A Conversation with Ambassador Ron Dermer

TRANSCRIPT

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- Ambassador Ron Dermer, Former Ambassador of Israel to the United States
- Michael Doran, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

Disclaimer: This transcript is based off of a recorded video conference and breaks in the stream may have resulted in mistranscriptions in the text.

A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/1964-virtual-event-a-conversation-with-ambassador-ron-dermer-52021

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Mike Doran:
Ambassador Ron Dermer, good morning. How are you?

Ron Dermer:
Good, all things considered, but we've been in a bit of a war for the last 11 days, so it's a trying moment for Israel as we have all these incoming rockets. But as usual, the people of Israel are showing enormous resolve, and we hope that this operation will at least bring a long period of calm and help convince Hamas that it was a mistake to get involved in this in the first place, and perhaps deter them from doing it for a very long time.

Mike Doran:
Well, why don't I just start with a question, then, about the general situation. Could you just give us your sense of how things are going? Why did Hamas open up these hostilities? And are you sure they actually regret it?

Ron Dermer:
I think we're only going to know that last question that you asked, whether they regret it, we're only going to know that after. Famously, Hezbollah in 2006, you had Nasrallah who said after the war, "If I would've known how Israel would have responded, I wouldn't have started it to begin with," and there has been some deterrence with Hezbollah, since 2006, but I would say that that could go off, that's a powder keg that could go off, and they have certainly used the last 15 years to arm themselves to the teeth. And now Hezbollah, from 2006, is nowhere near the threat of Hezbollah 2021. And the problem we have within these rounds is not simply the question of quiet, but is our enemy getting stronger?

So I would say, my sense is that Hamas actually was surprised by the response that came from Israel. I think they believed that there was going to be a minor response, and why they believed that, I can't tell you. I'm not an expert on Hamas. It might be that they thought, maybe, the political situation in Israel would lend itself to try to wrap things up. There have been several, and this, I think, people don't know, we've had four major rounds in the end of 2008, and the beginning of 2009. We had one in November, 2012. We had round three in the summer of 2014, that went on for about 50 days. And now we have, in 2021. But we've had several rounds where you've had dozens, sometimes a couple hundred rockets that had been launched. So they may have thought there'd be a back and forth for a half a day or so, but that Israel was not going to launch a much broader operation. That's my belief.

The reason why Hamas did this, really, has very little to do with Israel and everything to do with Palestinian politics. They want to take over basically the Judea and Samaria, the Westbank from Abu Mazen, and they were hoping to do it actually by Abu Mazen foolishly allowing a vote from his point of view, because Hamas was probably poised to win that vote. And they thought this would be a path for them to essentially take over the Palestinian political body. And that has been their goal for several years now, in addition to their buildup of their military machine in Gaza. And when Abu Mazen pulled the rug out from under it, they were looking for some sort of an excuse to launch hostilities that I believe they thought would be measured, that would enable them to come out as the defender of Jerusalem.

So they took this Sheikh Jarrah issue, which is this [inaudible 00:03:34] is actually the original name of the neighborhood, a neighborhood in East Jerusalem. And they basically fabricated a complete lie around it that was pressed on social media. Most of the world who buys into all these lies against Israel, they bought it hook, line, and sinker as if we're just evicting these innocent Palestinians, when this is really a land dispute between owners and tenants and people who hadn't paid rent for about 50, 70
years or something. And it had nothing to do with the government of Israel, it was going through our
court system where the owners of the property, we don't have to get into the specifics, were basically
making sure that they could take over those properties. And-

**Mike Doran:**
If I could just add, a court system that is famously not hostile to Palestinian, claims against Israel?

**Ron Dermer:**
Yes, you're right, but the court really almost had no choice, because the owners have the deed, and they
don't have deed on the property, and it has to do with what happened. And if you want, because it's a
long form discussion, it's not a CNN interview, but what happened is in 1948, Jordan conquered that
area, that actually was the illegal occupier of those areas of Jerusalem. And the Jews who own those
properties for many decades were actually thrown out. And Jordan decided to bring Palestinians and put
them in those homes, but they didn't give them ownership. Had the Jordanians actually given them
ownership, then I actually think the lower court system would have ruled the other way, because we
have a whole system in Israel that has to do with a law in 1950, about how do you adjudicate this
dispute when there is a transfer of title?

Because there are also many homes that Jews have that used to be owned by Arabs and the state took
them over, and then they gave title to other Jews. And there's a whole process for adjudicating that's
different. But in this case, Jordan actually did not give them title to those homes, it just leased them to
them. And that according to our judicial system, and the prior, I think British or Ottoman system, the
original owners have the deed, and this is the case with the Jewish owners of it. Anyway, at the end, this
has nothing to do with what's happening in Gaza, it just was a pretext that Hamas used to stir the pot to
get broad support among Palestinians for it. Then they use the issue of the Temple Mount, and the
Temple Mount has always been the most combustible powder keg, that's the one thing that can really
light a fuse, not just within Israel, but well beyond Israel.

And it's been used by the Palestinians many, many times, really over the century of conflict that we've
had at them. In 1929, it was used, basically a lie saying that Israel was trying to destroy the Temple
Mosque, was used by the Mufti, was really a poisonous leader that the Palestinians had last century to
effectively create a pogrom that killed the entire Jewish community of Hebron. And today people say all
those settlers were in Hebron. The Jews lived in Hebron continuously for well over 3000 years. It was a
city that had Jews living in it continuously from the days of Abraham. Where Abraham, actually in the
Bible, he paid in coin, I think 400 silver coins if memory serves for the cave of the patriarchs. And there
was a Jewish community in Hebron effectively for the last 3,700 years, with one exception between
1929, when it was massacred, because of a lie about Al Aqsa until 1967, when Israel came back and
liberated those territories.

But they use this Al Aqsa lie. And what happened was, several people connected with Hamas were
connected with basically a Northern branch of the Islamic movement, which is connected to Hamas
within Israel-

**Mike Doran:**
Muslim brotherhood.

**Ron Dermer:**
Yes. Another branch of the Muslim brotherhood and Hamas itself is a violent branch of the Muslim
brotherhood, and connected to the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt. But you had several people who went
up to the Temple Mount, they went into the Al Aqsa Mosque, they brought tons and tons of rocks. They brought Molotov cocktails, they bought fire bombs, and they started attacking the police, and creating that disorder and threatening also an endangering, I should say, the Jewish people worshiping at the Western Wall beneath it, and then Israel, and the last thing we would want to do is go into a mosque. And certainly the very last thing you’d want to do is go on to Al Aqsa Mosque.

They had to actually reestablish order in that mosque, so then you have the pictures that are, of course are broadcast all over the world, and they just tell you what happens at the end of the story, not at the beginning of the story, and the end of the story is that Israel threw in some stung grenades into a mosque, and had to go in to get basically this mob that was inside and using the Al-Aqsa mosque as a point of attack to stop it. Now that an emotional chord with many people, among all the Palestinians, they're not looking to give Israel the benefit of the doubt, they were always- and they stirred the pot.

Then they decided to fire a rocket into Jerusalem on Jerusalem day, which is the day where we celebrate the liberation of the city in 1967, and firing a rocket into Jerusalem was seen as really crossing a red line. So my sense is that what Hamas wanted to do was position itself, especially since Abu Mazen canceled the election as the defenders of Jerusalem. And as that in rockets were going into Jerusalem, there were many Palestinians, and also people who live in Jerusalem, the residents of Jerusalem, as the rockets were coming in there's videos of them celebrating the rockets being fired at Jerusalem, and hailing Muhammad death, who was basically the military leader of Hamas's mission. Now I think that what they expected to happen was that Israel would respond a little bit as we have had between these rounds in 2009, and 2012 and 2014, but not go into an all out conflict.

And what happened is they were met with a very, very tough response that was backed almost wall to wall within Israel. We're a Jewish state so you'll never get wall-to-wall support, Moses didn't get wall-to-wall support. We had very strong backing. And what's happened is the objectives that the military set out was not to destroy Hamas, not to reconquer Gaza, it was to harm Hamas and degrade their capabilities, and to restore security to the people of Israel and restore deterrence. So deterrence is a very amorphous word. And how do you do it? You have to hit them hard enough that the price that they pay is so great that they regret having started it in the first place, and that they are deterred from starting something like that in the future.

Now, how hard have they been hit? Well, they've lost, I think at this point over 200 terrorists, we've taken out. About 80% to 90% of their manufacturing capability for weapons has been destroyed. A huge military victory for Israel in this war is that our intelligence had figured out where their subterranean tunnel network is, and this is different than the terror tunnels that Hamas uses and had in the last round in 2014, which is used essentially to send in fighters into Israel to kill people, or to kidnap them and bring them back. These are tunnels from Gaza into Israel. Israel in the calm between the wars or the war inbetween the wars, however you want to call it, had actually developed a mechanisms to find these tunnels, destroy these tunnels, and also put up a way to block those tunnels, essentially up a wall underneath the ground that's very deep that prevents Hamas from digging those tunnels.

And so that has not been in a weapon that Hamas has been able to use. The subterranean tunnel network that I'm talking about is one inside of Gaza, which is essentially an underground city for terrorists, where they move fires, and they move weapons, and arms and everything else from one side of Gaza to the other. And that would be, not only important for them in a conflict like we’re seeing now, but certainly if Israel were ever to invade Gaza, then all those fighters would go underground and they'd be popping out in different places and attacking an incoming army. So what we did is we bombed this, and I understand that we have, according to public reports, that we have destroyed probably 40% to 50% of that underground tunnel network, which is maybe a hundred kilometers, 60, 70 miles of tunnels. And Hamas probably, that took them, I would guess, close to a decade to actually dig, and they probably
spent hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. They diverted a lot of the humanitarian assistance to putting the concrete that they need in order to build that underground network.

So that's a big loss. If you're trying to think about it in terms of an army, it's like losing the land forces that you have. So you have the missile forces, they still have, and they still have a lot of rockets, but you've taken out their manufacturing capability at which they obviously could rebuild over time. But now you've taken out something that they've invested, probably the better part of a decade and a lot of money in. And so we've taken that out. So now this is a short answer to a long question. Do they regret it? I think they regret it, I think they regret having started, because I think they definitely miscalculated. There's no question in my mind about that. My guess is they regret it, but it also depends what happens now, what happens after? Is it seen as the loss or is it seen as a victory? If it's seen it's a victory, then they're not going to have regretted it. They still may be deterred in the future, but they won't have regretted.

We want the best situation for it to be perceived as a loss. And that, we'll see in the coming days and weeks where they regret having started it and that they are deterred for a very long amount of time. They're not going to change their stripes, they're still going to be committed to Israel's destruction. And I think this is the last point I'll make, one of the key things for Israel moving forward, if we're able to achieve a ceasefire, if there will be a ceasefire, I should say soon, they will be durable, is what happens when Hamas rears up?

When they rebuild that manufacturing capability, when our intelligence knows that they've got a facility where they're working on manufacturing a thousand rockets to fire into Tel Aviv? When we take that out? Do we take it out? If we take it out, do we get the backing of the United States first and foremost? Forget about the international community because the United States is the necessary, but sometimes not sufficient, but certainly that's the critical player. Do we get the backing from the United States to take this out? Or people say, "No, do this, you're going to start a new round of five." If that's the attitude, then Hamas is just going to use this time to rebuild. And it may be three, four or five years, we're going to be talking about round five.

Mike Doran:

I want to ask you about US support and the trends that we're seeing there. But before I do that, let me give you how I frame this, and get your response to it. I suspect from previous conversations with you, that you're going to be sympathetic to my framing, but I'm still curious to hear what you say. So I think that from the American, and I would say too from the Israeli, but I'm an American, so I look at it from the American point of view, with regard to American strategic interests, we need to be thinking a lot less about disputes between landlords and renters in Jerusalem, less about Jerusalem day and Al Aqsa, although Al Aqsa is not a minor thing at all, and the claims about Al Aqsa, but we need to be thinking about this as a contest between Iran and the United States, Iran and Israel.

Now I'm fully aware of Hamas's aspirations to become the leader among the Palestinians, to supplant Fatah as the primary representative of the Palestinian people internationally, but also among the Palestinians themselves. And I'm also willing to grant that that's probably the major motivation for Hamas in this conflict. But they've got behind them Iran, and that's the factor that the United States should be most focused on, regardless of what the local issues of the moment are that may be inciting people in one direction or another. So when I look at it that way, I see a mixed picture. One of the things that I think is good about what you're saying is that, my fear would be from looking at Israel as an American ally in a conflict with Iran, that there could come a moment when Israel is going to have to have a two front war between Hezbollah and Hamas, possibly even in the absolute worst case scenario, you could even have ballistic missiles coming in from Iran.
I don't expect that that will be a scenario that we'll see, but in a worst case, we have to think in these terms, and the good news here is that Hamas has been taken off the playing field for the next couple of years, at least presumably if you've been as successful as you're saying, so Israel can then concentrate on the North, the North being Hezbollah, which is by far the biggest threat. So having said that, let me just get your reaction to those thoughts.

**Ron Dermer:**
Well, look, I agree with you and what you said is not inconsistent with what I said about what Hamas's intentions are and why they did it. And it's an internal Palestinian political issue, and yes if we have to fire rockets at Israel, so be it, but we want to take over Palestinian politics. I think if I step back, and I was dealing with it as an American, which I'm not anymore, I was born and raised there, but I moved to Israel, and now only an Israeli citizen,

**Mike Doran:**
Pardon me one second. Let me just interrupt there. I should have said at the top of this interview, let me just point out that, obviously everyone knows you were the ambassador to the United States, and now you are just a private citizen speaking only for yourself. Is that right?

**Ron Dermer:**
Exactly. Sometimes I let myself speak for myself, but that's about it, but yes. So I'm not speaking on behalf of the government of Israel. I came back from Washington a couple months ago, after seven and a half years of serving as Israel's ambassador to the United States. But you point to what is the U.S's interests. To me, the U.S interests, as I understand it, and interests are defined by the people who get elected, they may not be a fixed thing, and what you think is the interest may not be what the current administration sees an interest, but I believe that it is American interest to see Hamas utterly defeated, because I think that resonates throughout the region to all groups that are like Hamas, whether it's the Muslim brotherhood, whether it's Hezbollah, whether it's the Houthis, whether it's all sorts of forces that are trying to undermine the order that has existed in the middle East, or where the United States has really been the strongest step player here.

And I definitely think that the United States has an interest in ensuring that Iran loses. You mentioned Iran, and there's no question that they are a hidden hand here. I'm not saying that they are the ones who ordered Hamas to do it, but there's no question that a victory for Hamas is a huge victory for Iran. There are two terror organizations operating in Gaza, major ones. There's all sorts of minor ones that run around, and sometimes fire this or that rocket. But the minor one is Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and that's a wholly owned subsidiary of Iran. You have Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders. And this is, remember Iran is Shia power, and there are no Shia Palestinians, they are all Sunni. So people who think you can't have Shia and Sunni cooperate, that's ridiculous. You can have them cooperate to attack Israel, to attack the United States and to fight common enemies, to have a lot of... Sometimes you can bring together people for good when they're confronting a common enemy, and sometimes you can bring people together for bad when they're confronting a common enemy.

And you have Iran working with this Sunni terror organization, Palestinian, Islamic Jihad, wholly owned subsidiary of them. And you have Palestinian Islamic Jihad leaders that openly say in interviews that, "Iran finances us" that, "Iran provides us the weapon" and "Iran sends experts." Which they do, into Gaza, in order to teach us how to make weapons. One of the things that has happened between these rounds, and maybe we can talk about that, some differences between earlier rounds and now is that it used to be that Hamas and Islamic Jihad were smuggling weapons into Gaza. Now they're not smuggling
the weapons up through Sudan, through the Sinai, and under tunnels, now they're actually manufacturing it because they've gotten that expertise, and many of the terrorists we took out, frankly, are people who were involved in their weapons making development programs.

So there are a lot of those guys who they have these engineers and stuff that work on weapons development, a lot of them were taken out in this round, but the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas, they'll have the capacity to manufacture these weapons within Gaza. So I spoke about Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Hamas is a terror organization that's been fighting Israel for 35 years. Ever since it was established. It's charter, people don't like to say it because it's very uncomfortable for people to actually say the truth about what Hamas is, it's not just your run of the military organization, if you can call somebody that, they're a genocidal organization, they call for the murder of Jews worldwide, that's in their charter. And these are people who celebrated 9/11, and actually issued a statement, mourning the death of Bin Laden, the targeted killing of of Bin Laden. That's who you're talking about with Hamas.

And Iran backs Hamas with money, with assistance, and also with providing it this political support for Hamas throughout the region. So I can assure you that other players in the region, while there is this or that sympathy for Palestinians among the broader Arab world, the Arab States do not want Hamas to emerge victorious. That is certainly not in the Gulf, because they want to see Hamas loose. Because, if Hamas is victorious, that creates a huge problem for them in their own countries. And it will only embolden Iran, embolden other Iranian proxies. It will weaken the United States. And the United States, which is already perceived to be retreating from the whole region. I mean, a lot of the story about what has happened over the last few years in the Middle East, is really based on the perception of American weakness. And I can tell you that the perception that the US withdrawing from the middle East, is one of the only golden threads between Obama, Trump and Biden. Because, none of them were talking about sending more troops. Now-

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
President Trump may have projected more strikes and there were times when he didn't, like when he decided not to respond to that drone attack. And there are times-

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
Certainly when he did, when he took out Soleimani. And that had an impact in the region. Here, if the United States is not backing Israel and is not perceived to be fully backing Israel, it's not just bad for Israel, which it clearly is. It not just encourages Hamas to do these attacks, it actually sends a message to all of your partners in the region, that the United States is not going to be there for you. And then, they start thinking about each of them, their own interests. If the United States is moving back, who do I have to work with in the region?

And I think you then cede the Middle East the powers, that not only don't have your best interests at heart, they are working actively to undermine your interests in the Middle East. So, I think if you take a step back and you look at the big picture, there's no question that this should be seen in my mind, a pure national interest view of the United States, to make sure that Hamas loses, in order to make sure
that Iran loses in this battle, and all of its proxies in the region lose, because that's going to help us advance peace and security throughout the region.

**Mike Doran:**

Well, from that point of view. I personally, have been disappointed by the statements of the Biden administration. I mean, they have to be given credit where credit is due, that they've given Israel time and space, to defend itself and to take out the Metro, the underground tunnel network in Gaza. They have kept in the UN, they've held the line and prevented a UN resolution against Israel. But, what I haven't seen, and this has been disappointing to me, is that I haven't seen clear statements along the lines of what you just said. Clear statements from the leadership about what the national interest is and clear statements in particular, about Iran and Iran's role in this and the American interest in blocking Iran. And I draw a direct line between those negotiations that are going on in Vienna, to go back to the JCPOA and the unwillingness of the administration to admit that Iran's hand here.

This is a bigger story than just Israel. The Houthis, Iran's arm in Yemen, they are attacking Saudi Arabia as we speak. And the Iranian proxies are even attacking American bases in Iraq. And you have the defense department spokesman changing his language from calling them Iran-backed militias that are attacking us, to Shia-backed militias. In order to cover for Iran. And I say, in order to cover for Iran, not hold it, not give it attribution for those attacks, because if we are admitting that Iran is attacking us and attacking our allies, then it's going to make it hard for the negotiators in Vienna to reach the deal on the JCPOA. I wonder how you would respond to that?

**Ron Dermer:**

Yeah. I mean, it doesn't surprise me, because they're engaged in accommodation of Iran at best, an appeasement of Iran at worst. So, they don't want to say things that will undermine that strategy. And that it would be like the same thing that happened with the Red Line in Syria years ago. Why did the decision come then, of the US administration to not enforce that Red Line against the chemical weapons attack that happened? A good part of the calculation, and I think members of the Obama administration admitted that, many of them later, that if they would have done that, that would have undermined their ability to reach this nuclear agreement with Iran. Now, I think as you've heard Manny, he's actually discussed this I think, in an event sponsored by Hudson, three years ago, or four years ago. Before, Trump withdrew from the deal.

We think this is a disaster, to do the nuclear deal with Iran. And it's a worst disaster in 2021. To go back to the deal in 2021, is actually worse than going into the deal in 2015, because then people could have an argument, because no one could know what was going to happen in the future. Then, there were question marks about the deal. I mean, we were pretty convinced that we were right, about what the impact of the deal was going to be. But, in 2021, we don't have question marks, we have exclamation points.

**Mike Doran:**

Right.

**Ron Dermer:**

We know what this is going to do. And so, if you are in a policy and I think probably people in the administration say, "Look, our big foreign policy in the Middle East, is to return to the nuclear deal with Iran." And they're not going to say anything that is going to undermine that effort.
And it’s a huge mistake. And I think it’s disastrous for Israel’s national security. And I’ve said it publically before, and I say publically now, both when I was a sitting ambassador and when I’m not a sitting ambassador. It’s a very, very bad idea. And it could very well be, that people in the administration, the president, national security, vice secretary of State, they may actually believe, that going back into the deal is better for America and better for Israel. I’m not questioning the sincerity of anybody. I didn’t question the sincerity of President Obama once, when he did that, when I was a sitting ambassador. And I don’t question it now, when I’m not. They’re just wrong and they’re actually doing something that is extremely, extremely dangerous. And I’ll tell you what to me, my take is, it’s like nails on a chalkboard. For me, is when we hear them say, "Our allies want us to go back into the deep."

And really what they’re saying, is that Western Europe wants them to go back into it. Because, it’s the British, French and the German. I’m not even going to say all of Europe-

**Mike Doran:**

Right.

**Ron Dermer:**

Because, Eastern Europe is already in a better place. But, the Western European allies want to, that’s great. They’re thousands of miles away. America’s allies in the region, Israel and the Arab States, the Sunni Arab States that have been traditional and long part of America’s Traditional Alliance structure. We think it’s a terrible idea to go back to it. I mean, we were the guinea pigs, in this failed experiment. And instead of actually listening to people in the region and hearing none of us. Well, they’ll listen to what we have to say, and then just move on.

**Mike Doran:**

Right.

**Ron Dermer:**

And just ignore everything that we say. But, they understand what is in our security interest better than we do. Nobody on the planet, in the Middle East, except for maybe Syria, thinks it’s a good idea for America to go back to the nuclear deal with Iran and to remove the sanctions. Everybody in the Middle East. Now, some of them are afraid to say publicly, what we say publicly. What was the difference between Israel and the Arab States in 2015? The difference is Prime Minister Netanyahu, when he spoke in Congress, said publicly, what everybody else in the region actually believe. But, they didn’t want to say it publicly. And so, we had to stand up, not just for ourselves, which was the reason why we stood up, because we’re facing a threat. I remember Iran as a country, that in 2021, vows to destroy another sovereign state and they not just vowed to destroy Israel, they work to destroy Israel, and they’re a thousand times more dangerous than all of these proxy terror groups, because they have a sovereign state and they have thousands of centrifuges and an army.

And there are very dangerous force. And what you have and what you had in 2015, is Israel speaking, not just for itself, but really for broad parts of the Arab world. And I have to tell you Mike, one of the reasons why we were able to do those deals-

**Mike Doran:**

The Abraham Accords.
Ron Dermer:
That we did in 2020, the Abraham Accords. Part of that was, because Israel took that stand. And then, when our policy shifted from accommodating and appeasing Iran. Well, I would say, if I want to be precise, the Obama administration had a policy, not of preventing a nuclear Iran, because the deal just does not do that. I’m happy to discuss it with you, if you want. But, the statement that was made that this deal blocks the Iran's path to the bomb, that is false.
And it’s false when you’re playing with the future of States in the region and maybe the survival of States in the region. So, no one should ever say that. It was a false statement that was made at the time. If the Obama administration people want it to say, "We believe that this deal makes it less likely, that Iran will break out to the bomb in the next decade." That would have been a true statement. The price of that, is it guarantees they’re going to break out to the bomb in the second decade. If this deal is a nuclear strategic doctrine for an Iran nuclear arsenal in 2030, that’s what the deal does. But, Obama shifted from a policy of preventing Iran from going nuclear, to containing a nuclear Iran, hoping to buy a few years and a policy of confronting Iran's regional aggression to accommodate Iran's regional aggression.
Then, Trump shifted it and he shifted back to a policy of prevention. By the way, it did not happen overnight. It took about 18 months for them to actually pull out of the deal, 18 important months. But then, once they did that, they moved from accommodating Iran's regional aggression, to confronting it in different theaters. And that meant backing us whenever we were exercising our right to defend ourselves, it could have been Syria and other places that were reported that Israel operated, in order to confront Iran. It's also some of the action that they took, but the main club is they use enormous economic pressures against the Iran, enormous economic pressures. And it's very important to remember. And you remember this debate that happened when the Iran deal occurred. And I think we may have discussed it a few years ago when we were discussing Trump leaving.
When I was running to members of Congress to tell them, "Don't support this deal, it's a disaster." A lot of them said to me, "If the United States simply walks away, this whole sanctions regime will collapse." That's what was said-

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
Because, that's what people were telling was going to happen.

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
I said, "No, it's not going to collapse. The question is only one thing, are you going to force countries to choose between a $21 trillion US economy and a $400 billion Iranian economy?" If you force them to choose, they're going to choose to do business with America. And Trump left when all European leaders were lighting their hair on fire and saying, "What a wonderful deal this was for people in the Middle East." I still remember Mogherini running around, lecturing people in Israel and the Arab States, how this makes them safer. "You just don't understand, this makes you safer." But, the British leadership, and the French leadership, and the German leadership were all wedded to a deal.
But, guess what? British Airlines left, and German banks left, and French oil companies left, because no one wanted to do business. And what they did is they decimated Iran’s economy. And it took a year and a half... Remember, just understand the process, because I joke sometimes, that people’s sense of history goes to breakfast. In the think tank world, people go back a few years. But, let’s understand exactly what happened. Trump announced he was not going to recertify the deal in 2017 in October. It took him another eight months until May, to actually pull out of the deal. But, when he pulled out from the deal, there was still waivers that was allowing you to sell oil.

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
The waivers were taken away only in May 2019.

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
Okay? In May 2018, when he withdrew from the deal, when he formally withdrew the United States from the deal, Iran was selling 2.8 million barrels of oil a day. I think in that very month, they were selling 2.8 million barrels a day. When he pulled the waivers out in 2019, it only took about seven or eight months, the beginning of 2020 Iran was already down to about 300,000 barrels a day. That’s a two and a half million barrel a day difference. Two and a half million barrels a day at the price of $60 a barrel, that’s $150 million a day, that’s four and a half billion a month, that’s over $50 billion a year. Now, when everyone was looking at the deal, and one thing I think president Trump was wrong about, when he talked about the deal. He said, ”They got all the money upfront." No, they got a signing bonus.

Mike Doran:
Yeah, yeah.

Ron Dermer:
That was 50 billion, a 100 billion dollars, which was frozen in accounts. The big money in the deal, is the ability for them to sell oil on the financial markets. 50 billion a year, over 10, or 15 year life of the deal, that in itself is half a trillion to $750 billion.

Now, what Iran do you think we're going to have in 2030? After they've got 750 billion minimum, because as they invest in their oil sector and energy-

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
And gas. You’re going to see not 2.8 million barrels a day, it could be four million barrels a day. And you’re talking about perhaps over a trillion dollars and look at that infusion of capital. And I’d love to say that Iran was going to use that money to establish a GI Bill for turning members of the revolutionary guard. Instead, they were going to use it to fuel their war machine, and we actually saw them do it. And
Trump, because of the decision and the restoration of the sanctions and withdrawal from the deal, he starved Iran, of the fuel necessary for its war machine. And then, in the beginning of 2020, he took out the drive and cost some Soleimani, which was a very, very powerful blow.

And now, Iran's foreign reserves have gone I think, to about four billion, from about $122 billion. Their economy was decimated. But, since May 2019, when those waivers were changed, Iran has been focused on one thing, and one thing only. They hoped that help would be on the way in terms of a change of the US policy. That a year and a half later, you could have a new administration, with a new policy that would essentially get them off the ropes. And why did they hope that? Is it because they had special intelligence of what the incoming administration would do? No, it's because that's what everybody said they were going to do. They said, "We're going to go back to the nuclear deal with Iran and we're going to remove the sanction."

Mike Doran:
You can only assume that when Rob Malley and John Kerry and Chris Murphy were meeting with Zarif in New York, during the Trump administration, that that's exactly what they were telling him. "Hold out, we're coming back. And then, we're going to cut a deal."

Ron Dermer:
But, even if they didn't say that in private rooms, everybody that was following the political debate in the United States-

Mike Doran:
Could hear it.

Ron Dermer:
Everybody was saying, we were going to go back to the nuclear deal. And the argument of course, which we can discuss is, "Oh, this is going to prevent Iran from breaking out to a bomb." Which is ridiculous, Iran was facing a headwind, enormous pressure. And then, they got a lifeline. And their understanding was, we've got to hold our breath for a year and a half. And every day you get close to that, it's easier, because you're almost out of it. And once we get out of it, this will be a new beginning. And that's where Iran is now. And that's why it would be a big mistake, and I will say it again, because it hasn't happened yet.

I think the chances of it happening, I don't know if it's 100%, but it's pretty close. That they're going to go back into the nuclear deal. And it would be a disaster, it'd be a much bigger disaster than even Hamas having a perception of a victory in this war. It will be a 100 times worse, because Iran will be perceived as having a huge victory. And all the players in the region will start assessing the situation accordingly.

That Iran is once again, emboldened. Iran is once again, a rising power. And this argument that there's going to be a stronger and longer deal. No, it's going to be weaker and shorter.

Mike Doran:
Yeah.

Ron Dermer:
That's what's going to be after this deal, weaker and shorter. And you will not see, I predict, despite people making statements saying, "We're going to push back on Iran and other areas." They won't,
because Iran will threatened to withdraw from the deal. And since that becomes the most important thing, it will be used once again, to blackmail people from any response. They're going to try to make a deal, go back in, hail it as some victory as, "Now, we've broadened back Iran a few months from the fissile material necessary for a bomb. And what no one's going to pay attention to, is that in about five years, everything that Iran is doing illegally today, will now have a kosher stamp from the international community. That's what the deal does. And I hope and implore them to not do it, but it looks like they're just racing ahead as fast as they can over that cliff.

Mike Doran:
No, it's breathtaking. It's breathtaking to see how they repeat the same arguments that they were making in 2015, today. As if we don't have all of that experience to go by. And the news media, and unfortunately, a very large segment of Congress seems to go along with it. I suppose, because of our polarized politics here in this country. And with that, let me ask you-

Ron Dermer:
I think just on that point, because I think it's a very interesting question, why this is happening. Remember a very senior member of the Obama administration said about the press, "They literally know nothing."

Mike Doran:
Yeah.

Ron Dermer:
And that to him was a big advantage. No one has actually-

Mike Doran:
27 year olds who literally know nothing.

Ron Dermer:
Yeah, they know nothing, okay? That's how they treated the press and the press went along with it. And the idea that you're going to have all this leverage, that the Trump administration has given the new administration, and you're going to just give it away and remove all the sanctions. And then, you're going to get a better deal, is like somebody getting dealt a full house in poker, three aces and two nines. And you decide on the dealer, I'm going to give you back my three aces and one of my nines, give me four more cards. And then, I'm going to win the hand. I mean, it actually makes absolutely no sense. But, a lot of times I get asked, "Why are they doing this? Don't they not see what's going on?" It is so obvious to anybody who was looking at the region, that this is a terrible mistake.

And my answer is, "Why did the 1930s happen? Why did it happen?" I mean, was Chamberlain, and Baldwin before him. Were they fools? Were they immoral people? You read the historians writing now, decades later. And you see the cables that were coming in from Berlin to Paris, to London, to Washington, it's all there.

Mike Doran:
Yeah.
Ron Dermer:
Everybody knew what was happening, but they didn't want to see, and they didn't want to hear. And the reason was World War I. Because, 16 million people were killed, in what was widely perceived as the dumbest war in the history of mankind. And you had political leaders in the 1920s and 1930s, they were elected with one mandate, to avoid confrontation at all costs. And so, they just didn't want to see it, because they didn't want to deal with the consequences of what recognizing reality would mean. And because of that willful blindness, they created this situation where 60 million, not 16 million, 60 million people died, including one third of the Jewish people, 6 million Jews.
And now, I think because of Iraq, and because of Afghanistan, and because of a war weariness, which is understandable. Nobody just wants to deal with any problem in the Middle East. And it Iran that is pushing through that. And what you have is American leadership. The idea of withdrawing all military forces from the Middle East and as I said, that extends, it's not just on one side of the political aisle. No one wants to get involved and people don't want to deal with the truth about Iran, because that would mean you'd have to confront it. If you understand that Iran is a revolutionary power, you got a bunch of radicals and fanatics who are running that country, who hate America and are committed not only to Israel's destruction, but to take over the entire Middle East, take America out.
And hopefully, they think, to even attack America. And they're building ICBMs, it's not something to say, for fun.

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
Israel is on the same continent as Iran, those intercontinental ballistic missiles, they're not for Israel, they're for you. And only in cartoons, do you put TNT on ICBM's. In the real world, you put nuclear weapons on ICBM's and they want to be able to reach Washington and to reach New York, because then they think you'll be deterred from attacking them. You'll be deterred from attack, and what their plans for Israel, in my view, is they want to turn Tel Aviv into Seoul.

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
That's what they want to do. What does that mean? Think about North Korea. Why doesn't America go after North Korea? You can't militarily stop them? You can. But, the price could be Seoul and the price could be Tokyo-

Mike Doran:
Seoul, or Tokyo. Yeah.

Ron Dermer:
Exactly, right. So, what do they do? They want to have a nuclear umbrella, and then they want to surround Israel with these proxies in Syria, through militias there and in Lebanon, through Hezbollah, in Yemen through Houthis and also in Gaza. And to create a situation where no one can respond to that grave danger, because the price of responding to Iran is disaster in Israel. And I'm telling you, the same
people who were making the argument years ago. Well, here’s what they said in 2015, and you remember it, "We will have every option available to us then, as we have today. So, let's just take this tan down the road for the next 10 years."

Mike Doran:
Right.

Ron Dermer:
Which of course, it doesn't, because they can do R & D on centrifuges, and they advanced their nuclear weapons program under the deal. But their argument was we'll kick the can down the road for 10 years, and guess what? We'll have all the options available to us today. No, you won't. Because by then, Tel Aviv will be sold. And Israel is not prepared to allow Tel Aviv to be sold, which is why the Prime Minister is determined to take action to prevent Iran from entrenching itself in Syria, to take action from preventing sophisticated weaponry from going to Hezbollah, to take action against Hamas in order to degrade them, and to work on those other threats. Because we don't want them to put a noose around our neck, as the world applauds a deal that does nothing. And then in five, 10 years from now, Iran is able to break out not just the one bomb, but to an entire nuclear arsenal.

Mike Doran:
Do you think that the entire national security elite in Israel is of one mind about this question? Because I'm really struck, as somebody who, I don't think there's a word you have spoken today that I disagree with, except I think you were a little bit unfair to Chamberlain, but that's an issue we can discuss some other time.

Ron Dermer:
If you're willing to defend Chamberlain, you are definitely a contrarian voice.

Mike Doran:
For the record-

Ron Dermer:
Churchill had a nice word to say [crosstalk 00:47:17].

Mike Doran:
Chamberlain has a better, there's a better case to be made for Chamberlain than these guys now in the Biden administration. Because Chamberlain saw his appeasement policy as a way of buying time in order to rearm, because he recognized the threat. But anyway, forget about that.

Ron Dermer:
Israel's national security establishment.

Mike Doran:
Yeah, I agree with you. I agree with you, but I find... I don't want to say an absence, but there are very few people in Israel who speak as clearly as you and the Prime Minister do about the Iranian threat. And for understandable reasons, some of them are understandable. You can see in a moment like this,
you've got fighting on your streets in Israel, you've got bombardment from Gaza, you've got all of the
debate about the Palestinian issue which seizes everyone's mind. People have a tendency to get buried
in the local stuff, for good reason, they live there. But I wonder, does the national security elite see it as
clearly as you do? And if Yair Lapid becomes Prime Minister, can we expect this kind of clarity from him?

**Ron Dermer:**
I haven't had an in-depth discussion with Yair Lapid, so I don't know what he thinks. But I would say that
in my experience, and I've been 12 years versus a senior advisor to the Prime Minister, and then seven
and a half years as ambassador, meaning dealing with these decision-making forums, the Prime Minister
really is unique in his strategic understanding of the problem. And also, I think there are different
reasons why people will take another view. If you go back in the specifics let's say, of 2015, no one in
Israel thought it was a good deal. People thought it was a bad deal. The question became, should we
publicly oppose it? Because by publicly opposing it-

**Mike Doran:**
Managing Washington is the question.

**Ron Dermer:**
Exactly. Because then we're going to have friction with Washington, and if we do this we're going to
rupture the relations, that was kind of the discussion. And I had a different approach to it because I
actually feel very connected to the United States. When I say that we're family, we are family. I think
we're an extension. And we're a projection of American power and interest in the Middle East, and
that's how all our enemies see us. And I think sometimes families can disagree. And guess what?
Sometimes you have very tough fights with your family, but you get over it because you're family. And
that's how I see this relationship, and I think it was very important for Israel to take that stand, because I
think the worst thing for Israel and its relations with the United States long term, is to weaken itself,
because then we're not going to be a valuable ally to anybody.

Israel, if you know something about the history of the US's relations, and part of it is romanticizing the
relations, and believing that Israel was always a strategic ally of the United States. That is simply not
true. I know something about the history of the relationship. Everyone talks about Truman and that 11
minutes after the state of Israel came into existence, Truman became the first leader to recognize the
newly established state. What they don't tell you at those events, whether it's a Jewish event or a
Christian event or something like that, they don't tell you that yeah, the United States also had an arms
embargo on Israel in 1948.

And we fought the '48 war with Czech rifles, and we fought the '67 war with French planes. Not because
the Czechs make better rifles than the Americans, or the French make better planes, because the United
States wouldn't sell us anything. And then the Kennedy administration was the first one to sell us any
weapon system, but we didn't really have real military assistance until we won on the battlefield, until
we proved ourself a good ally during the Cold War against Soviet client states. So, the United States was
investing in winners.

And when Israel weakens itself and makes decisions because of American pressure, and they think that
if we fight this, we're going to end up actually undermining support for Israel in the United States, I think
just the opposite. The worst thing that Israel can do is become a weak ally. The stronger Israel is, the
better an ally we will be to the United States. And I honestly, I said this in the first speech I was
privileged to give on our Independence Day as Israel's sitting ambassador. I said, "Israel will be the most
important ally of the United States in the 21st century, the single most important ally." Now, that's a lot
to say for an ambassador of a country the size of New Jersey, which has a population all of, then it was eight and a half million, now we've passed nine million people.

But I'll explain to you why I say it, and it's very important to understand it, because it's lost under differences between this administration and that administration, on this or that issue, or even agreements between this or that administration on this or that issue. If you're the President of the United States, I'm going to give you, I don't know if it's a promotion or a demotion, to make Mike the President of the United States. If you're the President of United States and you're looking around the world and you say, "I need one security partner, I can only have one for the next 50 years." Who are you going to choose?

And when you think of a security partner, think about a military that can defend itself by itself, that you don't have to send your sons and daughters to go fight for it. Think about a country with a powerful intelligence capability, that can provide you valuable intelligence and provide your other allies intelligence. Think about a country with a cyber capability that's becoming more and more important in warfare. And think about a country that can develop weapons, offensive, and defensive weapons with you. Now, who are you going to choose? Now, America has many allies around the world. You've got French, and you've got Germans, and you've got Australia and you've got Canada, none of those countries match Israel on the categories that I just said. There's only one country, you're down to two, now you're with Israel and Great Britain, if you're looking ahead 50 years. Because Israel's emerging along with the US, China and Russia, as the other power when it comes to cyber, and also the British are there as well.

Now, take the second category: technology. People who understand what US national interests are moving ahead, I believe, have to recognize the threat that China poses, and that America would lose its technological preeminence. That will be a grave danger to the United States, and its standing in the world. If you're looking around the world for any country to partner with, to ensure that United States remains the preeminent technological power in the world, it's not Germany, and it's not Japan, and it's not Australia, and it's not Canada and it's not even Britain. It is actually Israel. On all the cutting-edge technologies, not just we have drip irrigation and we're very good at conserving water. I'm talking about 10% of global private investment is in cyber in Israel. I'm talking about autonomous vehicles, I'm talking about artificial intelligence, where again the powers are China, Russia, the United States and Israel.

So, when you look at just the national interest, working with Israel I think over the long term, is going to become more and more obvious about what Israel brings to the table. Because our relationship in the past was at the beginning, first two decades, Israel got very little and gave very little. Then I think Israel got more from the United States, and gave something to the United States, as being this pawn in this chess board. I think we're on a trajectory right now where Israel is giving a lot to the United States. When it came to ISIS, we were your number one intelligence partner in the world in confronting them. And I think when it comes to other weapons systems that are very important for America to maintain its edge in the future, we're very important.

And of course, the United States gives so much to Israel, not only the generous military assistance and maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge, there's the veto at the UN Security Council, there's the economic partnership we have. So, there's no question that the US is our most important ally, but I think Israel's role as an ally in the United States is important. And to the extent that you don't want to be in the Middle East, if you don't want to have troops in the Middle East, Israel is more important, not less important. And I think with those two factors, that I think extends across the political spectrum in the United States, the idea that we don't want to have ground forces in the Middle East, and the idea that I think is also bipartisan, that China represents a potential problem in the future. I think both position Israel as being a more and more important ally.
And that truth that I just told you right now, it was sort of buried under the disagreements of the Obama administration, and it was somewhat buried under the agreements of the Trump administration. And I think that's the fundamental forces that are joining us together. Now, does everybody in Israel understand... Everybody understands in Israel, the dangers of a nuclear armed Iran. There is in some quarters, a naivete that all of a sudden the world will come in and stop it. And I'll just tell you a specific example that happened to me, and I won't tell the person's name because he's still in our system, and it's not a personal issue for me. I spoke to a very senior military official about four years ago, and it was when Trump got elected but before he took office.

And he asked to see me, and he said to me, "I don't think Trump should withdraw from the nuclear deal." He said, "I think we should focus together on pushing back Iran in its regional aggression, because right now it'll be a few years, we can deal with that after, but I don't think he should do it right now."

And I said, "Let me ask you something: you really think that an administration that stays in a nuclear deal is going to take a confrontational posture in Iran in the region? It doesn't work that way." If they're confronting Iran on the deal, they will confront them in other areas. If they're not, they won't. And it will actually make it less likely that you'll have that. And what you just said, why don't you hear certain statements that you'd like to hear from the administration, despite many positive things, is because they're focused on the issue of the nuclear deal, and getting back in and not doing anything to undermine it.

So, they would have that same view, a different administration, on should we roll back Iran and Syria? Should we roll back Iran and Yemen? No, it'll all be subordinated to this nuclear deal. But the other thing I said to him was, "What do you think is going to happen in 12 years? In 12 years, according to the nuclear deal, the breakout time," in year 12, I should say, of the nuclear deal. This was only 10 years later.

Mike Doran:
In 2030.

Ron Dermer:
Well, 2030 is year 15. But in 2027 of the nuclear deal, the breakout times close to zero. That's not what I say, that's what Obama said when he gave an interview to NPR, and in a moment of candor, he said the truth. He said, "In year 12, the breakout time is zero." Why? Because Iran is doing R and D on advanced centrifuges over the next decade, and then in year 10, they start being able to actually place those centrifuges in place. And once you put, they have IR two, four, six, eight. Once you put the more advanced centrifuges that can spin uranium faster, the breakout time starts going down very, very dramatically. From that year, it gets cut down, and by year 12 it's nothing.

Now, it's still technically illegal for them for the next three years to have big stockpots, but the breakout time is zero. And I asked a senior military person, I said to him, "What do you think's going to happen in year 12 of the deal? Iran then doesn't need to break in or sneak into the nuclear club, they'll just walk in." And his response was, "The world won't let that happen." Now, you're laughing but that was an honest response, which is concerning. Let me tell you this: the Prime Minister has a deep understanding of history. I think he's probably the most well-read leader in the world. I would bet that against... He's somebody who as a sitting Prime Minister, I would say reads two to three books a week, as a sitting Prime Minister. And I'm not talking about short books, "Spot went up the tree," I'm talking about-

Mike Doran:
He has time to do that because Israeli politics are so quiet, he doesn't have to think about-
Ron Dermer:
That's right, exactly. No, the problem is he doesn't play golf, he doesn't have hobbies, he just does one thing: he reads. And he has a deep understanding of Jewish history. And the idea that the world will not let it happen, is not a sentence that would ever be uttered by Prime Minister Netanyahu. And frankly, it's never a sense that I would utter. There are people in Israel who may believe that, and they may believe it because people are telling them that in the US administration or elsewhere, "We'll take action, and we'll stop it." I don't believe that at all. The world did not lift a finger to save Jews 75 years ago, I think Israel has to be the protector, to do everything to secure the Jewish future, and we cannot allow a regime that calls and works for our destruction to develop the means to achieve that goal.

And some of this is about a kind of preventative wisdom, and hope that this won't happen. And also, how do you direct your military? Are you focused on the near threat, which is dealing with Palestinians, and Palestinians in Gaza, and Palestinians in today's scenario, the West Bank, and Hezbollah, or are you dealing with the strategic threat? And the Prime Minister has always been focused on the strategic threat. And sometimes when I hear my colleagues say the greatest threat facing Israel is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I put them in one category, one category. I think that's a danger, I think that's a threat, but Israel faces one existential threat, one threat to the survival of the country. And it's not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it's a bunch of fanatics in Iran that get nuclear weapons. That's the threat to the survival of Israel.

The other threats are various grades difficult, serious, Hezbollah is certainly a serious threat and a strategic threat, but an existential threat is something else. And the Prime Minister, through all the years I've known him, this is going back over 20 years, has always kept his eye on that ball and that danger. And that's why he has, [inaudible 01:01:56]. I don't think any other Israeli leader would have done what he did, I'd love to believe that was the case, frankly, it would make me sleep better at night knowing that everybody would do the same. I do not believe they would have done the same thing, and I don't think they would have done it because of his deep understanding of global politics, of power, and of history, and of the danger that Iran presents us, and what he must do as his responsibility as Israel's Prime Minister to thwart that threat. I don't think, by the way, it's not something new. I think if Menachem Begin were not Prime Minister in 1981, I don't think that nuclear reactor in Osirak would have been destroyed.

Mike Doran:
Look, it's very hard for an ally of the United States to defy it on one of its major priorities in the region. It's very hard. Very few countries are capable of doing that, very few leaders in history have been capable of doing that. It's a path that's fraught with difficulty.

Ron Dermer:
Well, I would say I have... I was asked what was the highlight of my time as being ambassador, and it sometimes shocked people that my answer to them was when the Prime Minister gave that speech to Congress. Because there were a lot of other things that happened when I was ambassador. We were able to reach a $38 billion MOU with the Obama administration on long-term military assistance. You had the historic decision of Jerusalem, of recognizing Jerusalem as our capital and moving the embassy. You had the historic decision of the Golan Heights, recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and you had the Abraham Accords. But for me, the reason why that decision was so important connects to what you said, how difficult a decision that is to be able to go and to stand alone on an issue that is the number one issue, foreign policy issue, of a sitting American President, of the world's greatest power.
So, it's not that you're not conscious of how difficult and hard it is to do that, but for me, it is something that had to be done because it was a matter of life and death for Israel. And if the Prime Minister of Israel would have not given that speech, I do not think he would have been worthy of being Prime Minister of Israel. Because one of the changes that have happened to the conditions of the Jews, and maybe we'll talk about other things, and anti-Semitism, and a lot of other things that are stirring. The change that happened when the Jews became a sovereign country, when Jewish people became a sovereign country again after 2000 years, is it gave us power. And it gave us, in my sense, the meaning of our sovereignty is really three things: it gave us a voice, it gave us a refuge, and it gave us a shield. People understand the refuge, Jews have to be able to come from around the world if they're fleeing persecution, for Israel as their national homeland. People even understand Israel giving a shield, where Jews have to have the ability to defend themselves. But it was the voice that the Prime Minister was exercising there. Because if you know the history of what happened in the 1930s, you know that Jewish communities were begging Jan Karski, this Polish diplomat, to go to Washington and to say a few words to Roosevelt about what was happening to the Jews in Europe. And we have a sovereign state, and we have a responsibility as a sovereign state to speak out on an issue that deals with the very survival of the country. Imagine an American President, who believes that something represents a threat to America, to the survival of America, not to the security of America, to the survival. You think that the President would not go to any parliament in the world to speak out?

Mike Doran:
I'll tell you what's amazing about it. Pardon me for interrupting you, but what's amazing to me about it is the resonance of his voice in the United States. If you just look at the world, one of the things that travels least well across borders is the voice of a politician. There are very few, they're not like rock music stars, they're very much tied to a place. But I noticed, because I was making these arguments about Iran back in 2013, 2014, 2015. I know, I saw that the environment in the United States changed overnight after the Prime Minister's speech in Congress. All of a sudden there was a receptivity and an awareness among people, of what I was talking about. Before then, it was like I was just talking to a wall. And then after that speech, it changed everything. It's absolutely remarkable. I hesitate to say these things because it makes me sound like a sycophant, but it's just true. It's just true. It absolutely changed the environment.

Ron Dermer:
I have to tell you something where it changed the environment as well. And this, I did not anticipate. Again, my view of the Prime Minister coming here was that he had a moral duty as the leader of the one and only Jewish state, to speak out a threat to the national survival of the State of Israel. That's why I wanted the Prime Minister to come and make that speech, because we could not be silent. We can't have a situation where we're going to be passive and silent with facing that danger. We'll make our case, American leaders will decide what they have to do. You're a sovereign country, we're a sovereign country, but at the very least, Israel is going to speak.

But one thing that I did not anticipate, a positive development that I did not foresee, was the impact that it was going to have on the Arab states. I didn't appreciate that. When we came and gave that speech, what the Arab states saw, they saw it as almost Israel's declaration of independence from America. Because from their point of view, if Israel is a vassal of Rome, and you're Rome this case, why do they need to deal with the vassal? In the end, you're just going to deal with Rome. And all of a sudden, Israel was speaking out, and had an independent policy, and that gave them a great deal of confidence that Israel was willing to be a reliable actor, independent of what US policy would be in the region.
And I can tell you that one of the leaders who we made peace with, contacted the Prime Minister right after that speech. And it surfaced years later, but that speech I can tell you, knowing everything that happened, accelerated the ties that were happening beneath the surface between Israel and the Arab states. And when you had a US administration that was confronting Iran, that’s how you were able to surface under the wings of the United States to allies in the region and to break through 30 years, 25 years of failed peacemaking, and the belief that every, or the road to peace has to go through a model. All of a sudden it was ready to break out because they understood that it was in their strategic interest to move into this public alliance with Israel. So not only was it important in moral terms and historic terms to actually take that stand, in practical terms, I think it changed the trajectory, temporarily, of U.S. policy into a different place, and I think it also opened up a door that we would end up able to go through several years later to reach peace with some of our Arab partners. And hopefully that will continue.

Mike Doran:
Well, let’s end on this, one subject here you’ve just raised, in the Israeli press today, I’m sure this happens to you quite often, a columnist, I won’t name him, he accused you and the prime minister but you in person, of politicizing Israel, of destroying the bipartisan support for Israel in the United States by being the Republican’s ambassador, Israeli Ambassador to the United States. I just wondered if I could get a comment from you on that, how you respond to that when, you hear that often, you hear that in the United States, you hear that in Israel, that Prime Minister Netanyahu and you politicized what was otherwise a very comfortable bipartisan support for Israel.

Ron Dermer:
So those are people that simply don’t know history and don’t look at the facts. When it comes to the prime minister, let me just say this. I was with the prime minister in 2002, when we launched Operation Defensive Shield, and that operation was launched after a year and a half of Palestinian terror. And we had finally Prime Minister Sharon launched a military operation to take over Palestinian areas in the West Bank in order to dismantle basically the terror infrastructure there in the West Bank. Something we have not done in Gaza, which is one of the differences between the West Bank and Gaza.

People forget that George W. Bush, and you were in the administration, I don't remember if it was the first term or the second term, I know you were there in the second term, but in the first term, this is 2002, George W. Bush was widely perceived to be a great friend of Israel, and I think he was a strong friend of Israel. He said, "Israel should withdraw immediately." And then I think Condi Rice, who was then National Security Advisor and even Colin Powell, they both sort of did follow on statement saying what immediately means now, without delay Israel should withdraw. Prime Minister Netanyahu with Sharon's blessing, took a plane to Washington. He came, and I was with him at his side. He did, I don’t know, 20 interviews with the press. He spoke to 50 senators, five, zero. I remember Senator Kerry being there right in the front row. And he spoke against the policy of a Republican president named George W. Bush. And no one accused him then of siding with the Democrats against the president. Now, I'll tell you another story that's a true story. Three years ago-

Mike Doran:
How many of the stories you've told me today are true?
Ron Dermer:
Well, they're all true, but sometimes people don't, they don't believe it because they're almost too good to be true. So three years ago, I had a very prominent Jewish Democrat who came to see me and he wants to strengthen support for Israel within the Democratic Party. And I think his intentions were good. And he came to see me. And I showed him a headline of a poll. And the headline of the poll said, huge gap in support between Republicans and Democrats when it came to Israel. And I said to him, "You agree with me that this is a problem." He says, "Yes." I said, "And you agree with me that we should focus on ensuring that Israel is a strong bipartisan issue in the United States." He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, let me ask you something. What do you attribute the gap to?" And he told me, "Prime minister's speech to Congress, embrace of Trump." That was it. The usual stuff that you read in the press all the time. And I said, "Okay."

Now look at the date of that poll. And it was 2003. There is, Mike, I asked the Hudson Institute to do this because I have said what I'm going to tell you now I have said it for seven years as ambassador. And I've told this to many, many journalists who have... The few that I met with when I was ambassador, when I would actually try to have a real conversation with them and they're trying to understand the issue. There is a 40 year gap in support for Israel among Democrats and Republicans. It is not four years. It is not eight years. It is not 12 years. It is 40 years. What I just told you, no one in Israel knows. They won't even put up a graph of the Gallup Poll that makes it clear.

What you've had for 40 years, is this gap that has been constant, it has grown bigger over time, the gap. Virtually, I would say two-thirds of the gap is the rise in support for Israel among Republican. And that is primarily been a function of evangelical Christians flocking to the Republican Party and shifts that have happened-

Mike Doran:
Absolutely right. Absolutely right.

Ron Dermer:
... in American society. If you look at the Gallup Polls, the number, you will find something that will be shocking. They separate these Gallup Polls and there's two, there's how many people think Israel is an ally of the United States, and then there's a question of sympathy, Israelis and Palestinians, which are obviously different. It's not the same thing, but you can see trends from both of them. What you'll see is at the end of the Obama administration in 2016 or the first poll, they usually do it in February, in 2017, and the poll in 2009, it's the same level of support for Israel among Democrats.

It stayed constant. But if you look within the, in the numbers of the Democrats, then and you see different gaps. You see gaps between those who were young and those who are old. And you see those gaps between those who define themselves as being progressive, and those who define themselves as being moderate or conservative. And among the progressive line, support for Israel went down. Okay. In the last couple of years, I think you already know what the polls show. Israel, what is happening in terms of views of Israel, it is essentially a canvas by which changes in American society are playing out. And what you saw happen, everyone said the prime minister's speech to Congress or what I did and this or that thing, that's why you think it's a, it's written nonsense. The prime minister's speech to Congress is not why Jeremy Corbyn almost became the prime minister of Great Britain.

This has to do, and I think part of the problem is there are people who deal with politics and there are people who deal with academia. Those people in academia could see these trends coming. If you want to understand what is happening in American society today, read Allan Bloom's book, The Closing of the American Mind from 35 years ago. I haven't read it in a couple of decades. I don't think he talks about
Israel in the book, but if you want to understand what creates the reality of new people, educated in the United States, coming out of the university system, their views of the world, how Israel is ordered in their universe, even when they're not really thinking about Israel, you can see how these trends happen. That's the story. And what you don't want to see, I would hope is a Corbynisation of the Democratic Party in the United States.

But you're seeing that things that were marginal before are now becoming more mainstream, and that has nothing to do with Israel. I would love to believe that Israel could change this or that policy, it would, this or that leader, this or that ambassador, and that will fundamentally change Israel's standing. It's actually, I must say whoever this journalist is, it's a very Zionist view because it means it's all up to us. This has nothing to do with Israel. We are the low hanging fruit of what in my view is an anti-American anti-Western animus that is growing, and more than anything else, that animus is based on an idea that justice and power are like buckets in a well. Those who are powerful are unjust. Those who were weak are just. That's a very, very dangerous idea for a country like Israel, where we're a rising power among the nations and where we're depicted as the Goliath to the Palestinians, David. So we're bad, no matter what, that's a very dangerous idea.

And beyond that, I actually don't think it's a very safe idea for Jews. Because Jews in American-

**Mike Doran:**
Definitely not.

**Ron Dermer:**
... Jews in American society are not living 10 to a room on the Lower East Side anymore. They have not only integrated into American society, but they are a prominent and they are an influential member. And if everyone you look at, it's a question of how much power you have or privilege you have or all of this, then I think it's very dangerous. And you will see that that force that has that view will not only turn against Israel, but it will not be safe for American Jews or Jews anywhere. And that's why you have Corbyn, who was an anti-Semite, who almost became the prime minister of... And it's remarkable. I mean, thankfully, the British people spat him out.

And I will say that President Biden is a long-time friend of Israel. He is not part of that. That is not President Biden. And you have somebody who's been a consistent supporter of Israel for many decades, you have somebody who I think has a natural sympathy for Israel. I think in a fundamental deep way that I can tell you comes from his father. That's what he told me. And he's, one thing about Joe Biden, there's an authenticity and sincerity to him that is very, very deep. And his father explained to him a decade after the Holocaust, how it's so important for the Jews to have their own state so that they can be able to defend themselves. He gets that. And even with all those disagreements that we have over policy, including this major disagreement over the nuclear deal with Iran, he's not there, that's not President Biden. But there are forces there that are becoming more prominent and more vocal, and that's what has changed. And those people who look at-

**Mike Doran:**
We see it right now on the streets and against the background of the Gaza conflict, it's troubling to see long-time supporters of Israel on the Democratic side, like Chuck Schumer and Senator Menendez being either quiet or almost supportive of some of the statements that have been coming out of the progressives in the last few days.
Ron Dermer:
Well, I'm going to be diplomatic about that. I'm not saying it's-

Mike Doran:
I was diplomatic when you talked about Joe Biden. I'm going to be less diplomatic now, as an Irish American, I recognize Blarney when I hear it.

Ron Dermer:
Look, I think, if anything-

Mike Doran:
Whenever they start waxing philosophical about their fathers, you should be careful.

Ron Dermer:
Without getting into the specifics, I think what you have is a growing force that has a real animist to Israel, because we are the low hanging fruit of an ideology. And what was it? [Hina 01:21:21], the German professor who says never underestimate the humble professor who's in his study. I saw these things happening when I was in a university in the United States. And so what is happening today, 25 years later, when the people I went to school with are now moving into positions of prominence, it doesn't surprise me. But I think the shift back is really a shift back that would be educational cultural in the United States and not have anything to do with Israel's policy. It could be that this or that policy could exacerbate that.

But I actually think what happens, you saw that with the speech to Congress, and you see this with the recent events and with Gaza and fighting Hamas is simply you have the subterranean forces that then all of a sudden surface. And you see shifts that are happening. And the shifts come out, you see where the lava's flowing over time when different events happen. And I think if people do not understand the terrain that they're facing, then they're certainly not going to be able to navigate it. And I would love to, again, I would love to believe that we're in a world where it's this or that speech or this or that policy and everything will change. I would be dishonest and it's not true. And it's important, I asked the Hudson Institute to have you or somebody else there do a paper on support for Israel to look at what are the driving factors, and I think it will be so against what the narrative, traditional, the narrative that's out there that hopefully it will open some minds.

And I will say on that, I have this opportunity to speak to you and you could see the quality of journalism. I recently was interviewed by a very prominent Israeli journalist. And I was asked a question about evangelicals. And the question I was asked was should Israel, is Israel focusing too much on evangelicals? And I said, "No, we're not focusing enough on evangelicals." Because they're 25% of the American population, because they're passionate in their support for Israel. It's one, two or third top issue for many of them. And because they're unequivocal in their support for Israel. And I said, comparing to Jews, I said, "Jews are 2% of the population in the United States. They are some of our fiercest supporters, are certainly Jewish Americans who you can see them defending Israel just now, but they're also some of our fiercest critics." And I said, "For many, many Jews, Israel is not the number one issue. It's not the number two issue. Number three issues. Sometimes it doesn't make the top five or 10."

But that our commitment to American Jews is a sacrosanct commitment of the United States because how we define ourselves as a state, that's the DNA of the country. It's part of the raison d'être of the state of Israel. Now I was very clear about what I said, everybody in the hall understood what I said. And
then an Israeli journalist just went with a headline and said, I said that Israel should prioritize evangelicals over Jews. And I never said that. So people, to sum up, here's what I've learned in the time I've been in public life. We have filing systems, it helps us make sense of the world. And if it doesn't fit into a filing system, we can't even process it. And you're at a time when there is so much information that is flooding at you. It's like a fire hose that you're trying to absorb that for many people like that journalist, they can't get out of the filing system they're in. So they'll say, "Well, Netanyahu helped Trump and that's why this has happened." Or, "Netanyahu gave a speech to Congress." They can't.

And what we have to rely on is people that not only with the intellectual integrity, but the willingness to look at the evidence, to look at the data, to question their basic assumptions, and that's something that's been lost and it has to be regained. And I think, I hope that you will take it upon yourself because I know you do that in many issues that you study, and we don't agree 100% of the time, but the intellectual integrity I think is so lacking because everybody is afraid of saying one thing that will offend the mob, that they're not actually willing to do the work and the research and to speak the truth. And that's why we fall into this laziness that actually can have dire consequences because if, the prime minister always says this, and I think it actually comes from his father, he said, "The most important thing for any organism human or otherwise is to be able to recognize dangers in time." If you cannot recognize dangers, if you're diluting yourself with a bunch of nonsense and claptrap, we're never going to be able to actually deal with these problems.

I have, I can tell you, I have great confidence in the relationship between Israel and the United States, because of what I told you of Israel's emergence as a power. I think the story of Israel's interests and important the relationship between Israel and the United States is to the United States and not just the Israel, is a story that has not been told. I think right now our enemies have stopped actually attacking Israel based on interests. You've been in Washington long enough to know, what was the old line about Israel? The United States shouldn't support Israel because it's against American interests. Why? Because of oil and because of Arabs-

Mike Doran:
It's going to alienate the Gulf States. Yeah.

Ron Dermer:
The Gulf States and oil. And when Walton Mearsheimer wrote this sort of antisemitic peace saying it's all some Jewish lobby, a nefarious lobby that is veering America away from its interest, a lot of people thought this was the beginning of a new round. Actually it was the salvo of the last round, because it was the last honest, it was the last, not honest, it was dishonest. The last attempt to make a case that America's interests are not served by supporting Israel. Now the case is ridiculous because America's energy independent, and because the Arab states are moving to Israel. So the whole case that Israel is a liability and not an asset to the United States has actually blown up in the last 10 years with no one paying attention.

Now, what the enemies of Israel do is it's not interest, it's values. Now they say the United States and Israel don't share values, which is nonsense, big nonsense. Because when you actually understand what Israel is doing, when you understand that we're a free society in a region where there are no other free societies, if you understand that we fight wars like no other nation does, in terms of the concern for civilian lives among our enemies, if you compare Israel to our other democracies that fought in history, it's a no brainer. The values are strong and the values are deep and beyond this, and I'll end with this, which is what I really think that the battle is moving forward in the U.S. Israel relationship, Israel and the United States, we share interests, we also share values. But we share one other thing, and that is we share a sense of destiny. Because America and Israel are not just countries, we are causes.
And that is hard for a lot of people to understand. I understand it because I was born and raised in the United States. And this idea of American exceptionalism is a very deep idea that many of those forces who are hostile to Israel, they attack that idea. I still hadn't met someone-

**Mike Doran:**
Absolutely.

**Ron Dermer:**
I still have not met somebody who is anti-American and pro-Israel. I've met people who were anti-Israel, who were pro-American, a few of them. Some of them could march through Charlottesville and things like that, but they usually go together because we're both causes. America is an exceptional country that was, I think destiny or providence, whatever you want to say, has entrusted it with securing liberty's future, Israel as a country is destined to secure the Jewish future and give full rights to all our citizens, Jews, Arabs, non-Jews alike. But we're both not only countries causes, the threat to the alliance between our two countries, and I said this in a speech I gave, nobody reads speeches, right? They just read the nonsensical headlines. I said this in a speech that I gave five years ago, "The threat to the U.S. Israel Alliance will be if either country no longer believes in its exceptionalism. If America sees itself as a normal country, and if Israel sees itself as a normal country."

I think in Israel, the forces of exceptionalism are actually on the merge. I actually think are getting strong. And I think in the United States, the forces against American exceptionalism are on the merge, and that's not a job, frankly, that an Israeli ambassador or an Israeli Prime Minister or anything else can do. That's an internal of the U.S. issue, and I hope for your sake, for the sake of Israel, and for the sake of the world, that the forces that believe in American exceptionalism, who believed that America has been the greatest force for good that the world has ever known even with all its imperfections, I hope that they carry the day. Because it will make, not only America safe it'll make Israel safer and it'll make the whole world safer. Because we know as Jews, what it was like when America wasn't the preeminent power in the world. It wasn't a good time. And we've been blessed over the last seven plus decades to have America as the preeminent power in the world, and from my point of view, America should remain that preeminent power, not just for decades, for centuries to come.

**Mike Doran:**
All right. Well, listen, you've been more than generous with your time. I really appreciate it. Fascinating. I wish you a lot of luck in your future career. And I wish Israel a lot of luck in this conflict right now. Thank you very much.

**Ron Dermer:**
Thank you.