as their knowledge that the free world — those who share the basic principles for which they are fighting — stands behind them in their moment of truth.

The last time Iran stood on the brink of such a change, the Obama administration's policy implicitly told Iranians that the United States did not stand behind them. By assuring Iran's rulers that he preferred the status quo to any policy that would weaken or destabilize the regime, the president took the wind out of the protesters' sails and gave courage to their oppressors. What could have been a moment of genuine liberalization gave way instead to another brutal government crackdown.

Now that history is repeating itself, the free world has a chance to avoid making the same mistake. Our leaders must not be misled by the argument

and suppress opposition.

Yet, world powers should go even further than this. They should warn Tehran — and thereby reassure protesters — that it must respect its citizens' rights if it wishes to continue receiving benefits from their countries. Articulating a clear policy of linkage would put pressure on the regime to make genuine changes and give hope to protesters that their sacrifices will not be in vain.

It is time for all those who value freedom to state clearly that the Iranian people — like all people — deserve to be free, and that when they fight for this right, those of us who already enjoy it will stand unequivocally by their side. (Washington Post Jan 3)

The US Can't Be Silent on Iran By Jonathan S. Tobin

The foreign-policy establishment and former Obama administration staffers seem to agree about two things concerning the protests in Iran. One is that the Trump administration should follow the example of his predecessor, who was largely silent the last time the Iranian people took to the streets to challenge their Islamist oppressors. The other is that on no account should any discussion about the current situation in Iran be linked to efforts to throw out or change the nuclear deal President Obama concluded with the same people who are ordering thugs to gun down protesters.

By speaking out on events in Iran, President Trump is passing a test Obama failed. Obama's reluctance to discuss dissent in Iran sent protesters a message that they were on their own and that the regime had a pass to do its worst. The establishment is chiding Trump and telling us American advocacy will only hurt the protesters. But, as was the case with the former Soviet Union, the support of the free world for those fighting tyranny not only encourages dissidents but also reminds the tyrants they are the ones who are isolated.

It's also a mistake to act as if what's going on in Iran right now must be kept separate from the nuclear deal.

The deal's apologists are correct when they say the agreement was solely focused on nuclear issues and ignored Iran's quest for regional hegemony, terrorism, missiles and human rights. But it was still a swindle, since the sunset clauses Obama conceded mean that within another decade, the weak restrictions on their nuclear program will expire and Tehran will be able to resume work on a bomb and still be in compliance with its obligations.

Trump is right that it must be changed.

Ordinary Iranians were promised the nuclear deal would end their country's isolation and, therefore, improve their lot. If it hasn't, it's not because the West has reneged on its pledges, but because the only real beneficiaries of the deal have been regime entities like the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. That's why rather than refraining from bringing the pact into current discussions, the West must make it clear to Tehran that if it isn't prepared to give up those sunset clauses, more sanctions will follow. President Trump can, if he likes, blow up the deal this month, but the smarter play would be to begin a real effort to renegotiate it with the threat of crippling sanctions on Iran's European trade partners to back it up.

Obama discarded all of the West's considerable leverage in his blind pursuit of a deal on any terms. Trump can't undo that fiasco on his own, but the protests present the world with a golden opportunity to get a lot of that leverage back. Supreme Leader Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is trying to delude Iranians into thinking the protests are a plot hatched by Trump, Israel and the Saudis. But if he lets his country sink back into further economic misery, the price of suppressing the growing voices of dissent will rise to a point where even he knows it can't be paid.

That makes this the ideal moment to make it clear to Iran that if it wants to trade with the rest of the world and prosper, it must concede that, at the very least, the sunset clauses in the nuclear deal must be voided.

Trump shouldn't be deterred by the bad advice of a bankrupt foreign-

policy establishment. Instead of remaining silent or pretending that Obama's decision to seek a deal with Iran didn't contribute to the problems inside that country, this is the moment to act. (NY Post Jan 2)

Trump's First Year Was Good for Israel By Moshe Arens

According to the American statistician Nate Silver, who has an enviable reputation for forecasting U.S. election results, 56.3 percent of the U.S. public disapproves of Donald Trump's performance during his first year in office, while 37.7 percent approve. He shows that Trump's approval rating at this point is lower than that of any previous American president in recent times. The avalanche of criticism leveled at Trump in the American media is presumably a reflection of this level of disapproval. In some European capitals they are less than enthusiastic about him.

By contrast, it is undeniable that for Israel, Trump's first year in office has been good. It compares very favorably with the White House's relations with Israel during the eight years of Barack Obama's presidency. The final chord in that relationship came in the last days of Obama's second term, when the United States, in a drastic departure from policy, refrained from vetoing a UN Security Council resolution critical of Israel. Compare that with the U.S. veto a year later of a Security Council resolution expressing regret over Trump's decision to acknowledge that Jerusalem is Israel's capital city. Under Trump, the White House stands by Israel at the United Nations.

C'est le ton qui fait la musique. With Trump's entry into the White House the entire mood of U.S.-Israeli relations changed. Gone were the criticism, lecturing and admonitions that Israelis grew accustomed to hearing from Obama, time and again. From the first day, Trump made it clear that the United States and Israel were friends. More than friends — allies. His visit to Israel was a celebration.

Unlike Obama, Trump had no compunctions about calling a spade a spade. Islamic terrorism was a danger. Not only to Israel, but to the entire world. It had to be fought, and Israel would not be left alone to fight it. Whatever claims the Palestinians may have, terrorism would not be accepted as a legitimate weapon to advance them. This he made clear to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas when they met on Trump's first visit to the region.

In October, Trump decertified the Iranian nuclear agreement. Unlike Obama, who spoke of Iran's right to be a regional power, Trump recognized Iran's aggressive intentions in the area, its use of Hezbollah terrorists to advance its goals in Lebanon and in Syria and the infiltration of Iranian revolutionary militias into Iraq and Syria. The nuclear deal, a "bad deal," had left Iran free to advance its ballistic missile program and its efforts to dominate the Middle East and threaten Israel. Israel was no longer left alone in its recognition of these threats. It now had a powerful friend who shared its concerns.

It took a year, but it finally happened. Trump acknowledged the fact that Jerusalem was indeed Israel's capital city. In regard to Jerusalem, the whole world had for almost 70 years played a game of make-believe. As if Israel had no capital, or Jerusalem only its virtual capital. The world was intent on pursuing the fantasy that Israel would have no capital until such time as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been resolved, no matter how long that would take.

When, after the United States cast its veto at the UN Security Council, the UN General Assembly was called into session to vote on a resolution submitted by Turkey and Yemen in an attempt to express massive opposition to the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Israel was not left alone in objecting to this motion presented by countries hostile to Israel and supported by Muslim states and by those who preferred hypocrisy to principle. The minority that opposed the motion held the moral high ground.

Like him or not, Trump's first year in office has been good for Israel. (Haaretz Jan 1)

A Zionist, Vital Law By Nadav Shragai

If any Israeli government ever decides to start sliding down a slippery slope — both in terms of security and Zionism — and tries to divide Jerusalem with fences and barbed wire, split the Old City, or make any compromise about the Temple Mount — it will have to overcome the obstacle enacted by the Knesset on Tuesday.

Ironclad orders that require a special majority of 80, rather than the usual 61 out of 120 MKs, are very rare in the Israeli legislative process. Such orders involve changes to Basic Laws. Thus far, such votes have only been held to prevent the suspension of a democratic government in times of emergency or on the issue of postponing a general election and keeping a government in place. Now, the legislative body has decided that keeping Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, whole is at least as important as laws to protect democracy.

This is a practical law, not a theoretical one. The Knesset has now

placed a serious obstacle in the path of any government that tries to hand over Jerusalem neighborhoods including Issawiya, Jabel Mukhabar, or Tzur Baher to the Palestinians. These neighborhoods and others like them lie flush against Jewish neighborhoods such as French Hill or Mount Scopus in the north, or Armon Hanatziv or Kibbutz Ramat Rachel in the southeast. On Tuesday, the Knesset reduced the likelihood that the Palestinians will ever resume shooting attacks from the seam like the ones in Gilo after its neighbor, Beit Jala, was handed over to the Palestinians.

The new legislation is also vital to prevent any possibility that, after a division of the city, the Palestinians would interfere with freedom of access to and worship at the Jewish holy sites in the city. They have done so in the distant and recent past with the Western Wall, the Temple Mount, the Mount of Olives, and Rachel's Tomb.

The law will also preserve the joint day-to-day life shared by Jews and Arabs in the capital. This is something else that exists in Jerusalem, along with the ethno-religious conflict, and to a much greater degree than most of the public is aware of. Dividing the city would definitely hurt that co-existence.

This is one of the most Zionist laws to be passed here. As it should, it empowers the existence and weight of the Basic Law: Jerusalem as part of the legal fabric of our national life. It puts up another barrier to ridiculous diplomatic or security adventures like the ones the two Ehuds, Olmert and Barak, have brought down on our heads in the past two decades. (Israel Hayom Jan 3)

Palestinian Authority Textbooks Still Demonizing Jews, Inciting Violence By Steven Emerson

Palestinian Authority (PA) schoolbooks remain devoted to systematically demonizing Jews and brainwashing generations of Palestinian children to support terrorism, according to a new study from the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center.

The report's authors, Arnon Groiss and Ronni Shaked, examined more than 200 PA schoolbooks, covering all grade levels over the past four years.

Delegitimizing Jews as a people with no rights to any part of Israel was a major theme.

"Britain was helped by the Jews to realize its imperialistic greedy ambitions and, therefore, Jews started immigrating to Palestine," an 11th-grade textbook says.

The study found no discussions of Jews or Israelis as regular human beings — just blanket generalizations of Jews as "wolves and snakes" who migrated to Palestine to eliminate the Palestinian people.

Jewish people are also consistently portrayed as Islam's enemies. The study's authors argue that this campaign of demonization is necessary to legitimize the importance of armed struggle against Israelis.

The texts often promote violence and terrorism. Cities in pre-1967 Israel, like Jaffa and Haifa, are listed as areas that must be liberated through armed conflict. And violent Islamic concepts, including jihad and martyrdom, are incorporated into Palestinian children's education as religious justifications for terrorism.

According to a sixth-grade textbook: "When the Muslim believes that God is the one who gives life and death, is the source of profit and loss, and victory and power are in His hand, then he frees himself of the others' control, and bravery and the desire to die as a martyr in God's cause revive in his soul."

The concept of the "shahid" (martyr) is used to encourage Palestinian children to embrace suicide terrorist operations. PA textbooks try to mask explicit promotion of violence — but they endorse terrorism by praising Palestinians that have engaged in terror operations against Israelis, the study found.

"The teacher asked the students: 'How can we celebrate Independence Day this year?' Safa: 'Let us invite the families of the martyrs and the prisoners-of-war to honor them.' Imad: 'Let us commemorate [our] town's martyrs and prisoners-of-war by planting a tree in memory of every martyr,'" reads a passage from the third grade civics schoolbook.

Virtually all references to Israelis or Jews are vehemently negative, and consistently portray Israelis and Jews as an existential threat to Palestinians, who need to be destroyed. Though the Palestinian leadership boasts of education reform, there is no reference to peace or coexistence with Israel in PA schoolbooks.

"It is apparent from [this] data that the PA schoolbooks prepare the students mentally and ideologically [for] a violent struggle, [and] for a future liquidation of ... Israel and its Jewish population," the authors conclude.

These findings corroborate previous research on Palestinian curriculum and schoolbooks that systematically glorify terrorism, deny Israel's right to exist, and encourage future generations of Palestinians to wage armed struggle. These themes have been propagated to Palestinian children for decades, and form the basis of Palestinian identity and societal

attitudes, which remain deeply anti-Semitic and devoted to the destruction of Israel.

And the problem may be getting worse.

An April study by Hebrew University's Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, found that the new curriculum for grades 1 to 4 "is significantly more radical than previous curricula."

The Palestinian education system is radicalizing entire generations, and has a real impact on terrorism.

For example, Palestinian terrorist stabbed an Israeli security guard in the chest on December 10 in Jerusalem. Before attacking, the terrorist wrote a will featuring a martyr's quote found in PA textbooks, according to Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service.

It's hard to imagine a stable and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without a complete revolution of the Palestinian education system. (Algemeiner Jan 4)

Why Trump's Palestinian Aid Cut Threat Makes Sense

By Jonathan S. Tobin

We didn't need the publication of a new book filled with behind-the-scenes gossip to know that Donald Trump is an unconventional and, at times, inappropriate president. His use of Twitter provides many examples of this fact.

But amid another flurry of questionable tweets on Jan. 4, Trump also talked about threatening aid cuts to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Most of the mainstream media treated that idea as being as loopy as the latest exchange of insults with North Korea's dictator. But while it's easy to mock Trump's social media habits, this one made sense and showed that, not for the first time, the president's instinctual distrust of experts and the foreign policy establishment may have served him well.

The minuscule amount of the national budget that goes to foreign nations generally serves American interests. In the case of Israel, which is the largest recipient, almost all of the money it gets is spent in the U.S. It's also part of a strategic alliance in which America receives a great deal back in terms of intelligence and technology.

But not all foreign aid serves U.S. interests. The money sent to the Palestinians illustrates this painfully obvious conclusion. Yet despite the abundant proof that keeping it flowing is counterproductive, the so-called experts seeking to restrain Trump can't seem to grasp this fact.

Aid to the PA is seen as necessary to prop up the only available interlocutor for peace with Israel. We're also told that funding the PA is a necessary part of its security cooperation with Israel.

There are elements of truth to these assertions. If the PA were to collapse, that would likely lead to Israel having to reassert direct control of the West Bank rather than the current situation in which the overwhelming majority of Palestinians are governed by the corrupt Fatah party led by PA leader Mahmoud Abbas. But the PA's need for cash to prop up its kleptocracy is exactly why the U.S. should be using its financial leverage to make it clear to Abbas that a quarter century of his organization holding the U.S. hostage in this manner can't continue. Abbas's threats of dissolving the PA are bluffs that should have been called long ago.

The same is true of security cooperation. Abbas relies on Israel to ensure his survival against the plots of his Islamist rivals as much, if not more, than the Israelis rely on the PA to help keep terror under control in the West Bank.

The PA also uses the hundreds of millions of dollars it gets from the U.S. to provide salaries and pensions to terrorists and their families. Congressional efforts to hinge U.S. aid to ending the PA's subsidies via the Taylor Force Act deserve the president's support.

The same is true about the massive American contributions to UNRWA, the United Nations refugee agency that is solely devoted to the Palestinians. While UNRWA is credited with feeding and educating Palestinians, its main role is in maintaining the Arab refugees as a stateless people to perpetuate an ongoing threat to Israel's existence. An equal number of Jews were forced to flee their homes in Arab and Muslim countries after 1948, but they were absorbed in Israel and the West. Yet UNRWA has been part of the effort to prevent Palestinian Arabs from being absorbed elsewhere, thereby allowing them to cling to their dream of destroying the Jewish state.

UNRWA's schools have courses and books that promote hatred of Israel and Jews. Just as outrageous is the fact that UNRWA employees are often involved with Palestinian terror organizations, and its schools and other facilities have been used to store Hamas weapons where they would presumably be safe from Israeli retaliation.

American governments have tolerated this situation because they felt there was no alternative. But whether or not it is because he isn't so versed in policy, and therefore is not burdened with the conventional wisdom that has made destructive programs seem reasonable, Trump appears to be unwilling to keep throwing good money after bad.

You don't have to be supporter of Trump or Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu's government to understand that he is right to demand that if the Palestinians want U.S. money they must, at the very least, come back to the negotiating table and cease funding and fomenting terror.

It isn't so much a case of "America First" to demand that recipients of U.S. largesse cooperate with U.S. policy, as it is one of common sense. Whatever his other faults, Trump's insistence on this is neither foolish nor proof of his being unfit for office. (JNS Jan 4)

Regime Change Is the West's Best Hope for Iran

By Noah Rothman

As anti-regime protesters meet with an increasingly violent response from the sources of authority in Iran, it seems that those in the West who supported engaging with the Mullahs have become very defensive. Their reaction to events in Iran is reasonable, if not entirely virtuous. After all, these demonstrators are repeating claims made by the Iran nuclear deal's critics in its earliest days. Following the implementation of the accords, the regime has only continued to siphon money away from the private economy and charity and into its coffers. It is spending its newfound riches not at home but on terrorist organizations abroad and region-wide military intervention, both directly and through proxies. Perhaps most chilling for the Iran deal's backers, these protests suggest that the Iranian regime is not an intractable fact of life with which we must come to terms. It may actually be quite fragile. For those possessed of the vision, a world without the number-one state sponsor of terrorism is today an imaginable prospect.

Regime change in Tehran is not a policy preference native only to blinkered neoconservative interventionists. It is the default position of much of the foreign-policy establishment. Even Obama administration assistant secretary of state and Middle East coordinator Philip Gordon conceded that seeing the regime in Tehran "weakened" or "even removed" would be a desirable outcome. To achieve that, however, he recommended that President Trump shut up. At the very least, he should feign indifference toward the protests in Iran, as though an American president could stand by in good conscience while a criminal theocracy was slaughtering civilians.

This is a familiar refrain. Gordon suggests that an unlawful regime in the middle of a savage bloodletting would be aided by the fact that an American president merely noticed the carnage and objected. These enlightened foreign-policy luminaries don't see moral clarity in the condemnation of state-sponsored violence in the streets; they see chauvinism. They imagine Iranians will rally around the government simply to spite Trump, temporarily forgetting the oppression they endure at their tormentors' hands. This is an unconvincing construct, but it is a popular one.

Truthfully, those who fear the effects if Trump condemns the Iranian regime's actions too forcefully fret not for Iran but for the West. As unsatisfactory as the Mullahs may be, they are a known quantity. What comes after them is not. "Alas" Washington Post reporter Glenn Kessler sighed, "Iranian people may have more freedom, but whoever follows the Mullahs likely still will want to retain Iran's nuclear ambitions and protect its power in the region—just like the Shah." Like any sovereign state, Iran will jealously guard its authority and pursue its interests with vigor, but it's far from clear that it would retain its nuclear program if the Islamic Republic collapsed.

The vast expense associated with a nuclear-weapons program is only justified by a rational assessment of the threat environment. There are many examples in history of nations deciding to abandon nuclear deterrents because the threats they were initially designed to combat disappeared. The most obvious of these are Ukraine and Belarus, both of which inherited nuclear arsenals following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Then, too, a seemingly intractable regime that had withstood the tests of history and the discontent of its people was supposed to endure indefinitely. Then, suddenly, it didn't. For these founding members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, maintaining even a small nuclear arsenal was not justified by the immediate post-Cold War threat environment, so they simply gave it up.

Similarly, Apartheid South Africa developed a nuclear arsenal because it was a pariah in its neighborhood. Fearing its anti-Apartheid neighbors, an indifferent or hostile international community, and a Cuban-backed Communist insurgency in nearby Angola, an insurance policy made sense. When those threats retreated as a result of political evolutions both at home and abroad, South Africa voluntarily dismantled its nuclear program. It even acceded to an invasive verification regime after the election of Nelson Mandela, signifying its decision to reintegrate into the African community. Likewise, both Brazil and Argentina surrendered their nuclear-weapons programs when the two states buried their mutual animosity following the signing of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which thawed tensions between these two nations.

If the regime in Iran collapsed, there's every reason to believe that Tehran would reassess its options. If the demonstrators have their way and

compel a provisional Iranian government to abandon its support for terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and rogue states like Syria, the threat posed by Israel's nuclear arsenal (which it has possessed since at least 1968) diminishes significantly. Likewise, Iran's regional non-nuclear competitors in the Arab World—chiefly Saudi Arabia and its allies—can be checked as effectively by conventional forces as they would be with a nuclear arsenal. Incentives provided to Tehran in the form of aid to induce verifiable nuclear disarmament and to transition toward a republican government would also facilitate this process.

To the self-described foreign-policy rationalists who engineered the Iran nuclear deal and now brood in exile, this all sounds like so much fancy. “Realistically, the best-case scenario is not that Iran becomes a Western-style liberal democracy, but rather that it follows the China model,” wrote current New York Times foreign affairs columnist Max Fisher, “of gradual economic and diplomatic opening, along with loosening some social freedoms.” Indeed, we have seen some social freedoms restored in the Islamic Republic—the abolition of the penalty of arrest for women who decline to wear the hijab, for example—but only as a result of protesters setting fire to government offices. Fisher's isn't just a failure of imagination disguised as sober calculation; it's bet-hedging. No one will fault you if the government in Tehran collapses and you didn't see it coming. Who could have? But if you were to advocate, much less hasten, the regime's collapse and it survives anyway, your reputation as a policymaker or analyst might not.

Cracks are beginning to show as enraged demonstrators beat at the Islamic Republic's foundations. Like the Soviet Union, Iran's is a repressive regime that sacrificed its legitimacy long before its citizens took to the streets in revolt. The Iran deal has provided Iran with lucrative new trade arrangements and access to assets lost to it in 1979, but it has not induced a change in its confrontational posture toward the West. Nothing will. There will need to be new management in Tehran. (CommentaryMagazine.com Jan 2)

The Iranian Explosion of Truth By Caroline B. Glick

If the Iranian regime is unable to brutally stomp out the countrywide protests raging through the country, and if the protesters achieve their goal of bringing down the regime, they will go down in history as the saviors of millions of people not just in Iran but throughout the world.

Given the earth shattering potential of the protests it is extraordinary to see the liberal media in the US and Europe struggle to downplay their significance.

Aside from a lukewarm statement on Twitter from British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson, as of Monday morning – five days into the protests – no senior European official had spoken in favor of the hundreds of thousands of Iranians marching throughout their country demanding freedom.

In the US, former members of the Obama administration and the liberal media have determinedly downplayed the importance of the protests. They have insisted that President Donald Trump should stop openly supporting the protesters and so adopt former president Barack Obama's policy of effectively siding with the Iranian regime against the Iranian people who seek its overthrow.

These talking points have been pushed out into the media echo chamber by Obama's former deputy national security adviser and strategic communications chief Ben Rhodes, his former national security adviser Susan Rice and former secretary of state John Kerry.

Obama's Middle East coordinator Philip Gordon stated them outright in an op-ed in The New York Times on Saturday. Gordon called on Trump “to keep quiet and do nothing” in response to the protests.

In Gordon's view, no matter how big their beef with the regime, the protesters hate the US more. And they really hate Trump.

Gordon wrote, “Whatever Iranians think of their own government, they are unlikely to want as a voice for their grievances an American president who has relentlessly opposed economic relief for their country and banned them from traveling to the United States.”

Just as Obama's surrogates have repeated Gordon's claims, so the Obama-supporting liberal media have gone out of their way to diminish the importance of the protests in their coverage of them and use Obama's surrogates as their “expert” analysts to explain what is happening (or rather, distort what is happening) to their audiences.

Obama administration officials have been so outspoken in their defense of the Iranian regime because they rightly view the prospect that the protesters will succeed in overthrowing the regime as a mortal threat to their legacy.

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

that it was incumbent on the US to make amends for its previous decades of foreign policy.

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

Since the current wave on anti-regime protests began last Thursday, the liberal media have parroted the Obama alumni's talking points because they feel that their war against Trump requires them to embrace Obama's legacy just as they embraced his talking points and policies for eight years.

After all, if Obama is not entirely infallible, then Trump cannot be entirely fallible. And if Trump may be partially right and Obama partially wrong, then their dispute may be a substantive rather than existential one. And so, the New York Times' coverage of the most significant story in the world has deliberately distorted and downplayed events on the ground in Iran.

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

The longer the Iranian regime remains in power, the greater the likelihood humanity will soon face a global conflagration that will dwarf World War II.

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

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

Their criticism is on point.

In 2016, flush with cash from Obama's nuclear deal, Iran quadrupled its support of Hezbollah from \$200 million to \$800m. per year.

In 2012 Iran cut off its funding to Hamas in retaliation for Hamas's support for the Muslim Brotherhood against Iran's Syrian proxy President Bashar Assad. In the wake of Obama's nuclear deal, Iran became Hamas's largest financier.

Last August, Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar said that Iran is Hamas's “largest backer financially and militarily.”

The \$100 billion in sanctions relief Iran received in the wake of the nuclear deal enabled the regime to give hundreds of millions of additional dollars each year to its proxy militias and armies in Iraq, Yemen and Syria.

It is self-evident that if the protesters get their way and the ayatollahs are overthrown, that money would stop flowing to Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and the Shi'ite militias in Iraq. Instead, that money, and billions more, would be spent developing Iran.

There are many ways that the nations of the world can help the protesters in Iran. The US and Iran's other targets can expose the financial corruption in the Islamic Republic, including the bank account information of everyone from Supreme Dictator Ayatollah Ali Khamenei down to local Basij commanders. They can broadcast anti-regime information into Iran through multiple platforms outside the regime's control. They can bypass the regime and unblock Twitter, Facebook, Telegraph and other social media platforms.

Aside from that, the Trump administration can take immediate steps to constrain even further the regime's access to the international monetary system and force European and US firms to cancel their multi-billion dollar deals with the regime.

There are many reasons to fear that the protests will fail to achieve their goal of overthrowing the regime. The regime is already sending its forces out to repress the protesters through killing and mass arrests.

But even if the protesters' prospects of success are small, there is no excuse for not supporting them, as constructively, enthusiastically and unconditionally as possible. There is certainly no excuse for working to preserve Obama's foreign policy legacy at the expense of a popular uprising that has the potential to avert a world war. (Jerusalem Post Jan 1)
