Reading the reviews and comments on an article about the current tensions between Iran and Israel, which sometimes are on the brink of war or at least Tel Aviv's threats to carry out missile and bomb strikes targeting Iran's nuclear program, one cannot help but be amazed at the short historical memory we humans have. There are few people now who remember that in early 1950, Iran was the second Islamic state in the Middle East after Turkey to recognize Israel de facto. A consulate general of Iran was even opened in Jerusalem. After that, Iran almost immediately began a close and multifaceted partnership with Israel. Iran supplied Israel with oil, gas, various raw minerals, foodstuffs, and consumer goods. The Jewish state shared its experience and technology in agriculture, medicine, science, and cutting-edge scientific research with Iran. Flights between the two countries were some of the busiest in the region due to daily travel of students, professionals and tourists in both directions. Hundreds of Israeli advisers worked in every region in Iran. Furthermore, Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence service, worked actively, along with the CIA, to create Savak, the Iranian intelligence service. They also cooperated with Savak until 1979, including "working" on Egypt under President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who planted the idea of Arab socialism throughout the region and was hostile to the regime of the Shah of Iran, considering it practically a U.S. agent.

It is interesting to recall that Iran was the only country that supplied oil to Israel after the Suez crisis of 1956, and kept it from suffering an energy shortage. And after the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Iran was virtually the only Islamic state that opposed the appeal of the Arab countries to destroy Israel as a state, and expressed support for recognizing Israel as an independent and sovereign country. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran in an interview with the Associated Press in May 1970 noted that "Iran recognizes the existence of Israel as a sovereign state." Then, in 1973, Iran gave much-needed assistance to Israel, supplying it with oil during the Yom Kippur War. In appreciation, by the way, Israel didn't object when Iran started construction on the Bushehr nuclear power plant in 1975.

Bearing in mind the current state of relations between Iran and Israel, it seems incredible that only 34 years ago they were a model of good neighbourliness between a Jewish and an Islamic state in the Middle East. Statistical data show that in 1971-1977 Israel was among the ten most important trading partners of Iran, and the positive balance of trade brought about $200 million to their treasury every year. The Eilat Ashkelon pipeline, the Ashdod oil refinery, and Eilat port were all built or expanded for oil traded between the two countries.

Most recently, Israel declassified archival materials that show Israel was one of the countries that assisted the nascent Iranian nuclear energy program when they began to apply nuclear technology in various fields of the Iranian national economy. In accordance with a bilateral agreement, experts from the Israeli nuclear centres in Dimona and Sorek worked on the construction sites and were able to lay the foundation for the nuclear reactor in the southern Iranian city of Bushehr and write a project feasibility study for building a research reactor in Isfahan before the Islamic revolution in 1979.

A notable area of cooperation between the two countries was defence and security. In addition to the collaboration between Mossad and Savak, an agreement on the exchange of strategic and defense information and coordination of mutual action was successfully implemented. Similar security threats stimulated a close relationship between the
two militaries. Israel helped create Iran's modern air defence system. And also at that time Israeli experts laid the foundation for Iranian missile production. Historians who study the Yom Kippur War in 1973 even site the following example. In one of the most acute periods of the war when Israel needed to add to its airplane fleet, Iran gave them 25 Phantom combat fighters.

It is helpful to recall the ancient history that illustrates the traditionally good relations binding the Jews and Iranians. Their relationship goes back 2500 years, when the legendary King Cyrus (Kourosh in Persian), who created the expansive Achaemenid Empire, issued a decree giving exiled Jews the right to return to their ancestral homeland and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus is the only foreign ruler who is referred to respectfully in Jewish canonical literature. Isaiah even identified him as the messenger of the God of Israel. This is unprecedented in the Bible and across all Jewish religious literature, because this title as a political definition is only applied to the kings of Israel in all other cases. Another well-known fact can be interjected here that characterizes the Jewish-Iranian dialogue of those early years: the emblem of the city of Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire, was depicted on the eastern gate of the Temple of Jerusalem. Incidentally, Susa is the location where two books of the Bible took place -- Esther and Daniel.

So why did Iran so abruptly change its attitude towards Israel? Nothing much happened, except for the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. The people overthrew the Shah, whose last years had been ones of reckless oil exporting, looting of the country, and unchecked corruption. And there was the fact that the Shah just killed dissenters. Iranians kicked foreign oil companies and banks out of the country along with the Shah. The main losers were the Rothschild family. Naturally, under these circumstances, Israel launched an undeclared war against Iran's Islamic revolutionaries. And it all went downhill from there.

The post-revolutionary period dramatically changed the relationship between the two countries, which turned into sworn enemies. In part, this stemmed from the purely religious factor of the Shiite religion. The underlying idea of this branch of Islam is the formation of a worldwide Islamic state, in which all people will become members of the global Muslim community. The theoreticians of the Islamic revolution in Iran have interpreted this process as the "submission of all other countries to Islam." The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, believed Israel, which lies in the heart of the Islamic world, is a major obstacle on this path, and therefore the task of combating it is seen as the "liberation of Jerusalem." Back in 1981 Khomeini said, "The religious leadership of Iran will never accept the Israeli occupation of the holy places of Islam." Iran's self-declared leadership in the Islamic world gave Iranian leaders the right to consider themselves defenders of the "oppressed Muslim nations," meaning first of all the Arabs of Palestine. In practice, this meant fully supporting the "Arab and Palestinian cause" and a large-scale injection of hostility towards the "expansionist invader."

The Islamic Revolution caused Iran to reorient its foreign policy. Of course, this affected the relationships between Iran and Israel and the Arab countries, and especially Iran's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and ways to resolve the conflict. In the time of the Shah, Iran tried to combine a close relationship with Israel with a consistently pro-Arab position on the issue of the Middle East peace process. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi repeatedly said that Iran's attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict wasn't derived directly from the condition of its relationships with its members. This gave him the opportunity to find a balance of common interests. With the removal of the Shah, the way the Islamic Republic positioned itself in its geopolitical space underwent a radical change.

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It is hard to argue with the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran was established by the will of its people based on a referendum held in the spring of 1979. This type of political system does not prevent dialogue with representatives of other religions. And in one of the first Israeli political statements about the new leadership in Iran, it declared that Israel was ready to cooperate with the new regime, since it had been approved by the people, and therefore was legitimate.

Therefore, something else gave impetus to the Iranian-Israeli tensions. The leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, came forward with an initiative to review the status quo. Almost immediately after the revolutionary events of February 1979, he announced that he was not satisfied with the old order of things, and unilaterally broke off diplomatic relations with Israel. This happened when the process to mitigate the positions of the Arab countries was beginning, particularly the signing of the Camp David accord, which marked a new stage in
Arab-Israeli relations. Thus, the easing in Arab-Israeli tensions happened just as hostility began to emanate from a recently faithful and trusted friend. The radical change is thought to have come from the main concept of the new regime, which was the necessity of exporting Iran's Islamic revolution first of all into the Middle East. Of course, the Jewish state, which lies in the heart of the Islamic world, was a significant hurdle to such plans. The leader of the country, Ayatollah Khomeini, immediately declared Islamic Iran the leader of the Muslim world. Clearly, in this context, Arab-Israeli relations, and especially the Palestinian issue, gained a radically new meaning. In such a situation, it is not surprising that the first foreign leader to visit Iran in the very first days after the revolution was Yasser Arafat. In Tehran, he was assured that once Iran stabilized its own political situation they would begin in earnest to plan a "historic victory over the Zionists." A mission of the Palestinian Liberation Organization moved into the empty building of the former Israeli embassy in central Tehran.

This is considered the beginning of the Iranian policy to actively resist any attempt to establish peace in the Middle East. At that time they also began to call for wiping the "cancerous tumour" from the face of the earth. The first to utter this curse was Ayatollah Khomeini, who then passed the baton to his successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani took part in this too, and said that reaching a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians and creating an independent Palestinian state would not in any way be a final solution to the problem for Iran.

Despite all the changes the Iranian people went through over the post-revolutionary period, when Islamic idealists were replaced by pragmatists, who were replaced by liberals, and then came the era of new growth and the neoconservatives, much of the country remained the same as it had been when the Islamic Republic was formed. When President Ahmadinejad came to power, anti-Israeli sentiment got a new ideological boost. Tehran's continual declarations that it would never accept the existence of Israel transformed Iran's nuclear program, in Israel's eyes, into a potential nuclear weapon, a kind of "sword of Damocles" that could destabilize the situation in the entire Middle East geopolitical space.

Relations between Iran and Israel were finally completely ruined right after Ahmadinejad came to power in Tehran. By the end of the 1980's Iran desperately required a new radicalization of politics and another wave of revolutionary rhetoric, because its influence on society had begun to dwindle, especially after the Iran-Iraq war. The country's population associated this war with the Islamic revolution and the new regime in Iran. When it became clear that the new system, which had been created by comrades of Ayatollah Khomeini and supported by their heirs, was close to exhausting itself, reformist politicians appeared in the country — first Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, then Seyed Mohammad Khatami. As a result of socio-economic reforms and attempts to establish a dialogue with the West, the country's leaders were able to talk about how Iran had gotten through to the world's leaders. However, the era of Islamic pragmatists lasted only until the middle of the first decade of the 2000's. A logical continuation of reforms in historical perspective might have been the transformation of the regime, but the Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khamenei and his entourage could not allow this — they needed Khomeini's regime restored. As a result, the presidential elections in 2005 brought the symbolic figure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the top of Iranian politics, whom the religious leaders of the country could trust to do what they wanted. The new president of Iran quickly realized that denying the Holocaust was one of the easiest ways to make high-profile attacks on Israel. The most important feature of Ahmadinejad's anti-Zionism was his attempt to link the Holocaust with the problems of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Revisionism in Holocaust history, which had up to then been very limited outside the scientific community, has now become a full-fledged part of the international relations of a sovereign state — the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ahmadinejad's denial of the Holocaust was not only strategic, but even more a tactical move. Denying the Holocaust served as a distraction from the Iranian nuclear program, which at the time was the focus of world attention. Iranian press at that time argued that, because of Iran's position on the Holocaust, the West would be willing to make concessions in the negotiations on the nuclear program in an attempt to force Iran to shut up.

The largest event organized by the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was the "Holocaust Research: A Global Vision" international conference that was held in Tehran December 11-12, 2006. Sixty-seven researchers participated from 30 countries. Interestingly, a group of rabbis representing the marginalized Jewish group Neturei Karta was invited to Tehran to the conference. This group denies Israel's right to exist, therefore has close links with the enemies of the Jewish state.

The radicalization of Iran's foreign policy toward Israel also became noticeable. The Second Lebanon War in the summer of 2006, and Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in January of 2009 showed that Iran was ready to support
And so, with the coming of Ahmadinejad to power, the delicate balance in Iranian-Israeli relations that had occasionally leaned towards mutual rejection, which happened under Hashemi Rafsanjani and Khatami, completely collapsed. Iran embarked on a path of open hostility with Israel, expressing its hostility not only in attempts to change the current policy of Israel, but also in the denial of the Holocaust (a crucial point for Israel), which also had an immediate impact on the foreign policy of Iran. Anti-Israeli military actions as an instigator. At the same time, according to official statements by the Iranian government, Iran's interference in these actions had one other goal. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has repeatedly made it clear that he considers it a suitable time to export the Islamic revolution, asserting that it is still alive, and thus making a claim for regional leadership.

And all of this was actively fuelled and encouraged by Saudi Arabia and other GCC (Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf) countries that would like to see Israel send air strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. The Wahhabi monarchy tried to involve the United States as well, hoping for a full-fledged war against Iran that would overthrow the legitimate government of the country. It came to the point that by March 2010, a U.S.-Israeli military operation against Iran seemed imminent. A powerful group of U.S. naval forces converged on the Gulf, and reports came out of Israel about combat readiness of military aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles carrying long-range missiles (they had just been delivered the day before from the U.S.) to attack targets inside Iran. The mass media of Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries was "hysterical" about the Iranian nuclear threat and its policy of "inciting" a Shiite revolution in the region. But then the Arab world entered a period of "coloured" Islamic revolutions, instigated and paid for by the same Arabian Wahhabi regime, and it did not have time for Tehran. In the summer of 2013 presidential elections were held in Iran, and Hassan Rouhani became the new president, who basically declared there would be substantial adjustments to foreign policy. However, Israeli leaders, especially Benjamin Netanyahu, have not caught on to this yet. But they probably will, especially if they remember the story of the fruitful development of relations with Tehran for 40 years -- from 1950 to 1979. What's more, the danger of Wahhabi radicalism poses a threat to security throughout the Middle East, and especially to Israel and Iran.

So one could say boldly that Iranian-Israeli relations have not only a solid past, but also a very promising future based on shared interests and natural geopolitical factors, as well as a common enemy in the conservative regime of the Wahhabi and fundamentalist movement on the Arabian Peninsula. The Islamist revolutions in the Arab world only reinforced this truth. It will also certainly contribute to the normalization of US-Iranian relations, which began after the visit of Rouhani to New York to attend the 68th session of the UN general assembly and his first meetings with President Obama, as well as Teheran's constructive position on its peaceful nuclear program, and willingness to cooperate more transparently in this area with the six negotiators and the IAEA.

But Israel will also have to rethink its stereotypes about Iran and honestly admit that the main enemy today for the entire Middle East, whether for Israel itself, or Iran and most Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, etc. — is the Salafi radicalism and Wahhabi expansionism promoted by the reactionary, conservative regimes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

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