

## Israel's National Security Strategies: A View from the Prime Minister's Office

### *A Conversation with Jonathan Schachter and Jonathan Schanzer*

DERSHOWITZ: Good morning, everybody. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Toby Dershowitz, and I'm the Senior Vice President for Government Relations and Strategy here at FDD. Thank you so much for joining us for today's conversation, *Israel's National Security Strategies: A View from the Prime Minister's Office*. We're so pleased to have with us Jonathan Schachter, for what I know is going to be a stimulating and informative conversation.

Today's program is one of many we host throughout the year. So for more information about our work, please visit our website at [fdd.org](http://fdd.org). We're so honored and privileged to be joined today by a distinguished audience of diplomats, representatives from the executive branch, including the Department of State, the Department of Treasury, Justice, folks from the Pentagon, and many experts from the policy community. We also warmly welcome the international media here today.

Many of our audience members already know that FDD is a nonpartisan policy institute. We're a source of timely research and analysis and policy options for Congress and the administration, the media and the wider national security community. I want to underscore that we take no foreign government or foreign corporate funding and never will. In addition to the folks joining us here today, I'd also like to welcome those tuning in online via our livestream. We invite all of you to join in on the conversation which will be live streaming at @FDD.

At this time, I'd also like to ask everybody to silence their cell phones. I'm very pleased to turn the podium over to the moderator, Dr. Jonathan Schanzer, who's FDD's Senior Vice President for Research. As many of you know, Jon served as a terror finance expert, an analyst, at the U.S. Department of Treasury, and has written several books on today's topic and on the Middle East. And he's a prolific writer. Jon, I'm pleased to turn the podium over to you. Thank you.

SCHANZER: Thank you very much, Toby. And thank you all for being here. Jonathan, great to have you. We've met a number of times in your office in Jerusalem. I don't think we've ever actually had a meeting here. So this is our first. And Jonathan, I should just note, we are often confused, not because we look similar but because our names are so similar, we're I'm sure next to each other in everyone's Rolodex or in their phones. And so, I don't know how many times I've had people call me thinking they were calling him over the last five or six years. And it's always a letdown when I pick up the phone.

So, just very briefly, Jonathan served as an advisor to Prime Minister Netanyahu from 2013 to 2018. His portfolio included U.S.-Israel relations, Israel diaspora affairs, and briefing congressional and other international delegations. As the senior foreign policy advisor, Jonathan was in regular contact with the Israeli security cabinet, advised the Prime Minister on pivotal policy issues from the Iran Nuclear Deal, to the peace process, to the expansion of Israel's ties in Asia, Africa, Latin America and beyond.

From 2011 to 2013, he worked for Israel's National Security Council. And prior to all of this, Jonathan was a research fellow at the Institute for National Security studies in Israel, and a lecturer at Northwestern University.

So, with introductions out of the way, I want to dive in. We'll have about, I don't know, 20 minutes, half hour to answer some questions that are on my mind. And then what we'll do is we'll open it up to the audience here. I'm sure there'll be lots of good questions. And if you have questions online, you can actually get them to me via Twitter.

So first, let me start, I think it might make sense for us to just go through the defense portfolios that you worked on, either directly or tangentially. You're at the Prime Minister's side during some of the sort of more tense moments over the last five, six years. So, let's start with, let's start with Gaza if we can. I know that you joined just before the 2014 conflagration. So that was kind of trial by fire for you I suppose. And then obviously, things have evolved. We have March of Return, we've got incendiary balloons. How did you deal with this portfolio? How did the Prime Minister deal with this portfolio? Give us some thoughts on the Hamas threat?

SCHACHTER: So, first of all, thank you for having me this morning. And I'll tell you about one tense moment in particular. It was a Friday night and I was, this has nothing to do with Gaza, I'll get to that in a second. It's Friday night, and I'm at a Friday night dinner at some friend's house. And as often would happen on Friday night after dinner, I fell asleep on my friend's couch. And my wife wakes me up, you know, in a start, and she says, "Your phone is ringing and I think it's important." So I look at my phone and it says it's the Embassy in Washington. So I answer the phone and they say, "Ambassador Dermer is looking for you." And I answer, I say, "Hey Ron, what's going on?" And he starts talking to me about an FDD event. And I realized that he thought that he was calling you. So that was a tense moment on a Friday.

SCHANZER: Sounds tense. Sounds tense.

SCHACHTER: When I think about Gaza and I think about – the balloons are just sort of the latest iteration of things. And I tried, when I think about a lot of the issues that we'll talk about today, I try and take a step back and think about it in a broader and more historical perspective. And when I think about the balloons and the demonstrations, I think about something that happened when I was a kid. So when I was a kid, my aunt went to Israel on a trip and she came back and she brought me a present. And the present was, it was a replica sign that said, "Beware of suspicious objects." And this was a sign that you would see in a lot of places in Israel.

And later, I learned that this was actually one of the most successful PR campaigns in Israeli history. And what it was, was Palestinian terrorists were taking bags and putting explosives in it and leaving them on buses and in markets and things like that. And so, they launched a campaign saying beware of suspicious objects. If you see something – It was the precursor to if you see something, say something. And this proved to be very successful. So now, Israeli kids from I think eight years old are taught this sort of thing. And they know that if you see a bag on a bus or on a bench or in the market or whatever that has no owner, that you're supposed to get away from it and you're supposed to do something about that.

So, I learned later through some of my studies the way this evolved was, okay, so now Israelis are aware of the abandoned bag tactic. So now they started to hide explosives more creatively. And if you've ever read about these things, or if you've ever had a chance to visit the Israeli bomb squad, they have a collection of things that explosives have been hidden in, and it's everything, it's, you know, I've seen baby dolls and I saw a picture of a watermelon that had been hollowed out, and there're all sorts of creative and terrible things that explosives were hidden in. And Israelis learned that you couldn't just be suspicious about bags, you had to be suspicious about others things as well that belonged or didn't belong depending on the circumstances.

So then the next evolution is the suicide bomber, because the suicide bomber is basically just a very sinister and clever way to hide an explosive. It takes advantage of that assumption that people want to stay alive. So you assume that everyone around you wants to stay alive so you don't suspect that somebody's actually willing to kill themselves along the way. Well, I think that they put a fence around Gaza already in 1994 if I'm not mistaken. And it's interesting because if you go and you look at the Second Intifada when you had this incredible campaign of suicide bombing, I think it was either zero or one of the suicide bombers came from Gaza. I mean, it's either zero or one. So the fence proved to be effective.

And so say, okay, so the bags don't work and the baby dolls and the watermelons don't work. And now the suicide bombers are having a problem. So now you see the rise of the rocket and missile threats so you can go over the fence and you see the tunnel threat so you can go under the fence. And it's basically – it's a terrorism/counter-terrorism arms race. And so, there are measures and countermeasures, and they keep going back and forth. And, you know, I think it would be, it would be wonderful if that sort of effort and ingenuity were being put into actually building something besides tunnels and methods of trying to harm and kill Israelis.

And the balloons are just the latest thing. It's incredibly cynical. You see these balloons, they have these balloons that say, "I love you" on them. But then there's a Molotov cocktail or an explosive attached to them. And it's at the point now where Israeli parents are teaching their kids, if you see a balloon that's lying around on the ground, you can't go up and start playing with it. And so, I sort of, I feel like it's, in some ways, it's come full circle to that sign that my aunt brought me.

So now Israel's dealing with the balloon threat. It sounds ridiculous to even say it, the balloon threat, but it's caused real damage. But it's a tactical threat, it's not a strategic threat. I don't think that, they call these the March of Return or whatever, I don't think that this is what's going to lead to a Palestinian return, but on it goes.

SCHANZER: So, you mentioned that it's a tactical threat and I think that's the way that everybody looks at this in Israel. And actually, that gets me thinking about kind of the showdown that we saw between Avigdor Lieberman and the Prime Minister, where Lieberman was pushing for Netanyahu to invade the Gaza Strip in response to provocations. And what we saw was that the Prime Minister had been reticent, did not want a full on ground invasion. And that I think, what was it – a week or maybe two weeks later, there was this revelation about Hezbollah tunnels up in the north.

And I think the, at least the way I understood it was that the Prime Minister was trying to sort of keep his powder dry for the potential for a northern conflict, where it's not a tactical threat, it's more of a strategic one. We've been hearing stories about 100 or 150 or 180,000 rockets in Hezbollah's possession, precision guided munitions, all this stuff. What was the view of the Hezbollah threat from the Prime Minister's office during your time?

SCHACHTER: Well, I should say that the revelation and destruction of the Hezbollah tunnels were after my time. So I have to speak the period from before that. The view is that this, you know, the threat is very grave and I don't see it getting less grave. The tunnels were part of a Hezbollah plan to send Hezbollah forces into Israel. And that is a major threat. And it was treated with I think the gravity that you'd expect.

But again, you can't talk about Hezbollah and you can't talk about Hamas and you can't talk about Islamic Jihad without talking about Iran. If you go back even to, let's pick 2006 and the second Lebanon War as a starting point, all of the rounds of conflict that Israel has had have been, you know, you don't have Hezbollah and the Hezbollah rocket and missile threat without Iran. You don't have Hamas and their rocket and missile threat and Islamic Jihad and their rocket missile threat without Iran.

We can talk more about Iran later, but you look at all of these places sort of around the map and Iran is there. And so I think that by and large, when Israelis look Hezbollah, it's unique, it's got its own set of actors, its own set of interests. It's obviously disturbingly interwoven into what goes on in Lebanon with the Lebanese government. And we're obviously concerned about the connections to the Lebanese Armed Forces. But it's also, you can't do it divorced from thinking about Iran more broadly.

SCHANZER: So actually, on that point, I recently worked with your former colleague, Jacob Nagel on a piece that looks at Israel's evolving national security strategy, a document that Prime Minister Netanyahu has been working on and is reportedly close to releasing potentially as the first official national security strategy since David Ben-Gurion released his after going into seclusion in his hut in stable care in the 1950s to write this thing. And one of the things that apparently is in this document is this new policy that Israel will basically not differentiate between Hezbollah and the Lebanese state or Hezbollah and the Iranian state, or any other terrorist group and their sponsor or their host.

How did this policy come about? I mean, was this, this does seem like a departure from Israel's careful surgical approach to these problems in years past, no?

SCHACHTER: Without speaking specifically about that document, I think even in 2006, Israel took actions in Lebanon, you looked at the attack on the airport and things like that that obviously go beyond the immediate Hezbollah only targets, and people have been talking for a long time about how Hezbollah can't have it both ways. I think it's pretty well understood that Hezbollah, you talked about these 100,000 plus rockets and missiles that Hezbollah has in Lebanon. And the Prime Minister's talked about this.

These are hidden in civilian areas, they're hidden in houses and apartment buildings and things like that. And if you put a rocket or missile in an apartment building, I mean, that becomes a legitimate military target. And I think ultimately, I was thinking about this just the other day, I expect that, you know, in any future conflict, a lot of those rockets and missiles are going to explode in Lebanon and wherever they are hidden. So, I think that poses –

SCHANZER: That's a very delicate way of putting it.

SCHACHTER: I'm very delicate. I think that a lot of these things actually may end up threatening Lebanon in ways that they don't threaten Israel. But they do threaten Israel and that's why they're taken so seriously. But I think the Prime Minister has also made it clear that, again, Israel won't look at these things in a vacuum and say, oh, it's just Hezbollah or it's just Hamas. They get their arms, their training, their money from someplace and that someplace needs to be called to account.

SCHANZER: Yeah. So, just maybe moving slightly east into Syria. There's a lot of talk right now and we've heard from, I've heard from you in the past as well as others, that the next war is not necessarily going to be a Hezbollah war as such, that it's going to be a northern war, if one does take place, that it would be Hezbollah and what's happening in Syria. We've seen some very interesting things take place, some during your time, some after. But apparently, something like 200 different strikes against Iranian assets inside Syria. Initially, this was quiet. Now you have a Prime Minister who is much more bold in claiming these. Can you talk a little bit about the evolution of the Prime Minister's thinking about claiming these strikes, about the strikes themselves, what you're targeting, what the strategy is?

SCHACHTER: Yeah, so I've heard of that. I think the way to look at Israel's policy in Syria since the war started there is through a series of milestones. So the war starts and Israel made a policy decision very early on of non-involvement with the following exceptions. The first was humanitarian. And Israel, as many of you may know, has treated thousands of wounded Syrians from the war.

And then the second was a series of three red lines. And the first was, Israel wouldn't tolerate any fire coming from Syria regardless of the source and regardless of intent. The second was, Israel wouldn't let the Golan Heights, the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, be turned into another terror front against Israel. And third was Israel wouldn't let Syria be used for the transfer of major weapons systems to Hezbollah. And that was the policy. And Israel stuck to it.

The next major milestone is when in 2015, you have the large scale Russian deployment. And that's when you see the Prime Minister start to have his meetings, his relatively frequent meetings with President Putin. And the purpose of that is, basically, because Israel was enforcing those three red lines and because you have Russian planes in the same airspace, Israel didn't want to be in a position where its aircraft were either crashing into or shooting down Russian aircraft. And basically wanted to avoid the situation that Turkey found itself in with the Russians shortly afterwards.

And so, they created this, they call it a de-confliction mechanism. It wasn't to coordinate. It wasn't to do things collaboratively, but it was to make sure that we didn't run into that situation. And I think it's proven itself to be quite successful.

The next milestone isn't so much a point in time as it's been sort of a period of time. It's been sort of smeared on the timeline. And that is, as the Syrian war has started to come to an end or at least lower its intensity, then the question became, okay, so what's going to be in Syria afterwards? Here we saw the Iranians saying that they were actually going to have a permanent military presence in Syria with the explicit purpose of being able to attack Israel from there. And so here, basically, the red lines that had been in place since the beginning evolved and said, Israel will not accept a Syrian, I'm sorry, an Iranian forward military presence, permanent military presence in Syria, anywhere in Syria from where they could attack Israel.

It's really an evolution of those same red lines, and it's really only in this last phase where you've seen the Prime Minister be more explicit about saying what Israel has done. I think it bears repeating in any of these talks about Iran and Israel, there is no natural enmity between Iran and Israel. Until 1979, the two countries were friendly, I've seen pictures, there was an El Al office in Tehran. I mean, it sounds crazy now but there was an El Al office in Tehran.

There's no natural enmity there between the peoples. And the enmity which now is perhaps taken for granted is, you know, there's no, they don't share a border, there's no territorial conflict between the two. The enmity between the two states is entirely driven by the ideology of the regime and its own unforgiving creed if you will.

So to put forces in Syria, Syria is 1000 miles away from Iran. There's no sort of natural good reason for those forces to be there except to threaten Israel. And Israel and the Prime Minister has been very explicit in saying it's not something that Israel will accept.

SCHANZER: You've been in some of those meetings with the Prime Minister and Putin?

SCHACHTER: Yes.

SCHANZER: Anything you want to share from those meetings?

SCHACHTER: No. The meetings I think have been very important. The Prime Minister was faced with a situation where the Russian army is basically, and the Russian Air Force, they're across the street. So it couldn't be ignored. And our planes were in the air, our forces were doing what they were doing. It wasn't something that could be ignored. And the meetings that they've had have been I think very productive in that regard. I think it's been all business and it's been I think very successful.

SCHANZER: I want to ask you about Iran. Obviously, it was a huge area of focus for you. Almost an obsession for the Prime Minister during the time that you were there. You had to serve with the Prime Minister during a time of political tension with the U.S. over the JCPOA, that happened right in the middle of your time. Want to talk a little bit about that tightrope that you had to walk trying to balance the security needs of Israel and maintain the relationship, the

strategic relationship with Israel's best friend and partner? How do you do that? And in your job, in particular, you've got congressional outreach and you've got to work within the Israeli system. How does that work?

SCHACHTER: It works – it was a challenge – it was a real challenge. I'll talk a little bit about sort of the JCPOA then, but I also like to say a few things about the JCPOA now. So, if you go back to 2015 – first, I want to address some of the, sort of some of the, there a lot of talking points around the JCPOA. One of my favorites was the JCPOA blocks all of Iran's paths to a nuclear weapon. Even if you believed that the mechanisms of the JCPOA were effective, which I don't, but even if you did, the line the JCPOA blocks all of Iran's paths to a nuclear weapon was a great soundbite. It was a great talking point. It fits in 140 characters. But it was never true.

SCHANZER: It's 280 now by the way.

SCHACHTER: I know. But I'm saying even at the time, it fit in 140 characters. But it was never true. It was never true because you can't possibly say that something blocks all of the paths if there are paths that you might not know about. And everything that Iran had done toward its nuclear weapons program, originally, we didn't know about it. So the two enrichment facilities they have, we know about them today. We didn't know about them at the beginning. We eventually learned about them. And not because Iran said, “hey, we're enriching.” It was learned through intelligence.

So, do I know today that there isn't more enrichment going on in Iran, there aren't other facilities in Iran? No. So how could I possibly say that it blocks all of Iran's paths? It was never true from beginning. We'll talk about other of these talking points. In 2015, the Prime Minister made his speech before the Congress, you may have heard of it.

He presented his take of what the deal that was coming together was going to mean. Ok? Some people disagreed with that. People who supported the deal said we have a different take. Ok? And the truth is, at the time, it was all beforehand. So each side was presenting their best take on what was going to happen. But now it's 2019 and we don't have to guess anymore and we don't have to rely on assessments. Now we know.

And the truth is, if you go back and read or watch the Prime Minister's speech, and I reread it this week. Ok? It's almost prophetic. Now, why do I say almost prophetic? One, because it's Israel and the bar for prophecy is super high. And two, because the Prime Minister wasn't the only one who was ringing the alarm bell about this. And you could see a lot of the, I mean, you could see what Iran was most likely to do. This is another one of these talking points I've been reading in recent weeks is there's been discussion about the future of the JCPOA. People say, well, all of America's allies support the JCPOA. The U.S. left but all of America's allies still support. It's like, hold on, none of America's allies and friends who are within Iranian missile range supported the JCPOA. None. Israel, the Saudis, the Emiratis, everyone who's in range of Iranian missiles did not support the JCPOA.

And if you if you go back and you look at what the Prime Minister said, and he talked about an enriched Iran that would be more aggressive, that has come to pass. The Iranian aggression didn't start, I love these sort of, these timelines that you see, and they go through this tit for tat. And it's great because you can always pick the starting point and then sort of pin it on whoever you want. But if you go back, you'll see that Iran became more aggressive in Yemen, in Lebanon, in Syria after the JCPOA, when they had all this money. They didn't use the money for building infrastructure and schools in Iran. They used it to support their proxies throughout the region.

He also said that this could lead to a regional arms race. And again, look at the interest that you're seeing around the region in nuclear technology, and in enrichment technology in the region. That's not in spite of the JCPOA, it's because of the JCPOA. Because the JCPOA, everybody knows that when the sunset, when the restriction's sunset and Iran is able to enrich on an unlimited scale, that other countries are going to, they're going to want to be able to do that too because they're hedging, they see which way this is going.

What I'm seeing now is, what I saw then was, to say that Iran was going to be like a normal country and was going to get all of this money. It's sort of, you say, well, you know, you want to make sure that Lebanon is safe and you want to eventually get to peace between Israel and the Palestinians. But you're giving all of these, you're giving access to all of these, you know, hundreds of billions of dollars to Iran who support all of the forces who work against peace between Israel and the Palestinian and all these other things.

So to me, the JCPOA at the time was a tremendous, I thought it was misguided, but it was a tremendous act of faith by its supporters. And what I'm seeing now, when I hear calls by presidential candidates to return to the JCPOA, despite everything we know from the last four years and despite all of the pressure that's been restored, tells me that the JCPOA is no longer an act of faith, it's become an article of faith. And that is something that is deeply troubling. I really hope that's not the direction that we're going.

SCHANZER: So we're going to have to go to Q&A in a second, but I do want to ask you if you could briefly touch on some of the kind of more recent developments. Obviously, you're not at the Prime Minister's side but you were probably aware of a certain warehouse that was raided by the Israeli Mossad. A lot's been learned since the revelation of those documents. Do you want to speak for two minutes on what we learned?

SCHACHTER: Insofar as I'm able to speak on anything for just two minutes, Sure. But that's the other thing that we know that we didn't know at the time is everything that was in the archive. And the archive, the reactions to the archives were amazing to me. I mean, there were people who, right after the Prime Minister revealed the archive immediately said there's nothing new here.

So if you go and you read the IAEA report from 2011 which addressed the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program, they say our assessment is based on over 1,000 pages of material. The archive had over 100,000 pages of material. And I can tell you, there was new stuff there. There was new stuff there. There was stuff there about equipment, about

experiments, about people, about locations, it's all new stuff. It changes the understanding of what Iran was doing.

The other thing is, Iran's efforts to take this material, to catalog it and to hide it increased after the JCPOA. The other thing that it really threw into, and I've heard this, again, these talking points, well, the archive just shows why you need the JCPOA. But the archive wasn't found because of the JCPOA. The archive was found in spite of the JCPOA. And what the archive shows was that the IAEA Board of Governors decision in December 2015 to stop dealing with the possible military dimensions was a political decision. It wasn't a professional decision.

And if you read, there's this final summary of the IAEA that was an advance of that decision, the picture they had at the time and the picture you have now after seeing the archive material is, I mean, there's no, it's not possible military dimensions. It's an absolute. This was a nuclear weapons program. It couldn't be plainer. By the way, one of the things that was the most challenging for us in putting together the Prime Minister's presentation of the material was, you know, you're looking, there's thousands and thousands of pictures there. You say, let's use this picture because it really shows what the Iranians are doing. I say, no, you can't show that picture because then you're showing the entire world how to build a nuclear weapon. I mean, there were serious proliferation concerns in putting together the material that you could show.

The other thing which I think is really important about the archive vis-a-vis the JCPOA is that a lot of what's in the archive dealt with weaponization. And the JCPOA is, you know, I think the restrictions of the JCPOA are too limited and they're too temporary. But they're very detailed and they focus almost entirely on the question of fissile material. And if you go through it and you read, you'll see it talks about what's allowed, what's not allowed, how it's going to be inspected, how it's going to be enforced, what the consequences are. There's operational language about it.

Now, the JCPOA also deals with the question of weaponization, which like I said, is sort of at the heart of the archive material. The JCPOA is 159 pages. The section on weaponization is half a page. It's half a page, it has no operational language, it doesn't say how it's going to be enforced, it doesn't even say how it's going to be inspected. It is one of the failings of the JCPOA and that I think the archive really threw into stark relief.

SCHANZER: Okay. I want to make sure we get to your questions. There was a lot that I didn't cover. I didn't ask about the deal of the century. It's going to be huge. I didn't ask about the outreach to the Arab world. There was a lot of that during your time. Obviously, there's a lot of things we didn't touch on with regard to Iran or some of the terrorist threats. So I do want to open it up to you. And just wait for the microphone to come and we'll start right here.

GORDON: Yeah. Michael Gordon, *Wall Street Journal*. Sir, I've covered the JCPOA and I'm familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of it. But what I'd like to ask you to explain is where you think you go from here. And we have an administration that has sought zero enrichment. It's sought to roll back Iran's – sought to roll back Iran's assertive posture in the region. So far, it's got increased enrichment and the decision by Iran to exceed the stockpile

limitations on low enriched uranium. So it's an entirely counterproductive result in terms of Iran's enrichment activities.

Our European allies don't want to invoke the dispute mechanism provided for by the agreement because they seem to blame the administration more than Iran for the crisis, so can't go to the Security Council. And the administration has made it absolutely clear and did again today that they do not see military force or military leverage as way to compel Iran to go along with a more stringent agreement.

So, given that the near term results have been counterproductive, although the long term outcome might be more beneficial from your standpoint, where do you go from here? I mean, you've had a lot of talking points about what you don't like about the agreement. How can you get the outcome that you think Israel and the United States needs? Because it's not happening right now.

SCHACHTER: No, but I think in some ways you answered your own question because I think there is a short term view and a long term view. Now the first thing is when I see that Iran can with the flip of a switch increase its level of enrichment and its quantity of material, that also, by the way, rings an alarm bell for me. It says that again, the JCPOA didn't block. It was relying on Iranian goodwill insofar as there is any, not to do those things. It didn't actually prevent it from happening.

But I think the question here is one of long term. Now the prime minister said from the beginning that Iran had the greatest incentive to keep the deal, not to break the deal because this is, the game here is the long game. And the concern of Israel wasn't that Iran was in a position to break out to a single bomb. The concern was that by following the terms of the JCPOA, when you got past that sunset clause that Iran would be in a position to break out to an entire arsenal of bombs.

And the archive only strengthens that assessment because if you look at the three pieces that Iran needs for a deliverable nuclear weapon or a deliverable arsenal of nuclear weapons. You've got the weaponization, the fissile material, and the missiles. Well, the missiles weren't touched by the JCPOA and they've continued to develop those. The fissile material is what the JCPOA will ultimately let them do. And now we know from the archive at the weaponization is further along than had been known at the time of the negotiation.

So the concern here isn't whether or not they're going from three and a half to five percent right now. The issue is what's going to happen over the long run. And the only reason that Iran came to the table in the first place also under the previous administration was because of pressure and the pressure that came from sanctions.

The fact that the Europeans are not now willing to activate the dispute mechanism doesn't add to Israel's confidence. I'm not speaking for Israel, but it certainly doesn't add to my confidence in the JCPOA because at the time, what did the Europeans, they said, if the Iranians do anything that's contrary to the deal, then we'll be there, we'll be on it. And now they say, well,

it's not such a big deal. If they're looking to reassure Israel, not that I think they are, but if they were, this is the exact wrong response. And, unfortunately, that's been their response.

And I'm also, I was disturbed to see that the, I think it's the Spanish foreign minister was going to replace Mrs. Moghreni, you know, gave this interview to Politico several months ago and said, well, you know, Iran calls for Israel's destruction. We got to live with that. That doesn't, I think, fill anybody with confidence either except maybe the Iranians. So I don't know which way that's going to go.

SCHANZER: I want to get Eli Lake in the back there.

LAKE: Yeah. Eli Lake from *Bloomberg*. Can you talk a little bit about how Israel understands its relationship with China, especially in light of the fact that in the last I'd say two or three years, we've seen a kind of Washington consensus emerge that China's not really a strategic competitor as much as it is a serious adversary? And in that respect, what is Israel's sort of strategic thinking at this point with China and its economic engagement with China?

SCHACHTER: I actually don't have too much to say about that. It's not portfolio that I dealt with very much. And actually, I think the only trip to China that the Prime Minister took when I was there, I didn't go. I was actually in Washington at the time. But I think, you know, by and large, I think most of these Israeli interaction with China has been focused on investment but I think also it's become clear over the last, I would say over the last year that some of that investment has raised some eyebrows in Washington.

And I think Israel takes that seriously, I think Israel's taken its relationship with China vis-a-vis Washington seriously. From the beginning there was the stuff, there were things that even already for decades that Israel won't do with China, and it could be those sort of understandings are evolving now. But I really, I'm not in the weeds on that as much as I'd like.

KELLY: Hi, Laura Kelly from *Jewish Insider*. Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar say that they're planning to go to Israel and the Palestinian territories in a few weeks. Could you talk about the Prime Minister's thought process about the possible implications of if they are allowed into the country or if they are blocked from entering the country? And maybe just about the possible – about the threat of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement that they're supportive of, where that ranks on the list of priorities of threats that Israel is thinking about?

SCHACHTER: I can't speak too much to the Prime Minister's thinking about this because I haven't discussed this with him and so I don't know, I don't know what the thinking is. I saw a headline that said that he was going to make this decision himself. I don't know if that's true or not true. I'd be curious to see what their itinerary is when they go to Israel. But in terms of what the Prime Minister's thinking, I don't have much to say because I just don't know.

In terms of the BDS movement, I think it's one of these weird, you have, when you're in the Prime Minister's office, and over time, you see the way some of these things are dealt with, I was constantly reminded, I wasn't a huge comic book guy when I was a kid but I was sort of a

minor one, and I'd have these Bizarro moments where everything is sort of backwards. And I see where, BDS movement is often discussed sort of in progressive terms, which was sort of, it was a Bizarro movement for me because the BDS movement, the idea of boycotting Israel is actually incredibly regressive. I mean, it's basically just taking the Arab League boycott of the 40s and making it current policy, which is I think anything but progressive.

But I also think that a lot of the, I think there are different – be careful not to paint BDS supporters with too broad a brush – there I think those who really understand the ideas of the founders of BDS, which was unequivocal in its opposition to the existence of Israel. And then there are others who think it just sounds like sort of a way of voting with your pocketbook and they don't really, they're not really necessarily aware of those things. If the idea is to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians, I don't think BDS is the way that's going to be achieved any more than I think that any of these other counterproductive things are going to move things forward.

NISSENBAUM: Hi, I'm Dion Nissenbaum with *The Wall Street Journal*. As you know, the U.S. came very close to striking Iran a few weeks ago. I'm wondering if you could talk about what you think the implications of that would have been for Israel. If you had been advising the Prime Minister, what you would have said whether that would have been a wise approach for the U.S. to take and whether that would have been something Israel should have supported? And then more broadly, if you could talk a little bit about how you look at the Trump Administration strategy in the Middle East, they've provided a lot of support for Israel, at the same time, you have a president that has tried to pull all troops out of Syria, which Israel didn't support, so it's a bit of an erratic strategy and how you dealt with that in Israel?

SCHACHTER: That's a lot of questions. I think in terms of, if the U.S. had responded with force in the Gulf, that's a U.S. decision. And Israel, I think didn't say anything or get involved in that and I think that's probably the right approach.

I think the administration has done some things which I think are very important in the region. I think the decision – for example – I think the decision to move the embassy was very important. And I think it was important not just for symbolic and historical reasons, I think it was also important for peace, because I think not moving the embassy, the only effect that had, let me put it to you this way, when President Abbas goes to the UN and he gives a speech, he talks about the Islamic connection to Jerusalem and he talks about, sometimes he'll also talk about the Christian connection to Jerusalem, but he never mentions the Jewish connection to Jerusalem.

And when the Palestinians launch initiatives at UNESCO which talk about making Jerusalem talking about the Islamic connection, the Christian connection, but oops, they always forget to mention the Jewish connection. And there's a reason, there's a systematic campaign by the Palestinians to deny any connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel broadly and to Jerusalem in particular. And I think that not recognizing Israel as the capital and not moving embassies there only feeds that fantasy that maybe someday there will be some reality where Israel is not connected to Jerusalem.

This was my favorite policy issue because, again, I wasn't able to give a two minute answer about the JCPOA because it's complicated and there are nuances and there are details and things like that. And it's the same with the peace process or any one of, you know, a million of these issues.

I remember, I think it was when the Trump campaign announced that if Trump was elected that they would move the embassy. We were with the Prime Minister, I don't remember where we were going but we were just getting on a helicopter. And Prime Minister's spokesman gets a text message from one of your colleagues, says the Trump campaign has just announced that if elected, they're going to move the embassy to Jerusalem. What is the Prime Minister's response? So, the spokesman goes over to the Prime Minister and says, Prime Minister, he's like screaming, "Prime Minister," "Prime Minister, the campaign just said this, what's your response?" And the Prime Minister goes, "My response? Great!" Because it was that simple, it was that straightforward. It was the right thing to do.

Israel is the only country in the world where it's not allowed to pick its capital, so I think it was the right thing to do, it was the historically right thing to do. And I think that ultimately, any peace agreement is going to have Israel as the capital of – Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. So I think it was good for peace too because it shatters that fantasy.

And the answer is, you know, people asked me at the time, should the U.S. move its embassy, the answer was yes, and I think everybody else should move their embassies too. So that was a big deal. Stepping out of the JCPOA was a big deal and very important I think for, again, for the long term.

The Syria thing is I think still an open question. But on the whole, I think that there have been some important things that have been done. I don't know what's going to be in the peace plan or when it's going to be released. But let's see. And the Prime Minister has said that he'll give it an honest and fair look, which I think is the right approach. And the Palestinians have said that they're not even interested, which I think is the wrong approach. And again, I think is actually tragic for the Palestinians.

SCHANZER: Dan?

RAVIV: Thank you. Dan Raviv of *i24 News*. Just sort of on the same theme, can you give us a few words, on November 9, 2016, you were working with Prime Minister Netanyahu, the election results came in from America. Did you realize that it could auger a really major change? I'm not fishing here for what Hillary Clinton would have done, et cetera, but when you got the results, did you realize it would have big policy implications?

SCHACHTER: I think we realized that it could have big policy implications. Candidate Trump had spoken very forcefully about the Iran Nuclear Deal and what he thought of that, which, again, I hope it's come through from my remarks this morning that is, it's the most important issue is Iran and its nuclear program. And so, I think that that was, there was obviously great potential for that. He and his team had talked about the embassy. So, I think there was, I think we saw that there was potential. But again, we also recognize that what people talk about

during campaigns and what happens in practice are not always the same thing. You may have heard of that. We were interested in finding out.

SCHANZER: Take a question in the back.

GEHRKE: Hi, Joel Gehrke with the *Washington Examiner*, thanks for doing this. I wondered, do you feel any, do you think that Israel feels on a tactical pressure with the Syria conflict sort of, in an end phase and different tensions with Iran? Is there any pressure for going into Lebanon or any move to really target Iranian or Hezbollah positions in Syria while the U.S. is still there or for any other reason in the near term?

SCHACHTER: In Lebanon or in Syria?

GEHRKE: Either. They're clearly related. But I mean, just given the regional tensions and the way that conflict is going, do you feel any pressure in the short term to make a move offensively?

SCHACHTER: I think the connection between sort of the waning of the war and Israeli action has to do with how Iran is positioning itself as the war ends. So I think right now, you see Iran and others are jockeying for position for what's going to be in post-war Syria. And if the Iranian position remains that they're going to have, they're striving to have permanent military facilities in Syria from which to attack Israel, then Israel obviously has said that that's unacceptable.

So insofar as they keep that policy, then yeah, then there's going to be more, I wouldn't say pressure to act, but there'll be more impetus to act. But a lot of it depends on what Iran does in Syria.

SCHANZER: I think we got time for one more question. Mr. Qanbar here in the front.

QANBAR: Entifadh Qanbar, Future Foundation. Sir, speaking of the tunnels in northern Israel, we know from information inside Iraq and through some media reports as well that al-Nujaba terrorist Shia militia was part of this attack. Hezbollah was using al-Nujaba. About 1500 fighters supposed to slip into Israel and create mayhem as you are aware of the plan. And we also know that there's a land bridge in Iraq which crosses a lot of bad materials through Syria via to Lebanon to Hezbollah. So it's very clear that the Shia militias in Iraq are eminent and direct threat to Israel. And we know that they don't have the best intentions to Israel.

In addition to very accurate information of presence of middle range and long range missiles in a specific area inside Iraq, which is obviously going to be used once they need to against Israel, is there any view from the Prime Minister's office and yourself in regard to how to counter those Shia militias in Iraq? And by the way, today, there was, at 1:50 AM Iraq time, there was an attack on area, police called, then there was an attack by some unknown drone. We think maybe this is Israeli one and killed or injured 16 Shia militias, notorious Shia militias from Kata'ib Hezbollah of Iraq. So do you have any thoughts about what your measures to counter this eminent threat from the Shia militias in Iraq?

SCHACHTER: I look at that as again through the lens of the overall Iranian threat in the region. So I think that, you've got Iran in Lebanon, you've got Iran in Syria, you've got Iran in Gaza, you've got Iran and Iraq, and in Yemen. And again, I think, obviously, each one of these places has its unique elements that need to be addressed uniquely but they're all part of a much bigger of a much bigger issue and that issue is Iran, as they say, malign activity in the region. And you can't do the one without considering the other. But the specifics about Iraq. I really don't have much to add to that. I'm sorry.

SCHANZER: Okay, well, we've run out of time. Jonathan, I want to thank you very much for your comments and for your candor today. I suspect there'll be a few people here in the audience that may want to follow up, journalists with questions. And I hope that you'll come back and join us in future conversations. But let's give Jonathan a round of applause.