

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

SABAN FORUM 2017

"AMERICA FIRST" AND THE MIDDLE EAST

A Video Message From the Prime Minister of the State of Israel  
Benjamin Netanyahu

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PARTICIPANTS:

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU  
Prime Minister  
State of Israel

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU: Haim. Thank you for asking me to address the Saban Forum once again. This year I want to talk about a topic that I almost never bring up, Iran. Just kidding. But if any of you were in my shoes you'd talk about Iran too. And I'd like to explain why.

Recently the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia referred to Iran's supreme leader as the "new Hitler of the Middle East." Obviously, there are some important differences between Nazi Germany and the Islamic Republic of Iran, but both regimes do have two important things in common: One, a ruthless commitment to impose tyranny and terror and, second, a ruthless commitment to murder Jews.

I'm reading Victor Davis Hanson's new book on World War II right now. He recounts how the world reacted to Hitler's rise; he cites Anthony Eden. Eden recorded a conversation with Chamberlain, and apparently after Munich Chamberlain said, "Well, Hitler," Chamberlain said, "wasn't just a bad fellow after all." Eden lamented, "The hardest thing for me during that time was to convince my friends that Hitler and Mussolini were quite different from British businessmen or country gentlemen. "My friends," he said, "simply refused to believe me. They thought I was biased against the dictators." In 1934 the newspaper, The Daily Mail, admirably quoted Hitler saying that Germany's problem "cannot be settled by war. Believe me," Hitler said, "we shall never fight again except in self-defense." "Deception," Hanson astutely observed, is "the mother's milk of tyrannies." Which brings us back to Iran.

I'm sure many of you have heard Iran's silver-tongued Foreign Minister charmingly explain that Iran is a moderate power, it harbors no hatred towards anyone -- Right. Mr. Zarif: Tell that to the journalists tortured in Evin prison. Tell that to students shot in the streets. Tell that to the hundreds of thousands of dead Syrians killed by Iran's proxies. Tell that to Baha'is and Christians denied any semblance of human rights. Tell that to Jews in Argentina whose loved ones were blown up in their community center by the Iranian regime. Tell that to Americans whose flag is stomped on, whose country is called the "Great Satan" in the heart of Tehran. Tell that to Israeli mothers and fathers whose children are routinely condemned to annihilation by Iran's fanatic leaders.

I speak so often about Iran because I read history. When tyrants call for the destruction of my people, I believe them. I don't have the luxury of discounting their genocidal threats. So, let me reiterate Israel's policy. We will not allow a regime hell-bent on the annihilation of the Jewish state to acquire nuclear weapons. We will not allow that regime to entrench itself militarily in Syria, as it seeks to do, for the express purpose of eradicating our state.

I know none of you wants to see the Iranian regime armed with nuclear weapons, but the JCPOA will leave Iran able to produce the fuel for an entire nuclear arsenal in about a decade. President Trump has created an opportunity to fix the great flaws of the JCPOA. I urge you, in the policy community, to help decision makers in the capitals of Europe and Capitol Hill, to

take advantage of this opportunity.

My friends, one day the Iranian regime will fall. Iranian mothers and fathers will rejoice in the streets. Israel will be the first in line to restore relations and rebuild our great partnership. That's just one reason why I'm so hopeful about our future. Today Israel is more welcomed by the nations of the world than ever before. Our economy is booming. Our foreign relations are flourishing. Our army is more powerful than ever. Our unique, our indispensable alliance with America is growing from strength to strength.

When I look forward 50 or 100 years, I believe Israel will be embraced openly by its Arab neighbors, rather than in secret, in the way it's done today. I see Israel as a world power that continues to provide cutting edge technology and innovation to help people around the world. I see a thriving relationship between Israel and Jewish communities, no matter how they pray or where they're from. I see, in short, a glorious future of prosperity and peace for Israel, but that requires confronting the challenges as we seize the opportunities. We're doing both. Thank you

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Carleton J. Anderson, III

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