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ISRAEL'S PERIPHERY DOCTRINE AND
SEARCH FOR MIDDLE EAST ALLIES

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RIEDEL: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Brookings Institution. Welcome to the 21st Century Center for Security and Intelligence and the Intelligence Project.

It is a great pleasure for me to be hosting today my long-time friend, colleague, and combatant together in numerous different environments, Yossi Alpher. Yossi had a very distinguished career starting in military intelligence and then going into the Israeli secret intelligence service, the Mossad. After the Mossad, a distinguished career at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Tel Aviv, then a long stint as coeditor of the internet journal, Bitter Lemons, looking at Israeli-Palestinian issues, Israeli-Arab issues and, in fact, over time the entire Middle East.

He is now the author of an extremely good new book called *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies*. I think that this book will stand as one of the best books written about Israel in several years before and several years afterwards. It is really a study into the grand strategy of the state of Israel, especially in its early formative years, but with a lot of implications for Israeli national security thinking in the years ahead and, of course, a lot of implications for the American-Israeli relationship, which is, as everyone in this city knows, front and center on the minds of everyone these days.

The format today is relatively simple. I'm going to interview Yossi for about 45 minutes with my questions, and then I'll open it up to you for questions from the floor. I'll try to bundle some questions together. I ask you, really, to please ask a question. If you want to write an op-ed, there are a lot of places you can get them published, but please don't write your op-ed on the floor here at the Brookings Institution.

One last procedural thing, please turn your phones to silent so that we don't have to listen to your clever (inaudible) call in.

With that, let me turn to you, Yossi, and begin with a very simple question: what do you mean by periphery, and what do you mean by Israel's grand strategy of the periphery?

MR. ALPHER: The simplest way to illustrate what the periphery means is to take at least one map, just to make sure you all have this in your head, you know, on American maps, the United States is in the center -- world maps -- on Israeli maps, Israel is in the center, on Polish maps, Poland is in the center. When we talk about periphery, we said, we're in the center of the Middle East, we're surrounded by a ring of hostile Arab states. We're going back to the mid-'50s, Nasser is leader of Egypt and basically of the Arab world, Saut al-Arab is daily calling to throw the Jews into the sea, two wars are behind us and a third one is undoubtedly ahead of us, and we're looking for ways to deal with this ring of hostility, and so we look to the -- from our Israeli-centric standpoint -- to the periphery of the Middle East, and the periphery is Turkey and Iran in the north, Ethiopia in the south, Sudan, very briefly, there's a full-fledged southern periphery, which developed over time as well, looking to these countries, and in some cases, even minority peoples, for friends and allies, for people we can work with in order to improve our deterrent image in the eyes of our Arab neighbors who think we're all alone.

If you want an illustration of how alone we felt, here's a poem written in 1957, some Israeli literary critics say the guy was actually just lovelorn, but it fits so perfectly into the mood of the times. The sense of isolation, the sense of being under siege and not having friends, not having money, not having resources, the periphery became a resource, and this was one of several grand strategies that came out of Ben-Gurion's office at the time, and it was a grand strategy, to my mind -- we used the term periphery at the time, in the Mossad we talked about the periphery doctrine. We didn't use the term grand strategy at the time. It's only in looking back that I identify this as a

grand strategy in the sense that it mustered resources of wide spectrum of national resources in the service of national security over a long period of time and over a broad geographical expanse. I can't think of a better definition for grand strategy than that one.

MR. RIEDEL: As you just implied, but I want to tweak it out some more, the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, was really at the heart of this approach, which is certainly unusual in most grand strategies. It is the military or the foreign service or the prime minister's office itself or the American presidency itself that is the motive force, but the Mossad became, in many ways, the motive force behind this strategy in Israel. How do you explain why that came about?

MR. ALPHER: First of all, the Mossad was and is directly under the prime minister, it's, in effect, part of the prime minister's office. It's an arm of intelligence gathering and execution in the service of the prime minister.

These relations, by and large, had to be clandestine. In some cases, like Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia, there was diplomatic representation as well. All three of those countries kept it at low level to keep their Arab friends happy, you know, don't worry, this is just a low level delegation. In fact, our diplomatic representation in Tehran, until the very end, was a trade delegation, that's what it was called.

We sent a senior ambassador there, but the nitty gritty of the cooperation, the security cooperation, was entirely clandestine, mainly at their demand, because they were prepared to work with us, but they didn't want to antagonize the Arab surrounding. So, if, for example, the primary purpose of this northern triangle, which was an alliance called Trident, was to collect intelligence and exchange intelligence about Syria and Iraq, as well as Soviet penetration into the region, well, okay, this is intelligence, this is all going to be done by the Mossad.

In our case there were various missions that were carried out by the

army as well, or even by the Shin Bet. You want to train the Shah's guards, his security detail, the Shin Bet is going to do it. But it all had to be coordinated by the Mossad and it was a very primary mission, not the only mission, but a very primary mission of the Mossad in its day.

When we get to some of the minorities, you're talking about very delicate relationships with the security establishments in neighboring countries, you want to get into South Sudan to help the Anyanya against the Khartoum regime, you need Kenya, you need Uganda. You want to get into Northern Iraq to the Kurds, you need Iran. The minute Iran closed it down in '75, you guys couldn't get in, we couldn't get in.

This was all channeled through the Mossad. Unlike today, when you -- we can get to it later, there's sort of talk of a vague sort of new periphery, which is much more open, and this reflects the fact that back then we were a weak, isolated country and if you're going to develop some sort of relationship, it's going to have to be clandestine, where as today we're a country, a post-industrial state of eight million people with far flung strategic relations with China and India and so on and so forth, and we can do it more openly.

MR. RIEDEL: You mentioned the Trident program, the Turkey, Israel, Iran program. Can you give us a little bit more flavor as to how that worked and how the clandestine part interacted with the more overt sides, especially the Israeli-Iranian relationship?

MR. ALPHER: I mean, it basically didn't interact, because to the extent that Trident produced fruit, let's say with Iran in the form of weapons sales, those were clandestine as well, all channeled, more or less, through the Mossad. It's a rather interesting history, and in some ways, kind of comical, because when Ben-Gurion set this up in 1957, '58, one of the first things he did is write to Eisenhower and Dulles and say,

“Hey, you’ve got NATO, we have Trident. And Trident is directed against Soviet influence in the region and we want to -- we want your blessing.”

He got a kind of lukewarm blessing from Dulles, but he -- we, then, in the Mossad, also got money from the CIA. And one of the first things the money from the CIA did to finance Trident was, you know, there was NATO headquarters in Paris, later in Brussels, well, Trident headquarters is going to be in a suburb of Tel Aviv. And so with CIA money we built a super modern, beautiful -- you’ve been there -- structure, Trident headquarters. You walk in and you turn left for Turkey, you turn right for Iran.

Well, what happened is, very quickly it emerged that Trident is only going to meet at the senior level of heads of services every half year and that will rotate between Ankara, Tehran, and Tel Aviv. So, there’s only a big meeting there once every year and a half. In the meantime, we’d hired the best cook in Tel Aviv, good Hungarian cuisine, non kosher, and we -- the Mossad -- turned this into a training facility very quickly.

When Trident met, you cleared out all the -- everybody is learning something, and for a few days you had just Trident, but this is a kind of comic example of what went on. But it also illustrates the fact that it was important to market this to the -- to Washington and to the CIA. The idea was to aggrandize Israel’s image, its deterrent image in the eyes of the Arabs and, of course, they knew about this. But also, its just -- value as a strategic asset in the eyes of Washington, and we’ve been trying to do that ever since.

MR. RIEDEL: Turning to the southern periphery, you briefly mentioned Somalia and efforts to replace Ethiopia later on over the Somalia (inaudible). Since it is such a great human-interest story, give us just a little flavor of your interaction with the Somalis.

MR. ALPHER: Okay, we're talking 1981. The strategic relationship with Ethiopia going back to the mid '50s has known its ups and downs. The worst down was in 1975 when Mengistu Haile Mariam smothers Haile Selassie with a pillow in bed and takes over and invites the Russians in. And the Russians stayed and eventually Ethiopia goes to war with Somalia, which is that -- the thing doesn't work --

MR. RIEDEL: Left over.

MR. ALPHER: To Ethiopia's right, bordering on the Indian Ocean, and they're fighting, and our relationship with Ethiopia is very problematic. There was one point in -- just after Carter was elected and Begin was elected, Begin went to Washington to try to sell Carter on Mengistu and, you know, you Americans have to go into Ethiopia, help them, and we'll pry them away from the Soviets, and Carter cited Mengistu's human rights record and said no.

This illustrates how problematic it was, and then we get -- the Somalis come to us via various European intermediaries. We'd like to have a relationship with you and come visit.

So, I'm sent to visit under a certain cover, I won't go into that, as part of a certain delegation, and I'm allowed to travel around the country and it's very clear that a lot of people in Somalia don't like President Siad Barre. This is a fascinating country, because ostensibly it's the most homogeneous African country of all. They all speak the same language, they all have the same religion, they all look ethnically more or less the same, and yet they're broken up into clans that just detest one another.

Somalia today, for those of you haven't noticed, is divided into three sort of semi-countries with all kinds of Islamists running around.

So, I get a sense that things are very problematic and then I get a chance to sit down with President Siad Barre. He knows where I'm from, but I don't know

if his aides quite know where I'm from, so this is a kind of guarded conversation, and he wants me to give him my assessment of what's going on in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, which was easy enough and apparently made a good impression on him. And you have to understand, you're sitting with Siad Barre, who is a big guy, little intimidating in his appearance; he was chief of police before he took over, and he speaks English with an Italian mafia accent, okay, because the Italians had ruled Mogadishu for a long time, which was why when they serve you a meal, you're eating camel schnitzel with pasta; okay, so this is where we are.

And he turns to me -- and he was also a ping-pong fanatic, and I was ping-pong champion of my high school, as a few people in this audience may know, and I was dying to ask him -- to challenge him to a game, but I figured this would have to wait. So, he says -- after he listens to me, he says, "You know, we have problems. We have problems with Ethiopia, and the Russians are in Ethiopia, and the Russians used to be in Somalia, but they moved. They were smart; the minute they saw an opening in Ethiopia they moved there. Ethiopia is the bigger prize." And he says, "But, you know, we're at war in the Ogaden, we've got all kinds of financial problems, what do you suggest we do?"

And I am completely unprepared for this question. Nobody back in Tel Aviv briefed me for how I'm supposed to advise Siad Barre. I was just going to learn and come back and report and give my impressions, which were generally fairly negative. "What do you suggest we do?" And I'm on the spot. I can't refuse to answer, and what he's expecting to hear is, hook up with Israel, and we'll help you. And via Israel, you'll get to Washington. And here you have to factor in, in a lot of these periphery relationships, our friends in these various countries had what you would, at some point, actually have to call an anti-Semitic view of Israel and the Jews. They'd read the protocols of the Elders

of Zion. They believed the Jews ruled the world, and particularly, the Jews rule Washington. The Jews just push a button, and they get whatever they want from Washington.

So, you've invited Israel to Somalia, because you really want to get to the Americans, but you know, you're going to have to go through Israel and be friends with them.

He's expecting to hear this from me. I have absolutely no mandate to say this. We're trying hard to be friends with Ethiopia, and there's the Jewish issue in Ethiopia. The mass immigration of Ethiopian Jews was just a few years away, and it was a very delicate question with Mengistu, but you don't want to spoil things.

So, I realized, I can't say this, because I'll get hell back home, and I may screw up our relationship with Ethiopia, so I thought -- and we're in 1981, four years after Sadat's dramatic trip to Jerusalem, and we signed a peace treaty with Egypt, so I said, go to Egypt. And via the Egyptians, you'll get to the United States, which he did, and he got to the United States, and some sort of relationship developed. He lasted a few more years in office, and since then, Somalia has descended into absolute hell, and none of this particularly mattered.

But it was an interesting, for me, experience in decision making, and luckily when I went home and explained what I said, yes, you did the right thing. Nobody said, no, you should have told him to come to Tel Aviv. So, it worked out.

MR. RIEDEL: Somalia really was on the periphery. It seems to me the centerpiece of the strategy was Iran, and one of the things you lay out in the book is that even when the revolution comes in 1978, and the events that follow from it, desire to get back to the good old days was so strong. Can you give us a sense of -- I call it, and I think you call it -- the periphery nostalgia that lingered on, which, you know, in this town

now, all we ever hear from Israelis is that Iran is the source of all evil, but if you go back 30 years you would have been told, no, Iran is the source of all wisdom and the partner that we really need.

MR. ALPHER: I call it periphery nostalgia, because it still exists. There are still very senior Israelis -- and I have a long list of quotes from people like Ehud Barak, Uri Lubrani, those of you who know him, people are still around who were very active in the relationship before the Shah fell and who, indeed, believe to this day that the Islamic Republic is an aberration and a temporary one, and if you somehow push the right military or sanctions button or whatever, they will fall and the good guys will come back to power.

Now, here I have to go back a little bit to explain how we related, particularly to Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia, which were, indeed, the pillars of the periphery in the '50s and '60s and '70s. We Israelis, again, back to that isolation -- we Israelis, to this day, have a need to -- a deep need to be recognized and accepted by the region. You see, Bibi's demand, which is supported by most Israelis, that the Palestinians recognize us as a Jewish state, or the state of the Jewish people -- the nation-state of the Jewish people -- this goes way back, this need to be recognized. It explains our relationships with some of the Christian and Kurdish and Druze minorities as well, and so at the height of the periphery doctrine, when things are going well, there's this sense that the ancient peoples of the Middle East have created an alliance, the people who precede the Arabs, okay. We go back with Iran, we just celebrated Purim, all right, we go back 2,600 years with Iran. The Egyptian, the Ethiopian national narrative is King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. So, this is almost a biblical -- a new biblical chapter.

This is how some people in Israel felt. There were also some people who were just cynical, practitioners of realpolitik. Everybody in Tehran and in Addis and

in Ankara were cynical practitioners of realpolitik. They did not reciprocate. They said, we kidded ourselves that they did. And we still do to this day, because if you believe that this is -- we are somehow Middle Eastern, ancient blood brothers, then who's Khomeini? This wasn't meant to be.

And so the Shah falls, and there are all kinds of Iranians going around making contacts, and if you just give us this, that, and the other, we'll get rid of these guys and go back to the good old days. This leads to Iran Contra, for example, not from the American standpoint, but from the Israeli standpoint, the protagonists really believed this stuff, and the entire intelligence establishment, the IDF and the Mossad said to them, you're dealing with cheats and charlatans who are taking you for a ride. You had a better phrase for it, I quote you -- you don't remember what you said? It was slang, "They're taking you for a ride," and the Israeli protagonists believed that they were dealing with Iranian moderates who had a foothold in power, and if we just sold them some TOW missiles, they'd have a double foothold in power, and we'd be on our way. That was the essential approach.

Fast forward to recent years when a guy like Uri Lubrani, a highly respected former ambassador to Iran, could say to me, and I quote him in the book, "If I just had \$100 million for satellite broadcasts to Iran, I'd bring this regime down."

Now, obviously Netanyahu doesn't buy this. And he's right. And he's right. And if you read his speech carefully, you'll see that he also essentially says, ten years from now, these same mullahs are going to be in power. Ehud Barak does buy it, for example. He says if we just hang in for ten years, there will be a new regime.

I'm going to link this now to just -- very briefly before we go back to the periphery -- to what's happening between the United States and Iran, because there appears to be, at least in some very important circles of the administration, an

assessment that given that the entire Arab world is in shambles, and most of the countries are fragmented, and can't really function, and the U.S. wants to get out of the Middle East, it's got better things to do, but it needs to pin its influence and its interests in the region on someone stable, and Iran is that country. And if you just do the nuclear deal, you will empower the moderates, and the moderates will then register achievement after achievement in bringing Iran back to something approximating when the Shah was the gendarme of the Gulf back in your day.

And we -- not only we, but all our neighbors, all our neighbors around us who are still functioning, the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Jordanians, the Emirates -- share this same concern, when the chief of the general staff -- American -- goes to Congress and praises the Iranian military contribution to the reconquest of Tikrit, we shudder, because this same Iran is on our Golan border and is on our Lebanon border. And the danger of actual Iranian-Israeli fighting in the year ahead, this is probably the biggest security risk we face today, bigger than another round with Hamas. And all this can come together in some perfect storm involving Israel, Iran, the United States in an ambiguous position, having cultivated Iran, and of course all our neighbors as well. So, that's just linking lessons from the periphery.

I write about Iran nostalgia as an Israeli phenomenon, but I'm now discovering it may be an American phenomenon as well.

MR. RIEDEL: It grows on the Potomac. Before I open it up, I want to ask you one more question and that's about whether -- you provocatively, at the end of the book, argue that there may be a case for a new periphery, a different cast of characters, but a new periphery. What's the case for a new periphery?

MR. ALPHER: Okay. One of the things I discovered as I began to -- particularly to interview people for this book is that since the Arab revolutions began,

there has emerged in Israeli thinking -- here again we're not talking anymore about the Mossad, we're talking about the Ministry of Defense, the Foreign Ministry, the Prime Minister's office, which, by the way, today, has much more elaborate planning functions than it did back then. Back then everything was improvised, and we did pretty well when we improvised. I don't think we know how to improvise anymore, so this is highly thought out, okay?

First, is there a new core, is there a new hostile core? Well, if you're going to point to a hostile core, it's the Islamists, and the Islamists are primarily non-state actors. You have Islamists in Sinai, you have Islamists in Gaza, you have them in southern Lebanon, you have them in Syria, you have Iran, the one totally Islamist state, and since Erdogan and the Mavi Marmara incident of May 2010, you have some concern about Turkey.

For one year we had concern about Egypt when the Muslim Brotherhood was in power there. So, this is an amorphous, hostile core. Can you somehow surround it and contain it by going to a new periphery? So, you see here that colored in are the new periphery countries, such as they are, and they're a motley lot. You want to contain Turkey with Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria. Well, Cyprus and Greece are broke. Cyprus doesn't even have an army. Bulgaria is the most corrupt country in the European Union. And yet, two months after the Mavi Marmara, you have this incredible photo in the Israeli and world press, head of the Mossad, Meir Dagan, is photographed having tea with the Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

Now, since when do heads of Mossad have photo ops? This was a message to the Turks. You think you can pull the Mavi Marmara on us, we're on your northern flank. The question is, does Turkey take this seriously or not. It's an open question. Some people think it may. It can't hurt. It certainly can't hurt.

Azerbaijan sells us oil just as we have gas cooperation with Cyprus and perhaps with Greece as well. Azerbaijan sits to the north of Iran. It has an old ethnic dispute with Iran. But it's small, it's weak, it's eight million people, it's a despotic regime, and this is an interesting aside, because I'm sure you'll feel familiar with this. One of our problems when we had an alliance with Iran was that the Shah is your ally. If -- do you know what's going on in that country? Do you dare learn the opposition and study them, risking the Shah discovering it and kicking you out? You don't dare.

So, you're surprised by a revolution and Azerbaijan, on a much smaller scale, something quite similar. There's a despot there. Do you really -- you've got -- you're invested in this country. One of the lessons of the original periphery doctrine is you need better intelligence. If these are your erstwhile allies, and you've got a huge investment there, you'd better know if the regime is faltering.

But none of us knew. The fact is that none of us really understood until the bitter end. So, that's to the north. Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya to the south. Here it's important to point to the Bab-el-Mandeb Straits where we and Egypt and the Saudis have an interest in keeping them strategically open, and that's one good reason for having these alliances. Another is the Sudanese regime, which is heavily engaged in arms smuggling to a variety of Islamists from Libya to Sinai.

Here I would add just one more, if I may, make one more interesting point. One of the things I discovered in talking, particularly to Egyptians, who were around then and are around now, about the southern periphery, because the southern periphery -- this part of the southern periphery is the same as 40, 50 years ago, is that the Egyptians are totally paranoid, for good reasons, about the Nile waters, and the Nile is Egypt, it's everything, it's existence, and so they're extremely preoccupied when they see anybody sitting anywhere near the sources of the Nile.

We were in South Sudan in the '60s with a three-man military contingent, and one doctor, and one communications guy, barely sitting on some branch of the White Nile. We had a close relationship with Ethiopia, the Blue Nile, and the Egyptians were having conniptions, the Israelis are going to divert the Nile.

Now, I have to add, we never touched the Nile, nor do we touch it today. Never, ever, but they were sure something was happening here. And the question that comes out of this is, then as now, because today we have close relations with South Sudan and Ethiopia, the Ethiopians are building the renaissance dam with Italian and Chinese help. We're not dam builders, we're not involved in this, but all kinds of important and influential people then, as now, say, those Israelis, they're meddling. They're going to divert the waters of the Nile.

I would offer the thesis that our presence in the southern periphery back in the '50s, '60s, '70s, had a positive effect on Sadat's eventual decision to go for peace, because he had to realize that, you know, who knows, there may be some truth to this. The Israelis are in my deep rear, and they're sitting on my water, and I can't beat them, so I'm going to have to make peace with them.

Today, if we didn't have a foreign minister who had once threatened to drop a nuclear weapon on the Aswan Dam, we would be well positioned to combine our connections with periphery and core, and say to the Ethiopians and the Egyptians, look, we're good strategic friends of both of you. Can we help you? At least, alleviate your concerns about us, but maybe we can actually do something proactive, and that's by way of suggesting that in this day and age, this new periphery concept is one concept of a regional alliance. I think it's a pretty flimsy one, but it's based on what we learned from the past. Of course, we have another concept of a regional alliance with the core -- Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE -- Bibi at the UN last October declared this was an

alliance. And the Saudis and Egyptians didn't object.

If we can work with two sorts of alliances, one with the Arabs, I think, is far more important, just as peace with Egypt is 100 times as important as Trident ever was, we can be -- we can hope to be a significant player in the region, even though there's a Palestinian issue and it's there in the background all the time. We're all preoccupied with so many other much bigger and more ominous regional developments, particularly with militant Islam, that there are ways we can cooperate, and we can be a little more creative today in doing it as well.

MR. RIEDEL: I said that was my last question, but I lied, because you raised the Palestinian question. To what extent did the periphery become not just an alternative to dealing with the core issues, but an escape message for avoiding core issues? And does that still -- is that still part of where we are today?

MR. ALPHER: You know, Bruce, I interviewed more than 50 people for this book and one of them was Marwan al-Muasher, former Jordanian ambassador to Israel, to Washington, Foreign Minister. He was the -- and he's not a Palestinian -- he was the only person, and I talked to Palestinians, too -- he was the only person who suggested that the original periphery doctrine was a way to get away from dealing with the Palestinian issue. I don't buy it, because there was no Palestinian issue, okay? In those days, Egypt owned the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank was Jordan's. There was no PLO. There was a refugee issue, obviously, but there was no Palestinian issue, there was no discussion of a two-state solution or direct contact between Israelis and Palestinians.

Yes, the Turks would periodically remind us that we have to do something about the Palestinians, but they never let this influence them.

Now, today, really, since Sadat, since '77, early '80s, the Palestinian

issue is front and center of Israel-Arab relations. And this attempt to link up with the Arab core in a kind of anti-extremist alliance against Iran, against the Islamic state, runs immediately into what every self-respecting Arab ruler says, which is, yes, we're cooperating with the Israelis against these major threats, but this cannot develop, it can't come into the open unless there's significant movement on the Palestinian issue.

What this does on the Israeli right is create -- some creative rightists then say -- Arab peace initiative. Arab peace initiative, we regionalize the problem, and we work with the Arab states on solutions that will enable us not to make the painful compromises in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. This is a total illusion, and nobody in the Arab world is encouraging it. There is an Arab peace initiative, it's a very rigid set of demands, and so this gets nowhere.

But at the same time, there are real regional threats out there that can't be ignored, and so we have really paradoxical situations. Our strategic military cooperation with Egypt has never been as detailed and elaborate with officers in one army talking on the phone daily to the other -- all kinds of tactical issues and, you know, you want us to fire at them, you're going to fire at them, we're talking about terrorists in Sinai and occasionally even in Gaza.

So, this is highly developed. We've set aside the Camp David peace with Egypt in order to let a large portion of the Egyptian army into Sinai, and we're not worried. Okay?

But at the same time, there's no Israeli embassy in Cairo. There's no Egyptian ambassador in Israel. Next month, the first guided tour of Israelis to visit Abu Simbel and Luxor is scheduled to go to Egypt, the first one in four years, because other than that, Israelis can't get visas to visit Egypt.

So, this is weird. This is paradoxical and weird, and we know that

President Sisi has a lot of dilemmas to deal with, nor are we self-appointed guardians of human rights in Egypt. We leave that to others. We have pragmatic existential issues to deal with with our neighbors, and we're proceeding in dealing with them, fairly successfully. Same goes for Jordan. It's even more elaborate in the case of Jordan, because of the threats from Syria, so, at least according to some reports, our drones patrol the Jordanian-Syrian border, reconnoiter, and report to Amman what they've seen. You have fairly close -- and that cooperation is not done because, depending how things develop in Syria, it can become even much more intimate and yet -- and yet, the king severely limits other aspects of the relationship, because, by treaty, he's responsible for holy places in Jerusalem, and he doesn't like what's going on there, particularly with all kinds of rightwing religious types who insist on praying on the Temple Mount and so on and so forth.

So this is full of paradoxes.

You can project a scenario in -- which is sort of a worst case/best case scenario -- you can project a scenario whereby the perception of the Saudis and the UAE of an Iranian threat and/or a "daesh," an Islamic state threat becomes so acute that they drop everything and say, Israelis, out in the open, we've got to work with you in the open, we have no alternative. Not very likely and much more likely that they'll keep up the pressure on the Palestinian issue, but they will nevertheless -- I don't think that the level of strategic cooperation we've reached with them, which is mostly clandestine, is going to recede and disappear. That's a plateau, unless we make terrible mistakes like the famous assassination in Dubai with the guys with the tennis rackets and so forth.

MR. RIEDEL: A lot here. I should have mentioned we have copies of the book at the back and when we're finished, not only can you purchase them, but Yossi will also sign them. So, please, give me some hands, people who would like to ask

questions, and please identify yourself when I call on you. Don't be bashful.

The gentleman over here.

SPEAKER: I noticed from the map up there the new periphery lacks one ethnic group, it's not a state yet, the Kurds of Iraq. I wonder if you could comment on Israel's relationship with the Kurds, primarily where you think it might be going.

MR. ALPHER: Am I collecting questions?

MR. RIEDEL: No, let's -- we'll take that one. That's sufficiently -- I was going to ask the same question, so I want to hear the answer to that one.

MR. ALPHER: There's no official relationship with the Kurds; there's no diplomatic relations. All these countries have fairly highly developed diplomatic relations with Israel, and as I mentioned earlier, the new periphery relationship, such as it is, goes way beyond the clandestine level. But the Kurds, like the South Sudanese, are examples of Middle East minorities who came to us for help, whereas the countries like Ethiopia, Turkey, and Iran, we came to them and said, let's try and work together.

The minorities have always come to us. Any Israeli who served in an embassy in Europe knows that once a week, somebody from a Middle East minority is going to come in asking for help -- Berbers, Copts, Kurds, and so on and so forth. And they came to us and the relationships we developed back in the -- with the Kurds beginning in the '60s, with South Sudan as well -- were very emotional relationships, and there was a very strong sense in Israel that we were doing something noble that there was absolutely no expectation of a payoff. It's pretty amazing that these two peoples are independent or semi-independent today. And the nice thing is, unlike the Iranians, they're grateful, and they really are. I mean, they really have a warm feeling toward us and a warm relationship.

So, there are all kinds of things going on with Kurdistan. It's kind of hard

to define it as periphery in the sense that because Iraq is in shambles, they're not deterring anything, nor do I believe that we are any sort of main military supplier; access is not easy, it has to be via Turkey, or by plane from Amman, but these are solid relationships.

You may recall back in August when Iraq collapsed and the initial huge conquests of the -- of ISIS, and the only ones fighting them were the Kurds. And Bibi made an extraordinary statement, he said, "We recognize Kurdish independence." Right? In the midst of this chaos, we recognize Kurdish independence. The Kurds were embarrassed. They hadn't asked to be recognized, they were not about to declare independence, they were going through a process which has since ground to a halt, of a referendum, they never had it, and my interpretation, which I have not been able to verify, but I think it's still a valid interpretation, why do you do this? What was Bibi after?

He was looking at the Obama Administration, which was then beginning with air strikes and air support for the Kurds, and clearly moving into deeper military involvement, and which had committed to keeping Iraq together. And from the Israeli standpoint, why? Okay? And so when you recognize the independence of Kurdistan, you're sending a message not to Erbil and Suleymaniya, you're sending a message to Washington. Don't do this. From the standpoint of our interests, we'd rather see an independent Kurdistan.

Then the two patched this all up together, and we've seen what patching Iraq together means, bringing in the Iranians, and supporting a Shiite regime, which is closely -- or Shiite government, democratically elected -- which is closely allied with the Iranians and all kinds of developments we're not terribly happy with.

But the relationship is good. There are plenty of Israelis who go back and forth, and there's lots of economic activity going on with both of those entities.

MR. RIEDEL: Gary and then Tom.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Gary Mitchell, and I write the Mitchell Report. What I really wanted to say was, just keep talking. So, but let me try it in a slightly different way with what I hope turns out to be a question. If this were -- if this session we're having today was the first of several sessions involving -- that Bruce might lead and you might be involved in, that was sort of a kind of a comparative politics on grand strategy, I want to put the periphery into some sort of global context.

So, for example, when we think about periphery, should we also be thinking about containment for the United States? What other nations have had grand strategies of some substance that we can talk about, A and B, if we use the example of containment in the United States, it's fair to say that it had, despite our significant political differences on almost everything else, there was a kind of American point of view about containment so that domestic politics didn't have as much potential for damage --

MR. ALPHER: You're talking about containing the Soviet Union in its day?

MR. MITCHELL: Yes. Right. So, I'm wondering, the first part of the question is, other examples of grand strategies by other nation states, and second, the extent to which periphery has had either general political acceptance across the political spectrum in Israel, or whether it has been kind of a political football from time to time.

MR. RIEDEL: There are two questions there.

MR. ALPHER: I told Bruce, I have a great memory, but it's very short, so I'm going to have to write this down.

SPEAKER: Take some notes here, Yossi. I have a two-part question. Source for part one is a very distinguished recent Israeli visitor to the Congress who in his speech equally praised and denounced in this country, mentioned in fact that there

was this kind of, put it this way, common relationship with respect to some of the major problems in the area that linked his country with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, perhaps other places.

And we've seen reports over the years that there have been meetings. Former head of Mossad met with former head of Saudi intelligence, those kinds of things.

MR. ALPHER: Everybody's favorite --

SPEAKER: Everybody's favorite guys, yeah. Would you talk a little bit about that?

Then the source for the second part, but a similar question, is --

MR. ALPHER: Talk a little about the commonality of purpose between Israel --

SPEAKER: And as it wears the "tachlis." The second question is, a source on the other side, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who said at one point, if the issue of dealing with the Palestinians can be resolved, he implied he saw no permanent barrier to a relationship. And this paralleled years ago what Yitzhak Rabin used to say to me, and he said to other people, Iran is a very important country, you guys; Americans, ought to be speaking to them with the idea in mind that obviously it was important to Israel post the Iranian revolution that something might take place.

And my question really is, seemingly the greatest victory of Bush foreign policy was the great popularity of the United States in Iran among the Iranian people during the period of his administration. Now, is there, in your view as well, a similar and parallel piece with respect to what one could call potential people-to-people relationship, Israelis and Iranians? There's still a small Jewish community, the Iranians speak often of how lovely things are for that community and what a good relationship that really is.

I think that there's a little bit of hyperbole there, but the world is full of

hyperbole as we've seen, and so, in effect, can you comment a little bit on the future of that relationship or that potential relationship, less from the point of view of what I think was the central theme of the prime minister's speech, that Iran is irrevocably malevolent and absolutely, totally committed to a bomb.

MR. RIEDEL: Okay. We've got four questions here.

MR. ALPHER: Right, and I'm going to take your second one first, because you asked to what extent the periphery thinking was accepted in Israel, if I understood you correctly.

I have a whole chapter on Israeli skeptics -- who back in the '50s, '60s, and '70s, particularly those who belonged to the Sharett school, which was very critical of the militarily activist Israeli policy of launching military missions inside the Gaza Strip, inside Jordan, to try to deter them from sending terrorists who were then called fedain into Israel. Very combative. And based on Ben-Gurion's very firm belief that we had no partner for peace on the other side, and we had to deter them, which is, of course, where the periphery came from.

So, there was a school of thought, which said the periphery doctrine is coming at the expense of possible peace with our Arab neighbors. We should be investing our energies in sending feelers to Egypt rather than alarming Egypt by showing up in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

A very articulate spokesman of this point of view today is Professor Shimon Shamir, and he harks deliberately back to Sharett.

They were a small minority and -- but there was another school of skeptics, which simply said watching the periphery doctrine at work had failed. Now, the periphery doctrine didn't cost much money. The entire operation in South Sudan or in Kurdistan, over the years, I once calculated, cost no more than a single Mirage III aircraft,

which was the aircraft of the day in the Israel air force.

So, it seemed to be money well invested, but there was a point, particularly in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when there were expectations from our alliances that they would come to our aid. Mullah Mustafa Barzani was committed -- all these commitments were oral, I have to add, there were never any written agreements, and since everything was improvised, there were never any staff papers in the Mossad outlining, here's the grand strategy, and here's what we do (inaudible) to make it happen, and here's our annual assessment of whether it succeeded or not.

None of that ever happened. I spoke to heads of Mossad, and they testify to that.

So, Barzani, we find ourselves at war with Egypt and Syria, October '73, and by tradition, Iraq is supposed to send an expeditionary force either to the Syrian front or the Jordanian front, well, in this case the Syrian front, and Barzani is supposed to muster forces, at least make enough noise to pin down those Iraqi divisions so they that don't find their way to the front.

And he gets a message via the Shah from Henry Kissinger, don't do it. By this time, this was a joint operation. This was joint Israeli-CIA operation. Don't do it. Don't muster your forces. In the meantime, the Shah doesn't apply the oil boycott fully, but he applies it to Israel, he was our main supplier. The Moroccans send a brigade even before the war started to the Syrian front, and then they send us a message, don't hurt them. All right? Leave them alone.

So, okay, so a guy like Yehoshafat Harkabi, former Chief of Military Intelligence, former strategic advisor to Rabin and to Perez, writes a paper, failure of the periphery doctrine. The paper is lost, I couldn't find it, but there are people who remember it.

I had to -- in looking at the cost benefit, making my own cost benefit assessment of the periphery doctrine, I had to weigh all of these -- the opinions of these skeptics -- and I nevertheless came to the conclusion that, on balance, this was a strategic success. I found no evidence that the periphery got in the way of peace feelers.

Now, it's perfectly clear, there were peace feelers that a prime minister like Golda Meir chose to ignore but not because of the periphery. She had political reasons, she had whatever, ideological reasons, but not because of the periphery. It didn't get in the way.

As to the failure at the critical moment, this is significant. It was a mistake on our part to believe that when the crunch came, these periphery friends and allies would somehow come through on our behalf. They were fair-weather friends, to a large extent. The Kurds really didn't have any choice, I mean, they really couldn't -- under Iranian and American pressure, they couldn't do anything about it.

But beyond -- so, beyond those skeptics, yes, it was accepted in Israel, and whereas our partners highly compartmentalized the periphery relationship -- Turkish scholars told me there were no more than 20 people in Turkey who knew about Trident, and they're all in jail today. Those who are still alive, Erdogan has thrown them into jail, because they were army people who wanted to keep up the relationship with us.

In Israel, bureaucracy worked fairly well. The foreign ministry knew about it, the Ministry of Defense. The IDF came in and did all kinds of things, so a fairly large circle of people, at least security people, knew about it, and it was accepted, but again, bear in mind that part of the support was just this sense of ratification that we're one of the boys, we're part of the neighborhood, which was important at the time.

But I think more than anything else, it was the deterrent message it sent to the Arabs, these Israelis are no longer isolated, we have to take that into account.

Your second question was about grand strategies. I feel inadequate to talk about the global level, I genuinely do, so I'm going to limit my answer to this: the periphery doctrine, as I identify it -- one of the first things I said was, we didn't use the term grand strategy then, but looking back, it's clear it was. And I identify from Ben-Gurion's day, from the '50s, four grand strategies, which is really quite extraordinary. I mean, you have a country that's just been born, a leader who is totally self taught in the military and strategic arts, and we have four grand strategies -- periphery doctrine is one, a nuclear deterrent is another, a great power, or super power ally, is a third.

In the War of Independence, it was briefly Russia via Czechoslovakia, then Britain, then France, and that intermeshed with the nuclear issues, and since '67, the United States. And the fourth was the ingathering of the exiles. Mass immigration, and here Ben-Gurion radically slashed military budgets. Yigael Yadin, the second chief of staff, resigned in protest and Ben-Gurion said, I need the money to bring hundreds of thousands of holocaust survivors, Moroccan Jews, Iraqi Jews, and give us critical mass.

And I ran into an amazing confirmation that this is how the Arabs saw it. Much later, 1991, when we've begun absorbing a million Russian-speaking Jews from the former Soviet Union, and the Al-Ahram Strategic Study Center in Egypt, the primary strategic institution in the Arab world, they put out their annual military balance, and they write in the very same words; this gives Israel unbeatable critical mass. If anybody thought they could still defeat Israel, that's it. This is a quality immigration, a quantitative immigration, and that's it.

So, four grand strategies, you don't find that anymore, certainly in Israel, you don't find much -- forget about grand strategic thinking, you don't find much serious strategic thinking. I mean, when you have a succession of leaders, for example, with absolutely no strategy for dealing with Hamas and Gaza. Absolutely none.

You know, you fight a war, you pull yourself together, you wait for the next one, you simply haven't thought this through and you don't want to. That's a very sad commentary, but it's also a compliment to Ben-Gurion.

MR. RIEDEL: You used up all the good ideas too early.

MR. ALPHER: That's right.

MR. RIEDEL: There's a lot of Americans who feel the same way about our Founding Fathers.

MR. ALPHER: And maybe, you know, we have a tendency to glorify them, but I must say, in looking back, I was really struck by the genius of Ben-Gurion in his day. It was not without controversy, some of the things he did. But you look back, and they were all successful.

Tom, I'm not sure if I fully understood what you're asking about -- I think you're asking, when Bibi spoke to Congress, was he -- what were the Saudis thinking?

SPEAKER: What was --

MR. ALPHER: -- of the Israeli-Arab relationship? Okay.

SPEAKER: They're all on the periphery even if it isn't "the" periphery.

MR. ALPHER: No, but I think Bibi believed he was speaking for a tacit alliance between Israel and the core Sunni countries. To the best of my knowledge, they didn't contradict him, and from my own contacts with Saudis, I know they've always been very happy to egg us on to take on Hezbollah, to take on Hamas. They don't have to do it, but they're very happy -- you know, do it right this time, give them hell, cut them down to size.

So, there's clearly a sentiment of approval. I wouldn't go too far in looking at the meetings of Prince Turki Al Faisal. I mean, he's been on a panel with me too, you can see it on YouTube. I mean, he's sort of made it his job to reach out to

Israelis and it's never clear to what extent he's speaking on behalf of the regime, but I think Bibi felt he was -- and my sense is, there was silent approval for Bibi's attempt to scuttle this deal, and here it's important to note -- this is my own interpretation -- it's not because of -- or just because of -- the impending nuclear deal, but rather, the sense we all have about what's going on on the ground and the sense that the United States is not aware of our concerns or is aware of them and has decided that its concerns override them. And so, you know, Bibi's speech began with schmaltz, it ended with Holocaust schmaltz, in between was some substance, a lot of inaccuracies about what's been achieved in the negotiations with Iran, including, you know, he held up that famous hourglass with the red line -- well, okay, he succeeded. I mean, the red line is lower today, and he can't acknowledge it.

But there was one passage in the speech where I think he really spoke for our neighbors as well, and that's when he said -- he pointed to three issues, Iranian -- well, one of them maybe our neighbors care less about, one of them is that Iran continues to threaten and destroy Israel. The second is Iranian support for terrorism via Hezbollah. And the third is Iran on the ground, and he made an extravagant claim that Iran is basically in charge in four Arab capitals, it's extravagant, but it's not totally wrong, okay?

Just to fill it in, Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, and Sana'a. He's not totally wrong. And he said that to the U.S., put that on the agenda, make that a condition. Well, he knows perfectly well that if he makes it a condition, there won't be an agreement.

But this is the first time that I recall that Bibi raised these issues front and center in the context of Israel's problems with Iran and what it would like to see the United States do, and I think it is important that they at least be on the agenda. Here he's representing very broad concerns, and if you want me to pinpoint them on our Golan

border, you remember a month ago we struck out at a reconnaissance mission and ended up killing an Iranian general from the Quds Force.

Well, one comment on what's happening today is that the party that then indirectly mediated between Jerusalem and Tehran, to make sure this didn't blow out of proportion, was Washington, okay? But from the Israeli standpoint, we look across our Golan border, we look at the variety of a whole basket of Sunni militant movements, al-Qaeda, Islamic State, (inaudible), the remnants of the secular opposition that the U.S. ostensibly was going to cultivate, and they -- we're not on their radar. They're not targeting us. We give them blankets in winter. Maybe we give them a few additional things, because they're really not interested in us now. Their ideology is ultimately interested in destroying us, but not now.

And then we have Iran trying to turn the corner from the Lebanon border, down into the Golan, leading with its -- and it's no longer hiding the fact that its soldiers are there, fighting the Sunni Islamists, and trying to reestablish a Syrian rule along the Golan border. But it's not Syrian rule, it's Hezbollah rule and it's Iran rule, it's Shiite rule, and we are on their radar screen, and this is of great concern. And this development is pushing Israel to a point where it may have to abandon a very wise policy that it's followed for the past four years, which is to stay out of it. Keep your powder dry, these guys are going to fight, you can't figure out if there are any good guys anyway, just stay out of it.

We may be on the verge of having to abandon that. And there may be a real danger of a clash with Iranian forces there. That was your first question, Tom. The second about Zarif, I mean, here I'm afraid I'm pretty much with the hawks and that, you know, it may have a lot to do with our common background of having dealt with the fall of the Shah, so it may be a subjective point of view.

I don't think these guys are about to change. I don't mean Zarif and Rouhani, but I really don't think they're ultimately in charge, and so Zarif can say what he likes, and of course, I welcome it. And it would be nice if they let some of their academics begin to come back to international conferences, and we could sit down and talk to them, because they are first class scholars and first class people and that's a good way to begin, but even that doesn't happen at least so far, even a couple of years into Rouhani, what ended when Ahmadinejad became prime minister has not been renewed at all.

But my sense is that the basic enmity is going to continue and you have to -- and here we're different than our Arab neighbors, because as Jews, when we hear -- the one country in the Middle East and the world that's still -- whose leaders still say, "Destroy Israel. Destroy the Jews," and that includes Hezbollah, by the way, we take it seriously, and we have to take it seriously, and so we'll be forgiven if we're kind of skeptical when Zarif says what he says, although having said that -- having said that, we're stupid for not reciprocating. When Rouhani wishes us Shana Tova, the proper reaction from the prime minister of Israel is not, ah, he doesn't mean it, but it is, thank you very much, and we welcome what you have to say, and unfortunately, that didn't happen.

And you can do that even if you don't believe what you're saying. You begin to go through the motions. Maybe just that's how a relationship can begin to be built again.

MR. RIEDEL: A couple of questions in the back, sir?

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. Benjamin Tula. If the United States and the other five powers and Iran reach an agreement on the nuclear issue, how do you anticipate that Israel will adjust its policies? And how do you think they actually should?

MR. RIEDEL: On this side?

MR. MANDEL: Thank you. I'm David Mandel involved with Jewish Voice for Peace and visiting from California for a couple days. Thanks very much for the interesting talk. My question is, you mentioned that on the political level, Sharett and Shimon Shamir and others had an alternative vision of trying to engage with the very close neighbors as opposed to even the close periphery in the early days of the state, but yet, you said before that there really wasn't a Palestinian problem, there was no PLO, and while it's true that the Palestinians weren't nearly as organized as they became by the late 1960s, there was Fatah, there was the PLO, they were created both before '67, and clearly there was this massive trauma after the Nakba, and I'm wondering -- my question is really, within the intelligence community that you were a part of -- I'm not sure if it was that early on in the '50s, was there some analysis --

MR. ALPHER: I'm not that old.

MR. MANDEL: Okay, yeah, I didn't think so -- yeah, I was just a kid then, too. But you probably know people who were. Within the intelligence community, was there an element that said, okay, you know, peripherally maybe it will succeed, maybe not, but it's not mutually exclusive that it was advocating, really, let's try to engage and address the core problem here. And this is coming from my feeling that had that been taken seriously back in the very early days, maybe it really would have succeeded and we wouldn't have this horrible mess that we have now.

MR. RIEDEL: Let's take those two.

MR. ALPHER: Okay, the first question was, if there was a nuclear agreement with Iran, how should Israel react, and how will it react. First of all, we have elections next week, and the outcome may be part of the answer to this, obviously. It's clear, at this point, judging from all the polls since a week ago that Netanyahu's Congress speech, which was really meant for the Israeli public, did not have the desired effect.

Whether he actually lost votes or not, we may never know. But he certainly didn't appear to gain votes.

My sense is, even Netanyahu, and certainly Herzog, and there's more than a little chance that we'll see some kind of unity government between them, the reaction will not be a military action against the Iranian nuclear program. Israel will have to acquiesce. And my sense is what we will then see, and I'm going back to Bibi's three points in his speech to Congress, is a far greater emphasis on those issues. All right, you did your nuclear deal. We're skeptical. We have no choice but to watch and wait. We'd like some additional something from the United States at the strategic level to reassure us. It's the perfect opportunity to go looking for more goodies in Washington. But more than anything else, we want you to pay attention to our concerns about Iran on the ground.

And there's a very easy way to make this happen, and that's to start shooting on the Golan. And it may happen in any case, but if you want to draw peoples' attention to this, you may have to do something more spectacular than killing an Iranian general. I emphasize, I'm purely speculating.

We will want -- even Herzog will want -- to draw the United States' attention to the threat on the ground, to the fear that Iran, having reached this deal, will now feel that it has more understanding in Washington to pursue its goals in the Levant, and this will seriously concern us not ten years from now, but a day from now.

Okay, the Palestinian issue back in the '50s. Look, Israeli governments, back then, when they looked at the Palestinian issue, they saw first and foremost, the refugee issue. If you've studied it, you know that in 1949 and '50 when Anderson was sent from Washington to mediate and try to turn armistice agreements into peace agreements, there was a -- Ben-Gurion made a very dramatic offer. Ben-Gurion was

asked to absorb refugees, to absorb 100,000 refugees from the Gaza strip, and he said, okay, and at one point he even intimated it could be 200,000 refugees, but on condition that we took over the Gaza strip, and that the Arabs make peace with us, which was Anderson's mission, but it obviously never happened.

Why did Ben-Gurion want the Gaza Strip? It's pretty hard to imagine anybody wanting the Gaza Strip today, but if you go back then, wars were fought differently. The Gaza Strip was Egypt's armored corridor to Tel Aviv. We blunted them in '48 and were always fearful that -- so that if you've got Gaza, you're much better able to defend the Israeli heartland, and that's what he suggested.

Well, that didn't happen, but Israel did begin absorbing refugees, and this is a little known story. We came up with a family reunification program that between '49 and '67 repatriated to Israel upwards of 70,000 of the refugees under a family reunification program, which was more or less a flimsy excuse to do it, there had to be some sort of link in order for it to happen. And this was an ongoing program until '67, and it was an Israeli effort to try to alleviate the pressure. And of course we were talking then about not five million refugees, but beginning from a number of 700,000 or so, so 70,000, 10 percent, is not bad.

Even after '67, but before the PLO came to the fore and the notion of a two-state solution came to the fore, once we had conquered the Gaza Strip, again there were efforts to encourage refugees to either resettle or to build homes outside the camps, and we gave them cash incentives to do it. You build your home, then you destroy your home in the camps, all of -- I'm not saying that these made any huge impression, but it's an indication that a succession of Israeli governments were conscious of this issue, were conscious that this is a powder keg, and even though nobody else was doing anything, there were no contacts with our neighbors, they were trying to do something to alleviate

the problem. So, it was very much on the agenda at a time when there were certainly no Palestinian representatives who we were being asked to talk to. And when Palestinians lived in Jordan and Gaza, and the Israeli-Arab community was still in shock from the events of '48 and didn't identify with them, it was a very different Middle East.

But, yes, the issue was definitely on the agenda and national resources were invested in trying to make something happen.

MR. RIEDEL: We have time for one more round of questions. This gentleman here in the front.

SPEAKER: Thanks. Yossi, what is the most interesting or most scary or most significant thing you did in Mossad?

MR. RIEDEL: The lady next --

SPEAKER: I'm just wondering if you can tell a little bit about how Israel is against Islamic groups and how America is against Islamic in the sense that the current Republicans have any kind of propensity (inaudible)? And why in your map, I don't think there is any Palestinian territory there?

MR. RIEDEL: Any --

SPEAKER: Palestinian territory.

MR. RIEDEL: Palestinian territory on the map. Okay. One more in the back.

MR. ALPHER: I've got hearing problems. What did the lady ask?

MR. RIEDEL: Why is the map not identified, West Bank is Palestinian territory. You always get in trouble for the maps. That's my experience. I never use maps in lectures, because I always get in trouble, no matter whose map I use. Please.

DR. POPLIN: My name is Dr. Caroline Poplin. I'm a physician. I'm a member of J Street. My question is the opposite of the gentleman's in front of me. What

happens if the Republicans plus Netanyahu scuttle the treaty or scuttle the agreement and there is no nuclear agreement?

MR. RIEDEL: One last question. That gentleman there.

SPEAKER: I'm (inaudible), the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation. I would like to ask you if it is in Israel right now an interest in getting into negotiations with the European Union for a future accession to the membership of the bloc. I see that there isn't -- sense that there isn't -- much interest in this question, so I'd like to ask you about this. Thank you.

MR. RIEDEL: You can answer any of those or just tell us great war stories about the Mossad.

MR. ALPHER: Well, the scariest, the best, the worst --

SPEAKER: You pick it.

MR. ALPHER: I'll stay within the framework of the periphery, and I'll relate a story that is in the book and that, to this day, causes me to wake up in a cold sweat at 4:00 in the morning.

We're in January 1979. The Shah has packed 70 suitcases, taken his father's ashes, and fled the country. And he's appointed Shapour Bakhtiar prime minister, and in effect, interim regent of Iran, here, parenthetically, something we talked about before, because the Shah was an absolute ruler, because you didn't dare -- Bakhtiar was opposition. He was the mildest of the opposition, of the secular opposition, but he was opposition. He harked back to Mosaddegh.

So, you know, you never dared have any contact with him, you didn't know the guy. But the Shah appointed him.

And a few days after the Shah left, Bakhtiar calls in our -- the Mossad representative, and he knew whom to talk to, not the ambassador, but the Mossad

representative, Gaizi Tzafir , who has written books about -- none of them in English, they're all in Hebrew, about the last days of the Shah. So, he has his own take on this story.

Bakhtiar calls in Gaizi and, okay, they introduce themselves and Bakhtiar says, kill Khomeini. This is our request.

By this time, Khomeini had left Iraq and moved to Neauphle-le-Chateau near Paris, where was guarded by a coterie of devotees of one sort or another and was being courted by the world, okay, Andy Young came to see him and called him a holy man and, you know, all kinds of things were -- interesting things were going on, and Bakhtiar says, get rid of this guy.

I get a call from Yitzak Hofi, General Hofi, the head of the Mossad, Haka to all, a man of extremely few words, who calls me in along with a few other people, including -- I am, at this point, the chief analyst on Iran, which isn't saying much because we never thought we'd be facing these kinds of decisions -- and also people from operations.

And he sits us down and he says, "Bakhtiar wants us to kill Khomeini. What do you people say?" And then he adds, he said, "You know, I am not enthusiastic about this kind of operation at all, but I'm prepared to listen."

And he looks at me. And I have to think -- I mean, Siad Barre in Somalia was easy compared to this. I have to think, you know, what do I believe? And at this point in time, two weeks before Khomeini comes back to Iran and takes over, I had to say, we don't know enough about this guy and his movement and their ideology and where they stand and what they will do for me to recommend on a cost/benefit basis, that we take the risk. You're taking the risk of an assassination on French soil, mind you, and I said, I can't recommend it. And Haka says, "We're not going to do it." And that was that.

I later learned -- I hope you'll corroborate me -- that either before Gaizi or after Gaizi, Bakhtiar called in the CIA representative and made this same request, he called in the MI6 representative and made this same request, called in the French Intelligence representative, and everybody turned him down.

And, okay, I mean, why does this haunt me? Because once -- it took only a few months to realize what this guy is all about, and what effect this is going to have on the Middle East, it didn't take long, and I -- if it - and I ever since have said to myself, if I had known then what I knew within months, I would have said, go for it, if it's operationally possible. At least look into it, because -- now, of course, I mean, here you're getting into the "what if" questions of history. Suppose somebody had assassinated Khomeini, who knows what would have happened, but we Israelis have the example of Yitzhak Rabin and the assassination of Rabin changed -- certainly negatively affected the chances for some sort of Israeli-Palestinian accommodation and the effect is felt to this day.

The person behind -- not just the person who pulled the trigger, the rabbis on the West Bank who sent him and who are still free and still preaching achieved something -- they really achieved something, totally negative in my sense, but in their sense they achieved something very positive, so, yes, you know, political assassinations in the Middle East can affect the course of history.

So, this is certainly the most dramatic decision, or really, opting out of a decision, that I remember, and it's very much in the periphery context, and it very much reflects the fact -- and this is one of the lessons I would like us all to learn from the periphery experience -- that you're involved with a highly autocratic regime that's paranoid about the opposition, it turns out for good reason, it is itself inept at dealing with the opposition. I mean, the Shah and the Savak, you know, they could have dealt with

Khomeini rather recently at one point in time, and you don't dare say to yourself, a lot of people don't like this guy. Let's study them, because we've got so much invested here that we need a better picture of what's going on.

Just to give you one example of how absurd this became, in 1978, the revolution is on, okay. Ezer Weizman, Minister of Defense under Begin, goes to see the Shah to offer him -- to sell him -- the technology for Jericho missiles, okay, and according to some rumors, more, more technology, at a time -- now, I'm the analyst on Iran. Nobody asked me. Nobody said, is this a wise thing to do? And, you know, he already almost got the technology before he fell. The Iranians are still chasing after that level of missiles, and if the Shah stayed in power a little longer, they would have had it.

Another example, the Shah was deathly ill. Did you know he was ill? All right, I didn't know he was ill until the last minute, but Professor Moshe Mani, president of Tel Aviv University, knew he was ill. He was treating him. He was taking private flights to Tehran to treat the guy.

Somebody else in Israel knew, but to tell the intelligence level so that you could come up with proper assessments of his chances of survival, no, and why not? Because if I'm Ezer Weizman, or Moshe Dayan, or Menachem Begin, or their predecessors, it doesn't matter -- Rabin, Peres -- and I know the Shah, I don't need any advice. Okay? I know these guys. What else -- all right, there's somebody sitting there collecting papers and analyses on Iran. I don't -- they're not going to tell me anything I don't know, so I don't bother. So, I don't bother to inform them of what I know because, again, this is -- you're dealing with an autocrat, you've got to be very careful, et cetera.

So, these are lessons from these kinds of dealings. If you want to see where they might apply today, they could apply to Azerbaijan, which is also a despotism. All right, we have far less invested, but do we dare study the Azerbaijani opposition? I

have absolutely no idea. All I can tell you is that I wrote a recommendation in my book that you've got to find ways to do this.

Cyprus and Greece are democracies, you can go there, you can talk to anybody, you can study the whole thing. Not so, Ethiopia, not so Azerbaijan, and some lessons should be learned here.

MR. RIEDEL: Yossi, I don't think you're going to top that answer --

MR. ALPHER: Okay.

MR. RIEDEL: -- no matter what. So, I suggest we call it here. Thank you, and I remind you that he's going to sign books in the back, but we're not going to get better than killing Ayatollah Khomeini in any outfit we come to today. Thank you again for coming.

MR. ALPHER: My pleasure. Thank you all.

(Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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