

MAY: Well, welcome and thank you all for joining us today. My name is Cliff May, I'm FDD's founder and President, and we're glad to be hosting here at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies this event. We're pleased to have you here, some in-person, some of course also tuning in live, for this discussion of Tehran's intricate network of armed proxies and the threat they pose to the United States and the United States' (inaudible) in the Middle East, Israel. The Islamic Republic of Iran has spent the last four decades building at least 19 what we would call foreign legions and terrorist organizations in Gaza, in the West Bank, increasingly in Lebanon, in Syria. Their goal? To murder Israelis, and if possible, destroy Israel's very existence.

To discuss this conflict, we're proud to host Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Conricus. He's a former international spokesman for the Israel Defense Forces and a member of the Israel Defense and Security Forum. Also, Jonathan Schanzer, Senior Vice President for Research here at FDD and former terrorism finance analyst at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, and Joe Truzman, research analyst at *FDD's Long War Journal*. The conversation will be moderated by Enia Krivine, the Senior Director of FDD's Israel Program and National Security Network.

And before we begin, just a few words about FDD. For more than 20 years now, FDD has operated as an independent, non-partisan research institute focused exclusively on national security and foreign policy. As a point of both pride and principle, we do not accept foreign government funding, no foreign government funding from anywhere. We never have, we never will. And for more on our work, please visit our website, FDD.org, and follow us on Twitter, @FDD.

So that's enough from me. Enia, over to you.

KRIVINE: Thank you, Cliff, and thank you everyone for being here today.

So without further ado, let's jump right in. I'm going to start with Joe. You recently produced a product – it's on an FDD website – that's outlining the 19 terror groups that are on Israel's borders. Can you tell us a little bit, set the stage why you produced this product, what the relevance is, and a little bit about how these groups function?

TRUZMAN: Yes, absolutely. So I just want to say thank you for – to everyone. I'm really happy to be here. This is a great event. I'm going to let you in on a – a little secret – I love this subject, I love – love watching – or studying these – these groups. Most of them, yes, they are terrorist groups.

So the big picture, what's going on – so I've identified with this visual 19 groups, 19 Palestinian – some of them Palestinians, some of them from Syria and Lebanon and the West Bank and others, that are either proxies of Iran, right, or they are backed by Iran, either by funding, arms transfers, and so on.

So – and the interesting thing about these groups is that all of them are on Israel's borders. We have the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria. There's also Iraqi groups operating in Syria as well that formed that are forming a front basically, an Iranian-backed front.

So these groups, a lot of – a lot – a lot of them been – some of them have been in the media, right? There's Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah in Lebanon, but there's others – there's – actually, there's 19 of them. So it's a formidable front, right? So I wanted to highlight that.

Something also that's very important here is that only some of these groups are designated as terrorist organizations, right, by the United States government and Western countries. So there's a lot there – there's a lot of groups there that are – that are not designated.

All right, - so I want to just talk about a few things. So who do these groups appeal to, right? How do they recruit their – their members, right? Most of their target audience is teenagers – teenagers, some of them children as well.

I'll give you an example. Hamas in Gaza, they run summer camps and they use these summer camps to recruit children – to recruit children, to recruit teenagers to their so-called military wing, all right? They run these camps, they teach children how to use weapons, and they teach them about the resistance [*air quotes*] against Israel. So that's one thing.

Sectarian differences, there aren't any really. Iran will help you if you're Sunni, if you're Shia, if you're Christian. As long as you take up arms against Israel, they're willing to help, OK? So I think this is why they've been a – able to amass 19 – at least 19 groups, all right on Israel's borders.

Something else is coordination between these groups – and I think Jon can talk about this a little more after – but we've seen some instances where, for example, in 2021, the reports about a nerve center in Beirut that was established by Hezbollah, the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps], and other groups to attack Israel during the 2021 Gaza War. And we saw rockets being launched from Lebanon and from Syria during that time.

There's also coordination between the Palestinian armed groups. That's usually called the Joint Operations Room. We see this in Gaza and Lebanon and possibly in Southern Lebanon as well now. This Joint Operations Room is led by Hamas and it's formed by about eight to 10 smaller Palestinian groups, including Islamic Jihad, OK? And they coordinate attacks against Israel.

This has happened just recently between – in the conflict between Israel and Islamic Jihad. Although Hamas wasn't involved in it kinetically, let's say, they – they still lead this Joint Operations Room. So they – they coordinate their attacks and that's how – they are stronger that way, when they launch these attacks against Israel. And this is happening in the West Bank too, which I can go into a little further later.

KRIVINE: Thank you. So, you brought up the Joint Operations Room. Jon, you wrote about this last year. I think you were the first person I saw write on this issue. I think it's extremely significant. Do you want to add a little bit of color there and – as far as, like, what you were seeing and where you got the tip-off and where you think it's going?

SCHANZER: Sure. First of all, great to be with everybody. No offense intended here if you see me showing the bottom of my foot to you. In the Middle East, that's actually a considerable insult. It's not intended as an insult here today, so please – please forgive me.

The – the nerve center, or at least as it was described, I first heard about it while watching Israeli news in Hebrew during the 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas. There was one analyst on Channel 11 who mentioned it just in passing, that we may have been watching, for example, the Arab communities in Israel coming out and rioting in some of the mixed cities and that that may have been the result of some of this.

In addition, the sort of attacks that were taking place in the Gaza Strip, possible attacks in Jerusalem, West Bank, rockets out of Lebanon, the implication there was that this was all somehow connected in a way that, perhaps, others had not figured out yet.

And so, over the ensuing months, we actually conducted research here at FDD, we dug into Hebrew sources, English sources, Arabic sources, and what we found was that there was actually – I don't want to say a lot but there was a fair amount. There were probably, I don't know, somewhere about eight to 10 different sources indicating that this nerve center existed, that it was spearheaded by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, basically spearheaded by Iranian leadership, that it – it exists somewhere inside Lebanon. No one knows.

And it's really interesting, when you talk to – and I've talked to Arab intelligence services and Israeli security officials – there is some discrepancy about whether it is a physical structure in Lebanon or whether it is a virtual structure, but at minimum, the servers exist in Lebanon, possibly an entire building exists there.

But what we've seen since, in the years since, is that there have been a number of photo opportunities where representatives from Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, all sit in the same room, behind them is a picture of the Supreme Leader of Iran, and they're sort of smiling and kind of winking at the Israelis, saying "we're here, we're working together, and you guys are the target."

So, increasing what we're seeing is this sense of coordination, and we can talk about it a little bit more but – perhaps later in our discussion – but we're getting a sense now that there is a strategy where there wasn't one before.

You know, it used to be that Hamas would just – every time they got angry or they were frustrated or they were trying to extract concessions from Israel, they start lobbing rockets at Israel and then Israel responds, and maybe you have an escalation, it turns into a full-blown conflict, maybe you don't.

What we're seeing now is at least some direction from Iran about who does what and when, and that should be eye-opening to everyone here if you're really concerned about a multi-front war against Israel. I think that is likely where all of this is heading. This nerve center appears to be the spearhead of such an endeavor at some point in the future.

KRIVINE: And they're now operating nerve centers in Gaza and potentially the West Bank too, according to our research.

SCHANZER: Right. Correct.

KRIVINE: OK. Interesting. I'm going to move to my friend, Jonathan Conricus. There's a lot of news recently about the West Bank, in the past 18 months, we've seen a significant uptick, and then just 10 days ago, I believe it was, there was a pretty sophisticated, significant but limited IDF operation in the West Bank that targeted Jenin, and much more specifically, a neighborhood of Jenin, which is sort of called the 'refugee camp'. Obviously, it looks like a normal sort of dense urban environment, but it's known as the refugee camp neighborhood in Jenin.

Can you talk to us a little bit about what the implications of that operation were and sort of – sort of why – why then and what – what did the IDF achieve?

CONRICUS: Thank you, Enia. So the operation in Jenin was, indeed, very limited. You know, it got quite a lot of coverage in many of the prominent newspapers, and agencies covered it, and perhaps a little bit bigger than what it really was in reality.

It was an operation commanded by a division headquarters, which immediately will tell you that it's a few brigades but not more than that, and that immediately tells you at what level the IDF was, you know, addressing the issue.

It took many months of slow-boil cooking of a hundred – or I'd say dozens of attacks coming out of Jenin against Israeli military and civilian targets, most of them in Northern Samaria, but not only limited Northern West Bank. And it took a lot of pressure from Israeli community leaders, Israeli civilians, to the government and to the military saying, "listen, we are not safe. We're getting stones – stones are pelted at us on every road we drive, there are drive-by shootings, there are terrorists who are getting into our communities, and you, the military, are attacked with live fire at various locations, and a lot of that is coming from Jenin. So, you really need to address the issue."

The bigger picture is – if we zoom out – is that the Palestinian Authority, for many, many months, has really retracted its security forces from Jenin and from Nablus, left a void, and the void has been very, very happily filled by Hamas-supported organizations, Iranian-supported organizations – which aren't mutually exclusive, it could be both – and by different new terror organizations or gangs in those cities, in Jenin and Nablus, and created a situation whereby Israel was kind of forced to launch this operation, did a very, I would call it surgical, you know – we use it in the military, we use that term quite a lot. This really was, I think.

It's, in my memory, the only time that Israel operated on the ground with significant forces, with air components as well, where lots of terrorists were attacked and killed and zero civilians – zero Palestinian civilians were killed.

And I looked and I haven't found any other reference or anything – other similar military activity in the world, Western military operating in dense urban terrain against terrorist infrastructure which is embedded in the urban terrain, with many civilians about, and fortunately no civilians killed – there were Palestinian civilians wounded but thankfully none killed – and that is because of the level of attention, preparation, and rules of engagement that the IDF uses in order to kill terrorists and try to undermine their infrastructure without affecting civilians.

That operation ended quite successfully. Most of the terrorists fled and they didn't fight. Then, they were able to return, at least to Parliament, but what they found is that most of their infrastructure is no longer.

I think that if we look at Northern Samaria, we have Nablus, which is just one town south of Jenin, where there still is a hotbed of activity. My guess is that that is where focus will be next. If nothing big happens in Hebron, then I think Nablus is really the area where other terrorist organizations funded by Iran are focusing.

And just to close – and if we ask ourselves so why is all this happening in Northern Samaria at this time, my analysis – and I'm not alone in thinking – is Hamas sustained quite significant damage in May '21 – also described in – in the excellent book that Jonathan wrote – a lot of damage – infrastructure, personnel, R&D [research and development] capabilities – and really a blow to their combat capabilities.

Since then, Hamas said "OK, then maybe let's export it out and let's use proxies in Lebanon and let's put even more emphasis on Judea and Samaria – or the West Bank – and let's get things going there so that we can continue, you know,

with the so-called resistance, armed struggle against Israel, and the use of different terrorist tactics without having it in our backyard.”

And Hamas has invested tremendously, a lot of it with Iranian help, in terms of funding, but it's been Hamas-generated – social media, mosques. What they attempted the last Ramadan was really – they got closer than they've gotten before but they didn't really pull it off because – and this is the bottom line – Palestinians in northern Samaria are still voting with their feet, saying “well, you know, I may like your ideas but I'm not willing to jeopardize all that I've worked so hard to get, a lot of it with – through Israeli concessions – quality of life, work, respect, et cetera, education – and I'm not willing to sacrifice that now for your agenda.”

That may not hold and that's really where we are now, in terms of the dynamic.

KRIVINE: Yeah. Jon?

SCHANZER: Yeah, just a couple of other quick notes. First of all, that strategy that Hamas undertook after May of 2021, I think a couple things to – to point out here.

First of all, I think it was at the direction of the regime in Iran. In other words, this is part of that nerve center, that kind of operation, the direction that these various terrorist groups are getting. This is strategic direction from Iran. In other words, they didn't just come up with this idea out of nowhere. This appears to be encouraged by the IRGC, in terms of kind of trying to create a broader strategy to surround Israel.

But the other thing, when you think about that move to the West Bank, it was really smart on the part of Hamas, right? on the one hand – and I think it's obvious – when every time you start firing rockets at Israel, if you're Hamas, you know you're going to get shellacked at home. – it's a rule at this point, you know you're going to get hit hard, it's going to be a – a lot of damage to infrastructure, homes, civilians are going to be miserable.

And so you've got two million-plus Palestinians living in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. They are unhappy already because Hamas is not exactly great at governance. Kind of a little known secret about terrorist organizations, they're not really great about keeping the trash collectors, you know, on the streets. And so why invite that kind of misery if you can export it, right?

So take it to the territory that you'd like to conquer, which is, of course, the West Bank, and there is, I think, the other kind of benefit that Hamas gets out of this, is – so, you know, Hamas, since 2007, has been in a civil war with the Fatah faction, with the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]. The PLO's been clinging to power in the West Bank, it has been – I mean, let's be honest, it's a civil war that's ongoing between the two Palestinian factions.

And so for Hamas, if they want to finish the job, if they want to actually control both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, then what do you do? You begin to export this kind of violence to the West Bank, you hopefully draw in – from their perspective, you draw in the Israelis, you get them to wage war, and at some point, maybe you have an opportunity of conquering that territory as well.

So it really makes a huge amount of sense, what Hamas was doing here, but I think it makes even more sense to know that it was the Iranians saying “hey, by the way, we have an idea for you. Why don't you try this?” And what we just saw just a few weeks ago I think was the beginning of this new strategy.

KRIVINE: Thanks. Yeah, I agree with everything you just said. I have – I was watching this some of the activities in Jenin and I saw that IDF Defense Minister Gallant said, you know, “We can replicate this operation in other places,” which I thought was a critical piece of that, which is he was basically saying Nablus could be next, and that’s how I interpreted that. Actually, I have a piece up at JNS.org today on sort of that operation.

And one of the interesting things that I thought is, as the IDF withdrew, so Abbas went in, right, because he hasn’t been there since – into those neighborhoods since 2005 because he’s not welcome there, it’s not safe for him. So this kind of outlines the strange symbiotic relationship the IDF has with the PA [Palestinian Authority].

Jon, you wrote the book on Hamas versus Fatah. I remember it well. It was one of the – I think it’s still one of the – stands today as one of the best books on the topic. How do you see this dynamic, this sort of Israel-PA symbiotic relationship coming – coming to a head with Hamas as it gets more active in the West Bank?

SCHANZER: It’s a mess. It – I mean, if – if – that’s the – I’ll just leave it there. No, I’m kidding.

(LAUGHTER)

Not ...

KRIVINE: Next question.

(LAUGHTER)

SCHANZER: Yeah, moving on.

Look, first of all, we know that the PA is – I mean, Mahmoud Abbas is now – what is he, 18 years into a four year term, OK? He is not well. He has not designated a successor. Up until a couple of years ago, he was a chain smoker, now he just vapes. So – well, like, we’re really, like, on the edge of possibly a major succession crisis inside the Palestinian Authority.

And what’s interesting is and this is conversations that Enia and I had, I guess it was last year in October. We were in Israel talking to some security officials and they were saying that, you know, up until maybe about a year or a year and a half ago, there was, like, a lineup of people that wanted to succeed Abbas. They were waiting for the old man to kick the bucket so they could come in and take over the Palestinian Authority, they could become the new Ra’īs, the new President.

And, you know, we saw former security people, we had people like Mohammed Dahlan, who’s based in the UAE, Mohammed Faraj – I mean, there was a whole group of people – Mahmoud Al Alul from the Fatah faction – I could give you about four or five others – they were all lining up. And you got a sense they were kind of throwing elbows trying to get to the front of the line.

And then what we heard from the Israelis was that – that, like, as the PA has been unraveling, as they’ve been unable to establish even a modicum of security in – particularly in the northern West Bank, but I think in lots of the West Bank, if we’re going to be honest – you began to see that these actors wanted nothing to do with the leadership role any longer. In other words, they took themselves out of the running.

Bottom line is why would you want to be captain of the Titanic, right? If you know the ship is going down, then maybe you don't want that leadership position.

And so what we're watching right now is the steady unraveling of the security situation because of Iran and because of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the nerve center and everything else. We're looking at a Palestinian Authority political structure that has lost the faith of the Palestinian people because of corruption, both political and economic. And now, on top of that, a leadership crisis, cause people are not lining up any longer. So this is the general sense of what's going on in the West Bank.

The Israelis are literally keeping things going right now, and the thanks that they get for it, which is kind of the hilarious thing, right – we know Israel is not welcome there, they don't love Israel's presence, they consider it an occupation. Whether you disagree with that or not, that is the way that Palestinians view it. But they're keeping the Palestinian Authority alive and in place, and they're keeping that security structure largely intact.

And the Palestinian Authority is still – you know, they're paying the salaries of – of terrorists who are sitting in jail, they are supporting the families of those terrorists, and tacitly, supporting violence against Israel. The rhetoric is, of course, horrific.

And so this is sort of the thanks that Israel feels like it's getting by clearing out a place like Jenin, allowing Mahmoud Abbas to come in there, and then slamming Israel in front of all of the people there with no real, no sort of self-awareness that had Israel not cleared the area, he would not have been able to make that speech excoriating Israel.

So it is complicated to say the least. There's actually a measure right now going through the Israeli government about trying to keep the PA afloat. How do we figure out how to make the PA stronger, which is just a strange thing, but it's the devil you know, as far as Israel is concerned. They need this structure in order to not go back into the West Bank. They don't want a full reoccupation. They don't want any of this. They like to keep things status quo. Iran is obviously working against that, so is Hamas, and so the great game is afoot.

KRIVINE: Thank you. Let's pivot to the – to Israel's northern borders. So I lived in Israel during the Second Lebanon War. I remember it well. It's been a pretty quiet front since then, right? I – I would say up until the past, again, 18 months, a similar sort of timeframe, you start seeing Lebanon test the Hezbollah specifically, which is an Iranian proxy in southern Lebanon, arguably Israel's most powerful foe on its borders, and you see them kind of testing Israel.

Joe, can you tell us a little bit about what's been going on, what that prodding looks like, and how you see it playing out?

TRUZMAN: Right. So there's a – it's a pattern that's – that's developing, right, that we've seen for at least a couple of years. One can point to the drones that were launched against the Karish gas field a couple years ago by Hezbollah.

You can talk about recently the Megiddo Junction bombing, and then following that, a low-level type of harassment activity in the north, specifically the setting up or establishment of – of tents – Hezbollah tents in Israeli territory or along the border. There was also an anti-tank guided missile strike by Hezbollah in an open area in Lebanon, but they're signaling, OK? So this is a pattern that I'm seeing developing.

And somebody I know – somebody I know once told me that history repeats itself, OK? So I've seen – I'm seeing this – I've seen this happen before, not with Hezbollah exactly but with Hamas in Gaza, and that was just recently actually in 2018, 2019. We saw the same thing along the security fence in Gaza. There was infiltrations through the security fence, bombings at the security fence.

And then we started seeing incendiary balloons that were being launched into Israel by Palestinian militant groups or its terrorist groups. So I'm seeing that pattern – sort of that pattern develop.

And what happened in Gaza is that conflict arose. There was – rockets were fired. Israelis had to retaliate. And I think right now, what we're seeing is that type of pattern developing, and with Hezbollah, which has a much greater arsenal than all of the Palestinian groups combined. So - it's a disturbing development, but I've been talking about kinetic action here.

Also, something I've observed is propaganda, especially on the Internet. What I mean by that – Hezbollah is pumping out more propaganda on the Internet, more than it has recently in the last few years. What I mean by that, I'll give you an example.

I've seen a lot of these productions showing Hezbollah Special Forces, they're called Radwan units. They demonstrate a mock infiltration into Israeli territory, they blow up cars, they blow up communities, they blow up the wall there at the northern border. So they're – they're signaling, OK? They're signaling that they have the capability of doing something. So that's – that's something else.

But the big thing now is, again, one incident that we've been seeing, at least the incidents that we've been seeing lately, can blow up literally and cause days of fighting, and I think that's – it's very concerning right now.

The the last thing I do want to mention is that I've seen the argument that Hezbollah is doing this because Israel is in a weakened state. Now, some people say it's the political situation in Israel – perhaps. That's a fair assessment.

Also, I think it's – it's very possible that it – this is being done by the direction – or on the instructions of Iran, and what I mean by that is, in the last few years – and Jon knows this very well – is that Israel and Iran have been engaged in a conflict, the war between wars, right?

And Israel has been attacking Iranian targets in Syria, thwarting PGMs, precision-guided missile transfers, to Hezbollah from Iran, and they've been attacking IRGC targets in Syria. And there's more – and there's other things, but these are just some examples.

It's plausible that what the Iranians are doing is bogging down Israelis in the north. So I think that's – that is one of the possible situations that's going on right now in the north.

KRIVINE: Thank you. So Jonathan, can we get some – I'm going to turn to you to talk a little bit about some of the things going on inside Israel. So we have a situation, as I'm sure everyone's following, where you have a very right wing government and a couple of firebrand members of Knesset that are causing a lot of stir and trying to push this judicial reform or overhaul, depending on who you talk to, which is getting a lot of play in the media.

Many people are – you know, in response to the – this judicial push, IDF reservists are now threatening to refuse to come and show up for their reservist duty, which would be a big blow to Israel's national security, undoubtedly.

So the question to you is: is this being blown out of proportion? Do you feel that the upheavals within Israel are actually a legitimate threat to Israel's national security?

CONRICUS: Yeah, I've heard that – I've heard that argument being made. And if we look back a few months, last time that legislation was going ahead, there were lots of protests in Israel, hundreds of thousands of Israelis were out on the street. And then the Defense Minister made a statement warning of the possible ramifications of the situation and urging the government to pause legislation and get national unity behind it.

Then, we saw he was fired for a short time and then reinstated, but what we saw then, on behalf of our different Iran-supported enemies, was that they probably interpreted it as a good time to attack. And we saw rockets fired from Lebanon, rockets fired from Syria, rockets fired from Gaza, and attacks in Judea and Samaria.

Based on that logic, I think that we are now these days in another such peak of political activity in Israel. And then there's a response by various Israelis, reservists. And I think the coming days will be very, very tense and important in the way that things will go ahead.

There have already been statements today, just a few minutes ago, of a lot of reserve personnel who are indeed saying that they will refuse to serve, which I personally – I may understand the feelings and logic behind it. I cannot commend it and I cannot say that it's something that you should be doing if you care about the security. I'm all for protesting and voicing your opinion, but in terms of not reporting for service in the IDF, at this time when we have this level of threats around us – very dangerous.

And I'm sure that – I mean, if the topic of our conversation is the Iranian proxies around us, they are definitely watching and they are definitely, I think, taking a lot of comfort from the situation in Israel. And they might try to, again, leverage the internal turmoil in Israel to their benefit.

So the bottom line of this, I think, should be that the government, who is, after all, responsible for everything that happens in the country and holds power, should understand the pushback, see and adapt its posture accordingly, and again, seek to find common ground so that we can avoid people taking very drastic and – means that I think aren't legitimate, but avoid that and focus on what's really important because we do – as we know in this room and many people around the world know – have a lot of threats to deal with. They're serious, they're along our northern border, south, and in many other locations. So it's a very hotly contested topic.

We haven't seen the peak of events yet, unfortunately. And my hope is that the government will find a way of compromise, because otherwise, I think we're looking at very negative ramifications for Israel.

KRIVINE: So do you want to add to that, Jon?

SCHANZER: Yeah, I – I mean, let me just say this I think that, you know, a lot of people are saying that they're 'pro-reform' or 'anti-reform' or 'pro-overhaul,' 'anti-overhaul,' 'right,' 'left'. I think it's important to note here that the challenges that Israel is experiencing with its Supreme Court, I think people on the left and right both acknowledge that there are changes that are needed. So in other words, it's not wrong to want to change it.

I think that right now, there is a trust deficit among those on the left about those that are trying to enact these changes within this current government, and I think, in light of that, that is – that seems to be the rub right now and it's probably the reason why we're seeing all these people out in the streets and probably why we need to press pause.

And I will also note that you know, this government is also sustaining a significant amount of diplomatic pressure from the United States, from other partners around the world, even from the – the parties to the Abraham Accords. They don't like what they're seeing, they don't like this kind of chaos, and they're asking the government to pump the brakes.

I think pumping the brakes on it right now makes good sense. Again, it doesn't mean give up on this altogether. Israel doesn't have a Constitution. It needs a Constitution. They're going to need to get back to the drawing board on that. They're going to have to figure out how to navigate some of the concerns that they have about the Supreme Court and a range of other issues.

The question is, as this war between wars is going on, as you've got things that are going on in the north with Hezbollah, as you've got Iran operating this nerve center, as Iran is on the verge of a nuclear weapon, is this really the battle that you want to be fighting right now, where you're yelling at each other about what the – what the term "reasonableness" means at the Supreme Court?

It seems like this is small ball compared to the big game that's afoot. And so I think it's probably in Israel's interests to try to put a pin in this, address some of the other concerns.

Of course, there are going to be those who say there is no good time for Israel to address any of these things. So you put a pin in it now, it means you're probably never going to deal with it because there is always going to be another security challenge, right? One goes away, another one comes in. This is the history of Israel.

That said, don't do this now. It feels like elective surgery. I don't want to, you know, give myself PTSD. But yeah, it – this looks like elective surgery right now, when you've got, like, a heart transplant that needs to be conducted. And that is, I think, the big takeaway for anyone who's thinking about Israel's security long term.

KRIVINE: So you touched on something that we haven't talked about yet. You said war between wars. And I know you're doing a lot of work on that topic right now. Joe mentioned that there are Iran-backed terrorist groups functioning in Syria.

What is the dynamic right now with Syria? How does – what's the lay of the land? And how does it affect Israel's risk calculus dealing in that space?

SCHANZER: So, first, "war between wars" is sort of the Israeli fancy way of saying "gray zone warfare". Israel has been waging a gray zone war against Iran in cyberspace, on the high seas, assassination of – of Iranian scientists, nuclear scientists. There's been a whole range – psychological operations – there's been a whole range of different attacks that Israel has been conducting under the threshold of all-out war.

And what's actually, I think, interesting to me about this is that Iran has been doing the same thing for many years, conducting proxy wars against Israel, right, and using Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and all the other 19 groups that Joe has been tracking. And so the war between wars have been heating up.

Nowhere is it more tense and more heated than in Syria itself. Now remember, Syria, over the last 10, 12 years, there's been a civil war that's been going on, total chaos. And what Iran has been trying to do is to use that chaos, to use the fog of war, to bring in a bunch of Iranian Hezbollah personnel, to bring advanced weaponry, to transfer them to the airport, and then from there, to bring those weapons to Hezbollah.

Specifically, I'm talking about precision-guided munitions, which is a very dangerous weapon for Hezbollah. No terrorist group actually, other than Hezbollah, even has precision-guided munitions. This is where you're able to attack a target within, let's say, about 10 or 15 yards of where you intended.

That is incredibly precise. It's what gives America the ability to dominate battlefield after battlefield, Israel the same. When you give – put – that in the hands of a group like Hezbollah, that means that they could target the Dimona nuclear reactor, they could target the chemical plant at Haifa, they could attack the Kirya, which is Israel's sort of Pentagon in downtown Tel Aviv. These are all targets that you don't even want to think about getting hit if you're an Israeli.

And so what Israel has been doing is they've been striking almost night after night. I mean, I – I – it's really hard to think of a week where I haven't seen a report about an Israeli strike inside of Syria. They've been doing it with almost total impunity and the goal has been to disrupt and destroy as much of that weapons pipeline and personnel pipeline that Iran has been putting into the country in the fog of war.

It's been incredibly successful. Thousands of strikes have been recorded. There are probably thousands more that we don't even know about. And so in that sense, Israel has been eating Iran's lunch and they've been dominating the airspace in Syria. So, OK, that's maybe the good news from the Israeli perspective.

Here's the downside or the other elements of what's going on. First of all, some of the PGMs are getting through. Right now, Hezbollah is estimated to have somewhere in the vicinity of 500 precision-guided munitions. They'd say, "oh, 500, that's not so bad."

OK, first of all, we don't know how well Iron Dome will do against precision-guided munitions because you can literally guide where these rockets can go – up, down, left and right, and you can try to evade Iron Dome. We don't know whether Iron Dome is going to be effective against PGMs or not. And so there is that concern.

The other concern is you take those PGMs, 500 of them, and you blend them with the 150,000 rockets that Hezbollah has in its possession, that it can deploy against Israel. How does Israel know – as they're watching rockets shoot out of Lebanon in a future conflict, how does Israel know which one is a PGM and which one is not? How do they know which ones to shoot down and which ones to let go through? It becomes very, very complicated.

So right now, the Syria space is now changing as a result of that, but then there's also this sort of weird phenomenon where the Syrian civil war is essentially over, Assad has effectively won. And the Arab League, after he has just – after Assad has slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Syrians and Palestinians, and he's displaced millions of people, the Arab world is like, "welcome back, Habibi." Like, where have you been? And it's really, it's amazing to watch.

And so there are big questions. As Syria re-establishes a certain amount of legitimacy in the country, internationally, does this continue? Does the campaign between wars continue? I think Israel sees no alternative but to do this but I would say that the stakes are probably higher and the challenges could become greater as Syria rebuilds.

KRIVINE: Joe, talking about Syria, you – I saw in the visual that you produced that there are several groups that are functioning out of Syria, that are either bankrolled or taking orders from Iran.

How – how would you characterize the coordination between Iran in these groups? Does it change between the – the various different, sort of distinct organizations? And then sort of across the board, if you're talking about 19 groups all around Israel's borders – I mean, I know, for example, that Hamas and Islamic Jihad have a very – both have a relationship with Iran. It looks different, right, between them. So how – how would you characterize specifically the groups in Syria? And then perhaps zoom out to how well coordinated these varied groups are with Iran.

TRUZMAN: Right. I think at least the Syrian groups and actually some of the Iraqi groups that are operating in Syria are very close to Iran, maybe even more so than – than Hamas. So I'll give you an example. There are groups that have been established by the IRGC in Syria. There's the Zainebiyoun Brigade, there's the Fatemiyoun Brigade, and the – there's other groups as well.

And so I – I see that they're – since they're being established by the IRGC, I believe they – they take – they – if they're given instructions, they will – they will adhere to them. I see this with the Iraqi groups as well that operate in Syria because they're so close with Iran.

In comparison to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, for example, I think Hamas has some autonomy, OK, right? They do get arms, they do get funds, but they're not a proxy, they weren't created by Iran, right, so – unlike Islamic Jihad. Now we see Islamic Jihad operating in the Gaza West Bank, in Syria and Lebanon.

And I'll give another example here. I – I – I think it's really important about Islamic Jihad, specific – specifically in the West Bank. In the West Bank, Islamic Jihad was dominant but not like they are now. The – Islamic Jihad has received funds and – and weapons from Iran at a much greater pace. So – even so much so that they've been able to establish groups in different – in different cities in the West Bank, OK? There's – obviously, there's Jenin, there's Nablus, there's Tulkarm, there's Tubas, there's several more, OK?

So there – what I'm seeing is these funds from Iran, these weapons from Iran, the support from Iran enabling Islamic Jihad to spread through the West Bank, all right? And the IDF is trying to thwart it, they're trying to – you know, they have the daily raids and things like that.

The PA Housing Authority, they've done a little bit of work, OK, which is good. Recently and in – in the last few days, they've arrested some members. So – but the problem is this happened – this started two years ago, all right, and now, we're just seeing that – the PA really trying to do some effort.

So – so if they're really – the groups that I'm really concerned about, as far as taking instructions from Iran and carrying them out, it's – absolutely it's their proxies more than anything. The ones in, like I said, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah – yes, Hamas, to an extent, but they have more autonomy – and then the Syrian groups and the Iraqi groups that operate within Syria.

KRIVINE: Thanks. Jon, anything you want to add on that?

SCHANZER: No.

KRIVINE: OK. I think this will be my last question. I'll address it to Jonathan Conricus. Throughout the past, I would say six months – I'll just throw that out there we've heard more and more discussion about a multi-front war, and Israeli, IDF brass saying the next war is not going to be sort of a discrete war with enemy X on Y border, we are looking at sort of a multi-front campaign.

And and we saw a glimpse of it recently. I believe it was April, during the holy month, when there were sort of – there were four fronts active. There was Gaza, there was the West Bank, there was Jerusalem, and rockets from the north.

So as – as someone who lives in Israel and who has multiple children there and – you know, your base, what does a multi-front campaign look like to you? How – what – what do you anticipate it looking like? And how would the IDF respond to that? Is it – is it capable of handling a multi-front campaign?

CONRICUS: You know, a few years ago, Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi, he was Chief of Staff of the IDF, and he was thinking of "how can I communicate to my fellow Israelis, to the Israeli population? How can we calibrate expectations? What will reality in Israel look like when this scenario actually becomes reality, when Iran says 'go, go, go' and really means it with Hezbollah, with Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and their proxies in Syria, and really push those organizations to commit?"

And there's you know, there's room for local agency, as Joe said very correctly. Some of them are "yes, sir, how high?" and some of them are "well, you know, maybe yes." But all in all, if Iran would really, really push, for whatever reason – internal, external – then we could find ourselves facing a – a total of nearing 200,000 rocket arsenal, north and south combined, at a rate of about 4,000, almost 5,000 per day.

And the dilemma for the previous Chief of Staff was, OK, "how do I communicate this to Israeli civilians without sowing panic and fear?" Because an easy calculation is we have the amazing Iron Dome and it shoots down 96, 94, 97 – depending on which conflict and what our enemies are doing – but a very high percentage of rockets, but we don't have enough – not batteries and not interceptors and definitely not enough to deal with 4,500 or 5,000 rockets per day fired simultaneously at different Israeli installations from different locations.

And what he then tried to communicate was, "well, Israelis, you will be in shelters, we will take the battle to our enemies. There will be a very heavy campaign of standoff fire, followed by perhaps ground operations as well, but only at the latter stage."

And what I think is the most relevant part for people outside of Israel listening into that conversation or that dilemma is Israel has always faced, especially over the last, let's say 30 years, the metaphorical hourglass, which immediately flips the moment we start using some of our military capabilities to defend ourselves.

And usually what makes that sand flow quicker or slower is the amount of non-combatants killed in any of the enemy areas where terrorists are fighting from and using them as human shields and the infrastructure.

The issue is that, in that scenario, a convergence, a multi-front war against all of the Iranian – or most of the Iranian proxies – around Israel, that would mean gloves off for the IDF. It won't mean, you know, JDAMs [Joint Direct Attack Munitions] and precise, very expensive American munitions, only at where the terrorists are, it will mean whatever Israel

has at hand, including heavy artillery and other pieces which don't only strike a specific, you know, small target area of a few feet, but much bigger, causing much more damage.

Why will Israel need to use that? Because Israel will face tremendous amount of rockets and there will be civilian casualties in Israel. Where does it become relevant for people listening? Because that is when Israel will need a lot of international support, first and foremost by the U.S., continuing to say that Israel has a right to defend itself against those threats brought at it by Iranian proxies.

And I think that's a bottom line that is very, very important to keep in mind, because if the Iranians decide, for whatever reason they have, that this is where they want to go, Israel will defend itself, respond, and it will be forced to use a lot of force to protect its civilians and its critical infrastructure against precision guided missiles, against a very large amount of non-precision guided rockets, and it could be very, very violent. And I think that is the scenario that our decision makers and generals are thinking about.

And to add complexity, also, the local Arab population in Israel, which we saw – we got kind of an early taste of – what happened in May '21. We had revolts, clashes, attempts at lynchings. Unfortunately, a few lynchings as well, not only attempts, which will add complexity for the IDF not to maneuver into – towards Beirut but actually to maneuver inside Israel, and that would be another layer of complexity.

But that's really, again, coordinated, and could be orchestrated by Iran, for whatever reason, and – and it would mean – I think it would – without being too bombastic, I think it would have global ramifications, that it would influence a lot of things happening. And the fact that Iran has been able to deploy all of these proxies and set them in place around Israel is really setting the stage to have that option.

KRIVINE: Thanks. Just doing the math in my head, but you said 200,000 rockets, several hundred potentially smart rockets that we don't know how Iron Dome will respond. You know, 97% is a really great percentage, except when you're facing 200,000 rockets, including 500 smart rockets, including kinetic threats inside your borders, and terrorist attacks, and potentially upheaval. So I don't think you're being bombastic. I think that's – that's a – it was a great description. I appreciate that.

I think it's time to turn it over to the audience. So Erin is holding a microphone if anybody has a question. Sure.

LEE: Hi. My ...

KRIVINE: ... introduce yourself.

LEE: Yes. My name is Ryan Lee, I'm a communications intern for the summer. My question is for all of you. In the event of an Iran – an Iranian-led – conflict with Israel, what role would these military security components of the Abraham Accords and Iran's sort of attempted alliance with Russia play into that sort of conflict? I don't imagine that it would be solely Israel fighting against Iran, that there would be other countries at play in the conflict. So I'm curious to know what you believe about that.

CONRICUS: I can give a short answer from an Israeli perspective, perhaps Jonathan or Joe can give a regional one. I think – I don't think that any in – anybody in Israel would think that anybody would come to Israel's rescue, and I don't

think that Israel would expect anybody to fight for its defense, not even the U.S. And I think it's – you know, that's the modus operandi of – of Israel.

At best, maybe Abraham Accord countries could mitigate criticism or, you know, attacks on Israel, diplomatic ones, maybe they could vote, if one of them would be at the – in the Security Council – that could be influential – but in terms of activity on the ground, I think that if that unfortunate reality comes to place, it'll be Israelis fighting for Israel and perhaps a U.S.-led support, like an umbrella support for Israel, perhaps with Abraham Accord countries.

SCHANZER: I would just, I think, add I agree. I remember, actually, one of the first articles that I wrote when I got to Washington quite a while ago was we were exploring the question of whether the Gulf countries in particular might join the coalition to invade Iraq, as they had done in the early 1990s, when George H. W. Bush pulled together a bunch of Arab states. And I think the assessment that I came up with was no way, and the title, which I think sums it all up, 'Survival of the Skittish,' right?

These are countries that are scared of their own shadows. Despite all of the bravado, most of these Arab countries – Gulf Arab countries, do not have significant armies, they don't have the capabilities to defend themselves. So if they jump into a conflict with Israel against a better armed foe, - that's just not where their heads are going to be.

Now, you did ask the question of – of Russia. I do think that is an interesting factor to consider. Assuming Israel needs to do more in Syria than it's doing, which is the one off every night, or every other night, or every fortnight, and Israel finds itself engaging with more Iran-backed forces, targeting more assets, Russia can play the spoiler.

And in light of what's going on right now with the United States arming Ukraine, the United States getting involved, at least bank shots, as it were, with the Ukraine Russia conflict, I could imagine Russia – even though Russia has a pretty good relationship with Israel, they're not allies, but they have a healthy respect for one another. It's a professional military-to-military relationship – I could imagine the Russians perhaps withholding access, making it a little bit more difficult to get in, unless the West were willing to yield certain things on Ukraine. I would not put this past Putin. He's got a mind for exactly this kind of thing. So I would watch Russia as an X-factor in a multi-front conflict.

KRIVINE: So I see my colleague Brad Bowman in the audience. I'm just going to commend to you his writings on sort of the regional security architecture that the U.S. is involved in and great, great sort of insights into the – that hit, I think, directly at your question.

But I'll also add that in this very strategic and surgical military maneuver that the IDF pulled off 10 days ago, in which zero non-combatants were killed, the UAE did not hesitate to denounce the operation. So, again, you know, words matter and different operations look different but they sure have been quick to condemn.

TRUZMAN: I will – I'll just say, though, while that's true, I have noted – and – and this is anecdotal but I think this is held across the last couple of Ramadans, in particular clashes in Gaza with Islamic Jihad – there is far less of the wall-to-wall coverage in, like, Al Arabiya, for example, right?

Al Jazeera, which is owned by the Qataris, and they're not party to the Abraham Accords, you see that they're out there just blasting away – look – talking about how there are war crimes that are taking place, even though it's surgical, et cetera.

But what we see within Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain right now is a tamping down of that really nasty coverage, which I think is – look, I don't know, maybe we're looking for positives to come out of this, and you've got to take what you get in the Middle East, right, but I – I do get a sense that if they want to maintain whatever relationships they have with Israel, they can't afford to blast this stuff all over the media. They keep it tamped down, they try to report the facts, and I think that's an improvement over where – where we were.

KRIVINE: You want to weigh in on that, Jonathan, since it's media? No?

(LAUGHTER)

PAVLICH: Katie Pavlich, part of the National Security Fellows Network. Thank you so much for being here today.

You mentioned Russia as a potential spoiler, and my question is about the admission from the Biden administration, including from President Biden himself, that we are running out of munitions and we're having a hard time producing them, and therefore we're sending cluster bombs to Ukraine, but the issue really is that we're running out of ammunition to send to Ukraine.

Do you worry, with a forefront war in Israel, that the United States will have trouble helping to defend our, you know, real ally in the Middle East as a result of not having the capability to produce munitions that you may need as you start to run out by fighting this forefront war?

KRIVINE: And you can add to that, of course, the drawdown on the pre-positioned ...

CONRICUS: Yes, I was going to go into that. So I think concerns that I've heard in Israel by Israeli generals and elected officials are related to two issues. One, kind of looking at, well, "is it really this bad?" I mean, are the industrial military capabilities of the U.S. really this limited, that it has come to where it has come, which then has implications or possible implications for the future? That's one thing.

And the second thing is what the U.S. has been doing, of course within its own right, is to use quite substantial parts of the pre-dispositioned or pre-positioned ammunition in Israel – U.S. ammunition, not Israeli, but positioned there by the U.S. for different eventualities in order to support fighting in Ukraine.

And I think that an important takeaway relates to production capability. I alluded to it before. What Israel usually uses is the expensive, high end, precise, very advanced type of weaponry because all of our targets are hidden behind civilians or under civilians and infrastructure.

We don't have the luxury of fighting armies up on the Golan anymore, – if you can call that luxury – but it's all urban terrain and it's all rocket launchers, under houses, hospitals, schools, mosques, and tunnels and that kind of stuff, and you need expensive ordinance for it.

And I've heard Israeli decision makers worried and also expressing some of those concerns bilaterally to their American counterparts. Big picture – and maybe my esteemed colleagues will address it – thinking of bigger fish to fry that the U.S. deals with. That, I'm sure, is a concern, for the U.S. ability to project force and to deter other players from doing bad things.

SCHANZER: I'll just say one thing. I think getting to that issue of precision munitions, you know, as these conflicts drag out – and hopefully we won't see one in the Middle East – but, you know, I think the cluster bombs are probably an indication of going away from the precision and going more toward, you know, what we would consider war of, you know, almost a century ago, where, you know, you sort of try to aim and do your best. And, you know, there's a time, I think, where right now, we're in an age where people would say, well, that's war crimes if you don't know exactly what you're hitting.

But if you don't have, you know, precision munitions and you still have to wage a war, this is messy stuff. I've got to hope that they're able to get through some of the supply chain issues that are right now dogging the U.S. in particular. But, you know, I think what we hear in Washington right now is that, you know, the real concern is the great power competition that is mounting with China.

That's where the real concern is, not so much with Israel, where they are still producing some of their own weaponry and I think have largely what they need in order to fend off some lower level threats around their borders. I do think, though, that if Iran and Israel come to blows, that changes the equation as well. So pretty cloudy picture right now.

GHAZANFARI: My name is Hossein Ghazanfari from VOA. I have a question for the whole panel. There were reports from inside Iran, I think it was from last year, that they were accusing some official – accusing Russia of letting Israel to target Iranian targets inside Syria by tampering the radars – I mean, like turning off the – turning them off, things like that. How accurate are those accusations against Russia?

CONRICUS: Want me to start? Without sounding cocky, I'd say that I'm not sure that the Russians need to, you know, tamper with anything for the IAF to be – Israeli Air Force to be able to conduct operations above Syria.

The IAF use a wide array of electronic warfare and a lot of skill to deliver ordinance to targets, Iranian targets in Syria, with or without systems being tampered with. One issue is, however, I think relevant, and I think that up until this day Russia has not – and as far as I understand, by decision – has not decided to use all of the missiles in its arsenal in Syria against Israel.

The more advanced anti-air weaponry that they have in place in Russian hands still that have been delivered but we have not yet seen them, as far as know, engaged. And I don't know if you don't have updates on it but we haven't seen them engaged against Israeli planes.

So I think that there is merit to that criticism. I think that Russia, for its reasons, is choosing not to use all that it has, maybe – my interpretation – because they know that or they fear that it won't fare well against Israeli Air Force and they don't want to be embarrassed. It's not good for sales and it's not good for general reputations, and therefore, have decided not to use the systems, and – and the IAF has been able to continue to operate in what I think still is the most densely – dense airspace – in the world for combat operations, and – I suppose that is how it will continue unless something significant changes.

We came close to that in, I think it was the summer of '19, when reckless Syrian air defense fire shot down a Russian plane and Russian airmen were killed. That was really a very tense time and needed a lot of military diplomacy and diplomacy to soothe the situation with the Russians. But since then, Israel has continued to operate.

SCHANZER: I'll just add on this question. It is something that we've been watching for – for quite some time. First, you have to understand that there is a deconfliction mechanism that exists already between Russia and Israel. They have regular consultations. They had more regular consultations when there were more Russian forces, Wagner forces, more hardware inside the country, but it still happens because of the fact that Russia still maintains a presence there.

When I've gone to Israel in recent years, they literally refer to Russia as their neighbor, which is a strange way of describing a country that is, you know, thousands of miles away, right? But that is the way they describe it because they are essentially occupants there. They control the air if they want to, and I think that's an important thing to note.

I've talked to Israeli officials who've been in the room when Bibi [Netanyahu] has sat with Putin, and the way that it's been described to me is that it's professional, it's cordial, it's not particularly friendly, it's not like they're slapping each other on the back and telling jokes. The Israelis go in, they have a need to operate in the airspace over Syria. Russia understands that this is Israel's neighborhood and that Israel doesn't have much of a choice in the matter. They agree on broad terms and they deconflict.

It's worked by and large – by the way, Putin has also taken the opportunity, as I've heard it told to me, that he often likes to try the – tell the Israelis that, "hey, you know, those F-16s that you're flying from the United States, they're junk buckets. Why don't you buy some of our Sukhois, just try them out, you know, we'll give you – you know – we'll let you take them out for a test drive."

So, there's an attempt to try to always pull the Israelis out of the American orbit. The Israelis, of course, are not interested. But what's interesting now is there is that drawdown, right? Wagner troops have left, the air defense systems are fewer. And so what I hear from Israel right now is that they've got greater opportunity to operate with more impunity.

That said – one last thing I'll just say is I have seen – I don't even know how describe this – cockpit cam from Israeli fighter jets who have been attacking inside Syria, and without giving away everything that I've seen, I'll just say the flight patterns are highly irregular. This is not the norm.

And they do certain things still out of fear that there could be a miscalculation with the Russians, and the last thing that they want is a miscalculation, like – maybe we don't call Russia a great power anymore, the joke is that it's a 'gas station with an army,' but you don't want to have a war with that gas station and that army. So the Israelis are still extremely careful, despite everything that I've just said.

KRIVINE: So, I think, unfortunately, we've run out of time for questions. I think, if we can just spend a couple minutes wrapping it up, providing final thoughts if you have any. Conricus, maybe we'll start with you since you're on my right.

CONRICUS: Yeah, I think that the convergence here of internal events in Israel, external factors, Iran, and the posture of the U.S. in the region, the way that the U.S. is talking about and speaking and acting in the region really sends – those three things together are sending, I think, messages to Iran and its proxies and the different enemies that Israel has that might be interpreted as good messages for them. And that is what concerns me.

I think that it is the mix of those messages that could be dangerous for stability in the region, that could be dangerous for Israeli security but stability in the region, and they could adversely affect U.S. interests. And that's the

really big picture of what we're seeing with the Iranian proxies that have been built and equipped and manned and trained and funded along our borders. This is what we're seeing in Judea and Samaria. And when it's combined with events in Israel that put into question cohesion and fighting capabilities, that is more worrying.

I am still confident that Israel is totally capable of snapping out of the current situation, getting its priorities straight and focusing on what needs to be focused on – not judicial reform, to be clear – and to get things back in line. And I hope that happens and I hope that the optics of the relationship between Israel and the U.S. will improve significantly.

KRIVINE: Thank you.

TRUZMAN: All right. So my concern about all this – what I've talked about today is obviously there's 19 groups on Israel's borders, 19 terrorist groups that are – are being funded and supported by Iran. And also, what I'm seeing is this – I would call it this chaos in the West Bank, and Iran's – a lot of it has to do with Iran. They're destabilizing the West Bank, all right? They saw – they see an opportunity there.

They have a blueprint – Iran has a blueprint. They've done this in Syria, they've done this in Lebanon, they've done this in Yemen, they've done this in Iraq. So what we're seeing now in the West Bank is what they've done before, OK? So they're arming these groups, destabilizing the – the West Bank, they know the PA is weak, and, you know, that's what's been happening in the last two years.

Something else that's – I think is very important is sanctions against Iran. And the only way to really help this situation – or rather, one of the ways to help this situation – the West Bank is stopping the money going to these groups funded by Tehran – by Iran. So if – if – I think that's something to think about.

Also, the designation of a lot of these groups who remain undesignated by the United States and other Western countries. So I think that's – that's critical right now cause I don't see a change in the West Bank the way things are going, and on Israel's borders as well, whether it be Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria.

SCHANZER: I think I'd leave you with this thought – I was at Christians United for Israel's Conference yesterday and I was talking – trying to explain the war between wars to, I think, an audience that was sort of uninitiated, right?

And explaining kind of gray zone warfare in sort of abstract terms is not an easy thing to do, so I'm going to keep going with abstract for a minute. Imagine you've got a white canvas, right, and you're looking at basically an outline of the Middle East. And you start to – you can start putting dots everywhere that Israel has been striking Iran as part of this gray zone war, and that puts a bunch of dots on the canvas.

And then you start to put other dots down where Israel is doing battle with these proxy groups – these 19 proxy groups – and you see more dots begin to appear. And then you look at what Iran is doing in support of all of these groups and the kind of arming and funding and all of the work that's going into creating new enemies to wage war against Israel. You put those on there. And then you look at all of the activity that's going on in Syria – those thousands of strikes – and that's even more dots on it.

Now, you – you look at it up front, right, right in front and it just looks like, I don't know, a Jackson Pollock painting, right? It's kind of a disaster. It just – it's a mess of color and – but what you need to do is take a step back, take 10 steps back, and you'll start to see that there are patterns of what's going on here.

There is a large battle that is taking place between Israel and Iran across the Middle East. There is a clear picture. It's not always clear when you look at the headlines every day, you open up whatever your website of choice is and there is one attack here and one thing there and one arrest there, and it's really hard to connect the dots.

What we tried to do today is to help kind of pool all of that together in a cohesive picture. Hopefully we've done, you know, an admirable job of trying to do that.

(LAUGHTER)

KRIVINE: Good effort – good effort. Well, thank you all for being here, it's a pleasure to have you. For those who were able to make it in person and for those who are watching at home or at your offices, please keep abreast of FDD.org. We will continue to update on these situations through the Israel Program and – and our other various projects that we run that are all housed in this building. Thank you so much.

CONRICUS: Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)