

ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
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Commentary...

A Little Pro-Israel Honesty at the United Nations

By Moshe Phillips

Far too often in the past 25 years, the United States has hesitated to stand firmly with Israel at the United Nations, allowing bias and double standards to harden into institutional routine. But that has changed. The Obama-Biden era at the world body is no more.

The recent actions of Ambassador Tammy Bruce stand out not only as straightforward but principled. Her remarks at her first U.N. Security Council meeting marked a rare moment of honesty in a forum that has a penchant for reflexively condemning democracies while excusing or ignoring the behavior of their adversaries.

Bruce spoke out against the “double standards” targeting Israel at the Dec. 29 meeting of the U.N. Security Council in a way that was necessary and honest.

The emergency meeting was held in response to Israel’s recognition of the Republic of Somaliland. This was the same day Bruce was sworn in as deputy representative of the United States of America to the United Nations.

Mike Waltz, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, tweeted that day: “A huge welcome to my friend and colleague, Ambassador Tammy Bruce, on her swearing-in as our new deputy representative! Tammy is a fierce advocate for American interests. I look forward to working side-by-side as we advance President Trump’s agenda and deliver results for the American people here at the U.N.”

That these comments were made on Bruce’s very first day in office is telling. It signaled not only the tone she intends to bring to the United Nations, but also a recommitment to defending both American interests and democratic allies without apology.

The issue at hand—Israel’s recognition of Somaliland—was itself revealing. Rather than treating Israel as a sovereign state exercising normal diplomatic judgment, the United Nations inexplicably escalated the matter into an emergency session, underscoring the very double standard Bruce later chose to address.

Perversely, the world body has long viewed Israel as wrong, no matter what it does. Bruce’s decision to call out the hypocrisy and outrageous focus on criticizing Israel year after year was a much-needed moment of honesty, one too rarely seen at the Security Council.

For decades, the State of Israel has been subjected to an unparalleled level of scrutiny. No other democracy is so consistently condemned, investigated and isolated by U.N. bodies, even as authoritarian regimes with appalling human-rights records evade accountability or are welcomed into positions of influence. This imbalance does not advance peace at all. Instead, it corrodes the credibility of the institution tasked with safeguarding it.

Among the comments made by Bruce were the following: “Israel has the same right to conduct diplomatic relations as any other sovereign state. Earlier this year, several countries, including members of this council, made the unilateral decision to recognize a nonexistent Palestinian state. And yet, no emergency meeting was called to express this council’s outrage. This council’s persistent double standards and misdirection of focus distract from its mission of maintaining international peace and security.”

These remarks were not incendiary; they were factual. Bruce highlighted an obvious contradiction that has long gone unchallenged in the Security Council chamber and in the entire entity. When political fashion determines indignation rather than principle, the United Nations ceases to function as an honest broker. With her determination to articulate this reality, Bruce’s comments were not only refreshing. They were long overdue.

Israel, a democracy, is regularly singled out for criticism by every

U.N. body while its enemies are welcomed. Bruce cannot be thanked enough for speaking out on behalf of Israel. That the ambassador’s comments needed to be made in the first place shows just how far the global organization has strayed from its

mandate and purpose.

Ultimately, this Somaliland duplicity is about more than Israel alone. It is about whether America will continue to defend democratic values consistently or allow international institutions to erode them through silence and accommodation. Bruce’s debut made clear that American representation at the United Nations can still be firm, principled and clear-eyed.

In calling out bias where it exists, she reaffirmed both America’s commitment to its allies and its insistence that international norms apply equally to all. That is not merely pro-Israel. It is pro-American—and essential to checking the unrestrained overreach that the United Nations, along with its respective branches and agencies, has engaged in for decades. (JNS Jan.5)

Tucker Carlson is an Enemy of America By Morton A. Klein

Tucker Carlson is not a patriot. In fact, he’s an enemy of America.

Why? Because American patriots don’t side with sworn enemies, such as the Iranian regime that daily plots and calls for death to the United States, and has murdered thousands of Americans. American patriots don’t give aid and comfort to terrorists, radical Islam, neo-Nazis and white supremacists. American patriots don’t persistently defame and disparage Washington’s closest ally, and all of its Christian and Jewish supporters. But the former Fox News host and current podcaster does all those things that true American patriots abhor.

Let’s examine a few of the many examples of Carlson’s enmity and utter lack of American patriotism. In a recent interview, he absurdly declared: “I don’t know anyone in the United States in the last 24 years who’s been killed by radical Islam.”

What about the radical Islamist murder of nearly 3,000 Americans and others on U.S. soil on Sept. 11, 2001? And the vehicle-ramming attack on in New Orleans last January, in which a Muslim ISIS member, Shamsud-Din Bahar Jabbar, murdered 14 Americans and injured another 57 others to “focus on the war between the believers and the disbelievers”?

What about the infamous murderous attacks perpetrated by radical Islamic terrorists, such as the 2019 shooting attack at Naval Air Station Pensacola (Florida), in which jihadist Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani murdered three American sailors and wounded eight others; the 2017 Lower Manhattan bike path truck-ramming attack (eight murdered and six injured by radical Islamist Sayfullo Saipov); the nightclub massacre in Orlando, Fla., in 2016 (49 Americans murdered by ISIS radical Omar Mateen); the 2016 Chelsea bombing (30 Americans injured by radical Islamist Ahmad Khan Rahimi); the 2014 San Bernardino Christmas party massacre (14 Americans murdered by Pakistani Islamist couple Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik); the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing (three Americans murdered and more than 500 wounded by the radical Islamist Tsarnaevs); the Sept. 11, 2011 Waltham throat-slitting murders (three Jewish Americans murdered by the same Islamist terrorists who later perpetrated the Boston Marathon bombing); the 2009 Fort Hood, Texas rampage (in which Islamist Maj. Nidal Hasan murdered 13 U.S. soldiers and wounded another 31 Americans, while screaming Allahu Akbar! to carry out his “jihad duty” to kill as many as possible)?

Islamic terrorists have continued their long history of attacking American civilians and troops abroad, including killing fans of Taylor Swift and Ariana Grande; injuring or killing 190 U.S. troops since Oct. 7, 2023, including killing three U.S. soldiers in Jordan in 2024; an Iranian living in Massachusetts was arrested for providing

the drone technology used to kill them. And very recently, ISIS terrorists in Syria killed three Americans, including a civilian. With Iranian involvement, Islamists also murdered hundreds of Americans in bombings of American embassies in Africa and Lebanon, the U.S.S. Cole, Khobar Towers, the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon and more.

But Carlson defends radical Islam terrorists by denying the well-known record of radical Islamists killing Americans, and instead asserted that Turning Point USA's poll finding that radical Islam is the greatest threat to America was "deranged" and resulted from an "op" (operation) that "comes from the Israeli government and its many defenders and informal employees in the United States."

He added that "if you convince them that radical Islam was their No. 1 problem, then you are the most effective propagandist in history. I mean, that's an unbelievable feat." During the same interview, Carlson accused Israel's prime minister of "mass murder," declared that Israel was a "liability" and "not even an ally."

In the same breath, Carlson also voiced an absurd conspiracy theory, intimating that radical Islam was not behind 9/11 and that instead it was Jewish Americans: Carlson stated that conservative commentator Ben Shapiro hasn't asked to declassify the 9/11 files because they're "hiding basic facts about 9/11[that are] not what they told us." (In fact, as the 9/11 Commission mentioned, and the federal court in the Havlisch v. Bin Laden case (Southern District of New York) found and detailed, based on an extensive investigation, Iran helped plan 9/11 with Al-Qaeda, trained 9/11 terrorists on flight simulators in Tehran and facilitated the the 9/11 perpetrators' travel to the United States.)

There is nothing patriotic about denying Iran's and other Islamists' role in the biggest terror attack on American soil, and trying to shift the blame to America's true friends in the Jewish community.

Carlson moreover promotes Iran's leaders and agenda, including interviewing Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in July. Foreign disinformation experts and Yorktown Institute's Turan Research Center explained that Carlson's interview was "a major victory for Iranian information warfare operations" and that Carlson "allowed Pezeshkian and the Iranian regime a platform—without context or pushback—allowing Tehran to shape the record to Carlson's viewers and listeners unopposed." Carlson allowed Iran's president to falsely claim that Iran wants "peace and tranquility," and that the Islamic Republic was never involved in killing Americans or carrying out terror attacks against Americans; never issued fatwas (rulings on points of Islamic law) against Americans; and doesn't mean it literally when they shout "Death to America," among other things.

Carlson also let Iran's president blame Israel for "putting into American minds that Iranians might be capable of doing something violent." In other words, don't look at the reality of Iran's 46-year-long war against America since seizing the American embassy in Tehran; it's all a mirage created by Israel.

And then there was Carlson's recent interview with interview with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed (bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani) at the Doha Forum on Dec. 7, in which Carlson falsely blamed the United States and Israel for Qatar hosting Hamas; and claimed that "It is widely believed in Washington that Israel will initiate another war against Iran in this coming year, 2026." (Carlson thus inverted reality. In fact, Israel initiated no wars against Iran; it is Iran that initiated constant wars with barrages of missiles, terror attacks via its proxies, and nuclear-weapons development for the stated purpose of wiping Israel and America off the map.)

Similarly, in a discussion with Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), Carlson called destroying Islamic, terrorist-supporting Iran's nuclear-weapons program this past June "an utterly pointless bombing of Iran. ... Iran is not even in the top 25 threats to us," and again falsely claimed that no Americans in this country have been killed by Iranians (again ignoring Iran's major role in 9/11 and the above-noted terror attacks).

And on June 13 (after Iran had launched 200 ballistic missiles and drones at Israel in October 2024 and was in the midst of launching another 500 missiles at Israel, killing 32 Israelis, injuring 3,000-plus Israelis, and damaging more than 2,300 Israeli homes and universities), Carlson tweeted that those calling for stopping Iran's nuclear-weapons program and who support Israel were "warmongers"

and "people who casually encourage violence." He also absurdly referred to people who support the Iranian and Palestinian regimes as "those who seek to prevent violence" and "peacemakers."

Carlson has also displayed his enmity towards American well-being with his fawning interviews of neo-Nazis and antisemites Nick Fuentes, Darryl Cooper, Munther Isaac and Dave Collum. America's "Greatest Generation" fought the Nazis; encouraging their ideology is an anathema to U.S. patriots.

Moreover, in Carlson's recent interview with Fuentes, a denier of the Holocaust, Carlson stated his own dislike of Christian Zionists "more than anybody," called Christian Zionism "heresy" and said that Christian Zionists are infected with a "brain virus."

Apparently, Carlson believes that America's greatest patriots, including U.S. presidents Abraham Lincoln, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Harry S. Truman, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump; U.S. founding father and inventor Benjamin Franklin; and current U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee all had (or in Huckabee's case, have) that "brain virus."

Tucker Carlson is becoming worse every day. It's time to ostracize him from the ranks of all those who love America.
(JNS Jan 3)

Venezuela, Trump and the End of the Liberal World Order

By Jonathan S. Tobin

As with much of the criticism of just about anything that President Donald Trump does, many, if not most, of the lamentations about the U.S. capture of Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro are highly predictable.

The Marxist left immediately took to the streets in defense of the now-imprisoned leader of the narco-terrorist regime in Caracas with the same speed and determination with which they sought to support the Hamas-led Palestinian attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, or to oppose the Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear program last June. The isolationist far-right, like Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) and former Rep. Marjorie Taylor-Greene (R-Ga.), denounced the president's actions as a sign that Trump was implementing a neocon foreign policy. Antisemites on both ends of the political spectrum also echoed the reflexive claim by Maduro's second-in-command and putative successor, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, that the American strike had "Zionist undertones."

A bitter debate about the American effort to both halt the flow of drugs from that country and to end the oppressive rule of a regime that has turned a once-prosperous and democratic nation into a failed state from which millions have fled has ensued. However, it is about more than just the usual knee-jerk opposition of the left to the president or conspiracy theories rooted in Jew-hatred.

The issue isn't just whether Trump has started something he can't finish or the legalities involved in the American arrest of a foreign leader, albeit a corrupt and tyrannical drug smuggler who stole elections, in his own capital. At stake is whether the administration's unilateral actions are destroying the establishment of what is generally referred to as the "liberal world order." That order is considered by many to have ended the anarchic great power rivalries that led to two world wars in the first half of the 20th century. The president is clearly seeking to topple a hostile government of a weaker nation for motives that may be as economic in nature as they are about stopping the flow of drugs to the United States, let alone restoring democracy in Venezuela. And that reminds some commentators of a bygone era of "imperialism" and the lack of international restraints on such actions.

But that's a tipoff that Trump is on the right track.

It's important to understand the context for the American effort in Venezuela as transcending the usual hand-wringing from the left or Trump-deranged establishment liberals about an out-of-control MAGA administration.

To the contrary, Trump seems to be responding to problems that the supposedly more responsible foreign-policy elites have not only failed to solve but have actually aided and abetted because of their belief in multilateralism. The complaints of the editors of The New York Times, whose editorial denounced the administration for a

policy that was both “illegal and unwise,” aren’t really about the erosion of congressional checks on the use of force abroad. Nor are they about the growth of executive power, which dates back to the 1960s, or sensible reasons for concern about the ways the American effort could go wrong.

Their real argument is about a belief that the United States must always bow to the constraints enforced upon it by the United Nations or the fears of its NATO allies. That also comes from columnists like the Times’ David French, M. Gessen and Michelle Goldberg, who thinks Trump is no different from a superpower mafia don.

It is for this reason that those who believe that the current priority must be to defend the West against both the red-green alliance of Marxists and Islamists that the Maduro regime was an integral part of and the growing geostrategic threat from the Communist government of China should be cheering for Trump. And that goes double for those who rightly worry about the way that the international community and its institutions have sided with the ongoing war against Israel by those who seek its destruction.

There are serious concerns about what happens next in Venezuela, or in related news about whether Trump’s talk of acquiring Greenland will lead to a messy and unnecessary confrontation with Denmark. But the laments for a situation in which both the United Nations and America’s NATO allies are powerless bystanders while Washington exerts its influence and power are misguided. The notion that the post-war order and the multilateral institutions that are part of it are indispensable to preserving peace holds enormous appeal to many around the globe who loathe or fear the United States. It also appeals to those who believe in it as an ideal apparatus for global governance. That remains the conventional wisdom embraced by the chattering classes and the foreign-policy establishment that views most of what Trump has done on the world stage with distaste, if not horror.

But they are wrong. The liberal orthodoxy that unilateralism is inherently misguided is the real problem, not Trump’s willingness to use American power, whether or not anyone else approves.

While many on both the left and the right wrongly thought his embrace of the slogan “America First” amounted to isolationism, they clearly misunderstood what he meant by it. Far from withdrawing from the world, Trump is determined to defend American interests abroad, though correctly understands that structures created for that purpose in the late 1940s are obsolete.

What Trump is doing amounts to a return to what historian Niall Ferguson accurately analogized to the “gunboat diplomacy” and “big stick” foreign policy of President Theodore Roosevelt in the opening decade of the 20th century. This was made clear in the administration’s National Security Strategy published in November, which essentially was the blueprint for freedom of action to defend American interests in South America, whereby the Monroe Doctrine is being updated and strengthened into a new “Donroe Doctrine.”

The assumption of the foreign-policy professionals during the last 80 years was that such behavior was just the sort of high-handed great power actions that led to disaster in 1914 and again in 1939. They thought that the high-minded ideals of world governance and collective security articulated in the U.N. Charter and the rhetoric of post-war American presidents could ensure that aggressors could be stopped and wars avoided.

They point to the fact that the great powers never went to war against each other from 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall—and even to the present after the Soviet Union collapsed—as proof that the liberal world order was not just preferable but an absolute necessity.

The creation of the United Nations, and a few years later, NATO, made sense as the planet emerged from the nightmare of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. The West then faced the need to resist the aggressive expansionism of Soviet communism. But neither the world body nor the fashioning of a Western alliance that sought to prevent Moscow from bringing other nations inside its totalitarian Iron Curtain prevented World War III from ever being fought. It was, instead, the possession of nuclear weapons by both rival global superpowers that deterred them from war, even when confrontations, like the one over the Soviets installing missiles in Cuba in 1962, took them to the brink. The new order didn’t abolish the basic truth uttered

by Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz about war being “the continuation of policy by other means” or end great power politics. Nuclear weapons just made the cost of escalating direct confrontations too costly to consider.

NATO served a purpose in ensuring that the Soviet aggression of the late 1940s was halted. So, too, did the U.S. resolve in Korea, when the South was invaded by the Communist North. But what the architects of the United Nations failed to realize was that the structure they created could be taken over by the very forces opposed to Western ideals. That the United Nations is today a bastion of antisemitism—and it and its agencies spend so much of their efforts and energy undermining and attacking Israel—is not an anomaly. It’s the natural outcome of a world body that is largely controlled by nations and movements that are opposed to Western ideals and values.

The simple and unavoidable truth is that the only way to defend those values, American interests, as well as the existence of Israel, is to go around or supersede multilateral institutions. Their preservation cannot be allowed to depend on the ideas of a now bygone era. The United States, as Ferguson has also accurately noted, is locked in a new Cold War; only this time, against China and its allies in Moscow, Tehran and Caracas. It should learn from the past, but it won’t win this conflict solely by working with the tools, like NATO, that were invented to cope with the challenges of the last one.

It’s only to be expected that the assertion of American power in South America or elsewhere, such as Iran—where Trump joined the Israeli campaign to destroy its nuclear program and which he has now also threatened should it violently suppress protests—will be opposed by ideologues who think international institutions are more important than national sovereignty. The point being is that if you don’t want rogue regimes to be allowed to export illegal drugs that kill Americans or to be used as bases by Iran or China, the only answer is for Washington to act. Waiting for a global organization to undertake operations that most of its members oppose or the assent of NATO allies is almost always going to lead, as it has on so many fronts, to inaction.

Some administrations, like that of Barack Obama, turned that dependence on multilateralism into something of a fetish. The result was, among other things, the catastrophe in Syria (where Obama walked back his 2013 “red line” threats) and the 2015 Iran deal that set Tehran on a course to have nuclear weapons, with which it could dominate the Middle East and threaten the rest of the world.

The argument that American unilateralism will encourage Beijing to attack Taiwan is nonsense. As Russia showed in Ukraine and Iran proved when it fomented its multifront war against Israel on the watch of a Biden administration that was similarly wedded to multilateral myths, it was U.S. weakness—not tough-minded Trumpian strength wielded unilaterally—that is likely to lead to more wars.

It may well be that Trump’s every utterance and act will continue to send liberals and leftists over the edge, no matter how sound or reasonable his policies (such as his success in halting illegal immigration) may be. It’s equally true that there are no guarantees that American intervention in Venezuela will work. Although by not committing to a full-scale invasion, Trump appears to be heeding his own criticisms of the George W. Bush administration’s blunders in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this latest instance of Trump’s freelancing while the global establishment clutches its pearls is that it is only by Washington’s willingness to act on its own that the threats to America, the West and the State of Israel can be effectively met. Far from the greatest peril being an erratic Trump let loose on the world stage, the president’s single-minded belief in defending American national interests is the best hope for fending off the machinations of enemies of the West. A mindless belief in the transcendent importance of the solutions that were believed necessary in 1945 to prevent another global war is not going to protect us in 2026 and the years to come. JNS (Jan 5)

Has Time Finally Run Out for Tehran's Islamist Tyrants?

By Jonathan S. Tobin

For the past 16 years, the world has continued to ask the same question with respect to the Islamist regime in Iran: Is it finally time for the despotic rule of the ayatollahs to end? Yet hopes that Iran might finally free itself have continually been disappointed. That's why even amid the heightened expectations that the breaking point has been reached, optimism about its imminent fall should remain tempered.

The theocracy imposed on the country in 1979—when the government of Shah Reza Pahlavi collapsed and was replaced by the rule of religious extremists, led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini—has survived every previous challenge. Despite its manifest unpopularity, it has repeatedly been able to mobilize both the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the nation's army to suppress protests with the sort of deadly force that intimidated a restive population into sullen acceptance of their fate. Nevertheless, the Islamist government's inability to effectively run a country rich in natural resources but now facing shortages of energy and clean water, as well as having wasted massive sums of money on building a nuclear program at home and funding terrorism abroad, has once again brought it to the brink.

Speculation that the time has finally arrived for the fall of Iran's theocratic government is centered on the latest round of protests spreading throughout the country. An Iranian dissident site, the Human Rights Activists News Agency, reported on Jan. 6 that after 10 days of demonstrations, 34 protesters had been killed and more than 2,000 had been arrested in 285 separate anti-regime rallies.

Unlike in the past, such as in 2009, when massive protests occurred, and in the fall of 2022, when women took to the streets after the death in police custody of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, the United States isn't signaling its passive support for the tyrants of Tehran. Under President Barack Obama, who was already planning a campaign of appeasement of the regime that would lead to the disastrous 2015 Iran nuclear deal and failed to speak out in support of the demonstrators, President Donald Trump has left no doubt about where the United States currently stands on the issue of Iran's future.

He warned that American armed forces are "locked and loaded," and ready to intervene. "If they start killing people, like they have in the past, I think they're going to get hit very hard by the United States," Trump said last week.

Given that the United States took part in a joint air campaign with Israel last June to take out Iran's nuclear facilities, neither the Iranians nor anyone else should regard that as an idle boast or typical Trumpian braggadocio. Over the weekend, Trump sent in American forces to capture Venezuelan dictator and narco-terrorist Nicolás Maduro and bring him back to the United States to face justice.

That should have further concentrated the minds of Iran's leaders on the prospect of what happens to deposed tyrants. If they don't make it to safety in friendly countries, their fate could be even less pleasant than that of Maduro. While none of them are currently under an American indictment, the reports that Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has already planned to escape to Moscow with his family and aides should the regime's forces fail to quell the protests. That's a sign that they understand that their continued grasp on power is not guaranteed.

The problem, though, is that the ayatollahs and the leaders of the IRGC are acting like they do plan to hold on. And the explanation for their strategy should sober up optimists who, not for the first time, are already making bold predictions about what a new Iran would look like and who might govern it.

The Iranian regime is still dangerous for three important reasons that separate it from historical examples of past tyrannical regimes that collapsed, such as that of France's monarchical *ancien régime* in 1789 or the Soviet Union in 1991. Unlike those governments, many, if not most, of those who serve Iran's theocracy are still ardent believers in the Islamist faith that has been its guiding force for the last 46 years. It's also true that, unlike the ayatollah, most of them don't have anywhere that they can flee to while holding on to their assets. As a result, the regime's henchmen—both in the IRGC and the army—seem willing to obey orders and kill as many of their compatriots as is

necessary to once again stamp out hopes for freedom.

It remains an iron rule of history that tyrannies do not end because they are brutal. They collapse when they are no longer able to count on their loyalists to be brutal. They only fall when they are either conquered by external forces (i.e., Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan) and/or experience military defeat that destroys their credibility (i.e., the junta in Argentina after its failed 1982 invasion of the Falkland Islands). Or they go down after suffering a collapse of faith in a regime's legitimacy and belief system, as in the case with France in 1789, and Moscow's evil empire after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Is such a crisis of faith happening in Tehran? It's hard to know for sure.

Their defeat at the hands of Israel and the United States, when their planes had free rein over Iran's skies as they sought out its nuclear and other targets, might turn out to be a tipping point. That was a body blow to a government that only a few years ago seemed well on its way to achieving regional hegemony with clients in power in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and part of Yemen. The Israeli rout of Tehran's Hezbollah auxiliaries in 2024 was an unexpected setback for a terrorist force that for years seemed to be invincible in Southern Lebanon. That, in turn, led to the end of the Bashar Assad regime in Syria in December 2024, a nation that seemed to be in Iran's pocket up until then.

Add to that the growing economic collapse of the country, and it's hard to see how a government that still sees itself as an expression of Islamist revolution can cling to power.

Yet while the casualty figures from anti-regime protests and the claims that demonstrators are prevailing in some parts of the country are a potential sign of regime collapse, the fact that army and IRGC forces are still firing on dissidents and killing dozens could indicate that the regime's taste for blood and their ability to shed it have not slackened.

Moreover, despite the encouragement they're getting from Washington and Jerusalem, Iran's protesters should be under no illusion that this time, the Americans or Israelis will do their fighting for them.

Trump's tough talk notwithstanding, implementing threats in South America, which is in Washington's backyard, is a far cry from doing so in the Middle East. Trump might order some airstrikes on regime targets, but he's not going to make the mistake of engaging in an invasion that might lead to American occupation of part of Iran. Trump wants to use U.S. military force to make the Iranians pay a high price for bloody repression and continuing to spread terror. He has no interest in occupying the country or replicating the mistakes made in Iraq and Afghanistan during the long wars there that Americans grew tired of.

If the rule of the ayatollahs is to end, it will require at least some of the Iranians with guns—in either the IRGC or the army—to turn them on their rulers. Americans, and even Israelis, might be prepared to help them become free. However, they are going to have to do most, if not all, of the hard and likely bloody work of overthrowing the theocrats themselves.

As illogical as it may be for an incompetent government that turned a rich land into a failed state to be able to hold onto power, Khamenei and his followers could do so if enough of their minions are still ready to slaughter more innocents demonstrating for freedom.

So, while Americans should be doing everything possible to encourage Iranians to throw off their shackles and rejoin the international community, it's by no means a certainty that this is going to happen or that even American assistance will make it a realistic possibility.

That's a discouraging thought for those who recognize just how dangerous Iran has become, both because of its status as a threshold nuclear power (or, at least, it was until last June) and its being the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. Still, if Iranian opponents of the theocracy can't find a way to persuade at least some of the regime's enforcers to lay down their arms, then all the optimism about the end of the long Islamist nightmare will prove unfounded.

(JNS Jan 7)