

## Terror, Sunsets, and Declining Pressure: Countering the Full Range of Tehran's Threats

*Featuring David Albright, Behnam Ben Taleblu, Bradley Bowman, Shannon Crawford, Richard Goldberg, Eyal Hulata, Anthony Ruggiero, Jonathan Schanzer, Rep. Brad Schneider (D-IL), and Andrea Stricker*

**RUGGIERO:** Welcome to today's event, hosted by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. It's Monday, October 16. I'm Anthony Ruggiero, senior director of FDD's Nonproliferation and Biodefense Program and senior fellow at FDD.

Today's event will focus on two expert panels, the first focusing on Iran's nuclear and missile programs, the second on Tehran's export of terror and the greater implications of an unconstrained Iran.

We gather today in an important and somber time. We all saw the horrific attacks in Israel just nine days ago. As we learned details about the attack, we were shocked by the devastation, and we remain concerned about the Israelis and other citizens held by Hamas inside Gaza.

The shocking images of innocent men, women, and especially children brutally slaughtered can only be seen as a part of a campaign to try to wipe Israel off the map. As my colleagues have noted, that's the core purpose of Hamas, and they are working toward that goal.

We've also heard the stories of courage during the terrorist attack, and we now see Israelis returning home to defend their country. And the allies of Israel, including the United States, condemned the terrorist attack and are providing support for Israel's response.

Our collective outrage also gives way to disappointment and anger here at home, as we saw attempts to justify brutally butchering women and babies, raping and murdering women, and kidnapping the kids and the elderly, and that antisemitism threatens and terrorizes our Jewish friends and families both in Israel and here at home. There can be no excuse for terrorism, and if Hamas wants peace, they can release their hostages and surrender.

We also saw attempts to remove culpability from Iran, all in order to sustain a flawed nuclear deal that is not worth the paper it's written on. Those efforts were equally disheartening. We should speak plainly and clearly that the leaders in Tehran are implementing a strategy to circle Israel in a ring of fire to drive toward its destruction.

Iran supports Hamas with financing, training and other support. They are just as complicit in these terror attacks as the Hamas terrorists who carried them out. When we encounter this level of evil, we first ask, "Why did this happen?" and then, "What can we do?" And we have two all-star panels today that will illuminate the first question and have many answers on the path forward.

Our first panel will cover Iran's nuclear program and its missile program, as well as the arsenal of Tehran's proxies. It's a longstanding refrain that former president Trump's 2018 withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action drove Iran's expanding nuclear program. That's just not true. The most significant nuclear advances occurred after President Biden's election.

My colleagues Andrea and Behnam, both of whom are on the first panel today, have detailed Iran's activities since November 2020. The just-updated visual is available on FDD's website, [FDD.org](https://www.fdd.org). I also recommend Behnam's exceptional monograph, "Arsenal", that chronicles Iran's ballistic missile program, which can also be found on FDD's website, as well as our table of literature for those attending in person.

Our first panel will focus on what exactly are the sunset sanctions and what their impending expiration means for Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs under Resolution — U.N. Resolution 2231.

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This panel will feature David Albright, a renowned physicist and founder and president of the nonprofit Institute for Science and International Security in Washington, D.C. He's written numerous assessments on secret nuclear weapons programs throughout the world and co-authored four books. Throughout his career, Albright has testified numerous times on nuclear issues before the U.S. Congress. Albright cooperated actively with the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] Action Team from 1992 until 1997, focusing on analyses of Iraqi documents and past procurement activities. In June 1996, he was the first nongovernmental inspector of the Iraqi nuclear program. In spring of 2003, after the fall of Baghdad, he initiated a successful effort to retrieve the only complete set of classified Iraqi documents, hidden since the 1991 Gulf War, about making gas centrifuges to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons.

Behnam Ben Taleblu is a senior fellow here at FDD who focuses on Iranian security and political issues. Prior to his time at FDD, Behnam worked on non-proliferation issues at an arms control think tank in Washington. Leveraging his subject matter expertise and native Farsi skills, Behnam has closely tracked a wide range of Iran-related topics, including nuclear nonproliferation, ballistic missiles, sanctions, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the foreign and security policy of the Islamic Republic, and internal Iranian politics.

Andrea Stricker is Deputy Director of FDD's Non-Proliferation and Biodefense Program and an FDD research fellow. She's an expert in nuclear weapons proliferation and illicit procurement networks. Andrea has extensively researched Iran's nuclear program, including its history, proliferation efforts, and diplomatic agreements, particularly issues related to Iran nuclear program, the nuclear deal, and Iran's nuclear archive. Her other areas of interest include non-proliferation regimes and related UN resolutions, chemical and biological weapons, illicit finance, Middle East security dynamics, sanctions, and U.S. foreign policy.

The panel will be moderated by Shannon Crawford, ABC News journalist covering the State Department. She reports on a wide range of issues, including Americans wrongfully detained abroad and the war in Ukraine, U.S. relations with China and Russia as well.

Shannon often travels with the Press Corps accompanying the Secretary of State on missions around the world, where she observes the critical negotiations and diplomacy that directly impact American interests. She has also questioned a number of world leaders in one-on-one interviews and press conferences, including pressing the President of Iran on his regime's crackdown against sweeping protests over the treatment of the country's women and girls.

One quick note before we begin — for more than 20 years, FDD has operated as a fiercely independent, non-partisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. As a point of pride and principle, we do not accept foreign government funding.

And with that, I'll hand it off to Shannon. Thank you for being here.

**CRAWFORD:** And thank you so much for making the introductions. Now I do want to jump right in because we are meeting at such a critical time, not only because of the unfolding situation in the Middle East but because of something you mentioned, and that's those restrictions, a series of restrictions imposed by the United Nations as part of the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action]. They are set to expire this week, October 18th, Transition Day.

So first, I do want to jump in with Behnam because you've tracked, as you pointed out so nicely, "The Arsenal", — your recent publication. You've tracked Iran's ballistic missile program so closely.

So first, we want to hear what will those impacts be? We know that some countries are going to impose their own unilateral sanctions. But is that enough? So I want to open that up then to the entire panel to discuss what the non-proliferation landscape will look like after Wednesday [October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023].

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**TALEBLU:** Well, Shannon, thank you very much for coming and the — question and to FDD for hosting and to the rest of the distinguished panelists for being willing to share the stage with me, and Anthony for the very kind intro as well, who leads our Center on Non-Proliferation.

Listen, the JCPOA, the 2015 Iran nuclear deal contained within it a Faustian bargain, where basically over time a whole series of formerly permanent prohibitions on Iran's missile, nuclear and military programs would lapse. These were largely called non-proliferation sanctions.

You know, the restrictions that are set to lapse on October 18th — there's two batches of them, by the way. The batches contained in the U.N. Resolution 223, specifically Annex B, specifically Paragraphs 4 — 3 and 4, if I'm not mistaken, you know, formerly used to be permanent, permanent prohibitions against Iranian ballistic missile tests, permanent prohibitions against Iranian ballistic missile development, permanent prohibitions against Iranian ballistic missile-related activities, to include transfers.

Now you see the Islamic Republic routinely violating other agreements, pushing the boundary of course, violating this prohibition with its transfer of long-range strike systems, like drones, specifically suicide drones, to Russia.

So the Islamic Republic, which has already been violating many international agreements, already feels no compunction to be bound by the rule of law anyway, is going to basically put its proliferation problem, one that we see in real time with the capabilities it's empowered for the Houthis in Yemen, the Shia militias in Iraq and Syria, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and perhaps the most acutely now Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, it's going to put that proliferation problem on steroids.

And what's more, there is connective tissue here. It's not just about nuclear politics, even though we have two very well renowned nuclear scholars to my left — don't take that politically, but to my left — it's about what — the confidence that Iran will feel.

There is some news for cautious optimism. The Europeans, particularly the E3, are going to be keeping a host of their non-proliferation sanctions, stuff that the JCPOA required them to de-list. If you look at the list, this contained Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, its Aerospace Force, the General leading its Aerospace Force, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, and a whole series of missile, military, and nuclear industries that have made the Islamic Republic home to the world — to the Middle East's largest ballistic missile arsenal.

It's good news that Europe is going to keep those sanctions. It's an open question as to what Washington is going to do. After Europe keeps those sanctions, as Iran looks to expand their proliferation problem, what is Washington going to do to bridge this sanctions gap and to further restrain the Iranian proliferation problem?

**ALBRIGHT:** Did you want to go first or?

**STRICKER:** I think another important point is that this is going to create a very open sales environment potentially with Iran. You know, countries that are turntable countries, where goods can go transit to Iran, like Turkey, for example, the UAE, the restrictions on the drones and missiles are going to have a less of an impact on them restraining sales of items to Iran.

And then also, Iran will be exporting more of these goods. So the war in Ukraine is just going to heat up unfortunately, at a time when it — when we don't need that, when we have another war opening with Israel, and I think we're just headed for trouble.

And it really underscores the fact that the Biden administration's policy has failed over the last almost three years. It's been just an environment of permissiveness to Iranian equities in the region, so to speak — so if we — potentially bribe them with funds, if we release sanctions, that they will stand down and cause less trouble. And I think the attacks have just shown very starkly that that's just not true.

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**ALBRIGHT:** Yeah, and if I could just pick up on what Andrea said, I mean, one of the — this was a U.N. Security Council Resolution, and much of the world doesn't respect US or European sanctions, and sometimes it's our allies are in the developing world.

And so it makes it much harder to — as Andrea's talking about, blocking the flow of goods. I mean, now from studying Iranian — or the drones and the other military equipment found in Ukraine after it's been shot down or used, we now know that Western technology, particularly U.S. parts, microelectronics, drive this equipment.

Even if you take a case of a system to prevent jamming built by Russia, by Kometa, it — if you analyze the part, it has a — Swiss receivers, an Irish GPS system, and that's the heart of the system to prevent jamming, in this case of drones or other military equipment.

And so the sanctions disappearing at the U.N. level make it much harder to block the flow of goods coming out of the United States and going out to other countries and then ending up in — Iran or, I would add, in Russia, or in Russia via Iran.

All the drones — the kamikaze drones now used by Russia, the — all the internal equipment of those drones comes from Iran today. So Iran is out there buying things for drone programs, and those drone programs are no longer covered by U.N. sanctions. And — therefore, many countries will feel free to export them to the — to Iran.

**CRAWFORD:** Truly a vast and increasingly troubling network. I'm going to take a step back now and just get a temperature of the threat first. David, I know this will be right up your alley. But I want to talk about Iran's nuclear development programs.

Now, we've seen officials come out this year and say that Iran is not months, it's not years away from developing enough fissile material for a bomb, it's mere days away from having that capability. Of course, we know there's more that goes into this equation of developing an actually viable nuclear weapon. But how far away is Tehran from having that?

**ALBRIGHT:** Well, I think in terms of getting enough weapon-grade uranium for a bomb, I mean, I think there's a consensus. It's about 12 days. I mean, that's just using just a very small part of their infrastructure, two or three centrifuge cascades, 500 centrifuges, and that can be used to turn the 60 percent-enriched uranium into weapon-grade very rapidly with — without essentially, with very little preparation. If they wanted to go and use the 20 percent, they may need to probably have some preparation necessary, a couple weeks, But then it — by the end of a month, they could have produced enough weapon-grade uranium for a total of six nuclear weapons.

So we're dealing with a situation where if they do break out, much of the breakout to weapon-grade uranium could happen before even inspectors would necessarily know what's going on, let alone any kind of opportunity for countries to respond to it.

**CRAWFORD:** And Andrea, if I could ask you — a nuclear Iran, how would that change the dynamics in the Middle East and the world? What would be the ramifications?

**STRICKER:** Well, I think we've seen that in Ukraine with the Biden administration's hesitancy to arm them, and in some cases, to win quickly and decisively. I think if Iran had nuclear weapons we would see the same, where countries would be more reticent to go where they shouldn't go, they would be worried about Iran's response, about escalation in the nuclear sphere.

So I think Iran would run rampant around the region, basically, and we would be hard-pressed to stop it.

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**TALEBLU:** I think in real time — just a really short footnote to this — in real time, we're seeing the fact that Iran is always willing to fight to the last Palestinian, always willing to fight to the last Arab so it can continue — or at least, these — so that the Islamic Republic can continue its willingness to export the revolution, its ability to achieve its ideological and strategic games, obviously at the expense of the Iranian people and obviously expense to the wider countries that host this network of proxies that they themselves call "the axis of resistance".

Some may take solace in this term that's floated around here, "the nuclear fatwa", that there may somehow be religious or political prohibitions on Iran actually moving to weaponization. I'll just turn your attention to an older declassified U.S. government document. You can find this stuff on the CIA Electronic Reading Room. It's an assessment of the Iran-Iraq War. Even though Iran was subject to many chemical weapons attacks, it ultimately, at one point, according to this documentation, did cross the chemical barrier, and the analysis notes despite previous political and religious prohibitions to do so.

So one should not take solace in some of the rhetoric of Iranian officials who, again, push back on, you know, the need to be concerned about Iran moving towards weaponization, or that that may be some kind of guardrail, be they, you know, bureaucratic, legal, religious, political. There are no guardrails when it comes to the Islamic Republic. They're showing you that in practice every single day.

And in this case, we actually have an assessment of them saying they're not going to go towards a WMD [Weapon of Mass Destruction] capability, and then, in fact, doing it when the battlefield conditions required it.

**CRAWFORD:** And then a big part of Iran's strategic puzzle, an important chess piece, if you will, is that missile program. So we've heard a lot of claims come out of Tehran regime that they've made these leaps and advancements in developing its missiles, its capabilities, including intercontinental ballistic missiles. Now, can you tell us, how much of that is bravado and how much of that might be reality now or reality in the near future?

**TALEBLU:** You know, this is a great question because it comes a really sensitive time in Iran's evolving ballistic missile program. I see a few Persian speakers in the audience. There — is a phrase, "to be able to pull" — and I'm just translating literally — "to be able to pull the hair from the yogurt," to separate the wheat from the chaff, "to pull the needle out of a haystack," is a better figure of translation.

That's what looking at the Iranian missile program over the past 10, 15 years was like. There used to be a hell of a lot more hyperbole over Iran's ballistic missile capabilities. There was a lot of talk about quantity.

When you look at both on what they report today and what is used today, there's a lot more talk about quality. Range is changing. Precision certainly has changes. Lethality, survivability, mobility. This is not just a WMD delivery vehicle, this is not just a tool to deliver a crude nuclear device or to talk back about that chemical capability I mentioned previously. These have increasing battlefield utility, and you see that.

You know, the US received its largest ballistic missile barrage after World War II from the Islamic Republic of Iran in January 2020. These are game-changing developments, and game-changing developments that, when not responded to, underwrite the next level of confidence for the regime to continue to break through these political barriers, to break these bureaucratic barriers, to more willingly and more openly flout these U.N. resolutions.

Lo and behold, imagine what would happen when these U.N. resolutions terminate, when these artificial political handcuffs terminate on the government of the Islamic Republic? It'll be basically turning it up to 11, for those of you who are familiar just with the movie "Spinal Tap".

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A couple of things to just pick out in this most recent year, which was really a game-changing year. You know, Iran doesn't have an ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile], a — over-5,500-kilometer missile just yet, but it has a very active space program, and a space program that actually uses all solid propellants. It can develop a three-stage solid propellant ballistic missile capability derived from its satellite launch vehicle capability that could make up for, in real time, the intermediate-range gap it has and then the intercontinental-range ballistic missile gap it has.

It also is developing a more storable liquid propellant capability. Liquid propellants are more corrosive. You — if — once you've fueled the missile, you can't really move it around. It could explode. Iran, like the Soviet Union, like North Korea, has — is learning to ampulize liquid fuel, to kind of pre-store it like a — like that little casing of the liquid in a needle to make it safer to transport.

We saw that with a test earlier this spring of the Khorramshahr-4 medium-range ballistic missile. This is something Europeans, who see this range of capabilities growing and see the knife moving closer to the neck with drones first and missile second, are quite worried about.

There is one area still of skepticism. It's Iran's latest claim to have developed a hypersonic ballistic missile capability. Most of Iran's medium-range ballistic missiles do reenter the atmosphere already at hypersonic speeds, but it doesn't have that hypersonic glide maneuverability, but it has something in between. It has a small solid-stage motor, so it's more of a maneuvering reentry capability.

So while Iran is not one foot tall on the missile front and it's not as 10 or 9 feet tall, as it's claiming to be, it's a six or seven, and it's showing you in real time that is growing and it's connecting the dots with these capabilities, whether through procurement of them abroad, production at home, and then ultimately, proliferation, again, to networks abroad.

**CRAWFORD:** I know you touched on how Iran is able to export its missiles to fuel conflicts, really, in the region and throughout the world now, when we look at the UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles] that have wound up in Russian hands. But can we — just drilling a little bit more on what kind of missiles Iran is exporting to Hezbollah, Hamas, how might we see Iran fuel this conflict now that's unfolding before our eyes?

And then we'll also go a little bit broader picture to see what kind of different conflict — a different focal point for the Biden administration and the West in the Middle East, what that might do to these nonproliferation efforts, what cover that might provide Iran.

**TALEBLU:** So in this case, Iran's been very clear — it is willing to transfer select missile capabilities but it transfers a different capability to a different kind of proxy who is fighting a different kind of battle at a different point in time.

So take for example Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. There is no clear evidence yet that these two terror groups, which are Iranian proxies that Iran supports, it has not given precision strike capabilities to, but since 2014, it has had a very clear policy of supporting local development of missiles with foreign tech and foreign assistance and foreign inspiration.

So if you're Hamas and I'm Iran, it's your tools, your resources, your — fertilizer, your ammonium, your plumbing and tubes, but it's my design, it's my blueprint, and it's my wiring. So it's a very different capability.

With the Houthis in Yemen, first they were transferring parts of a short-range ballistic missile, they were cutting it up and putting it on dhows. The UN has attested to this. But now they're also supporting domestic or local production there as well. Some select Shia militias in Iraq and Syria have short-range ballistic missiles.

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There is the most famous PGM project, a precision-guided munitions project, that Iran is helping take Hezbollah's quantitative advantage, its rockets, and through the provision of these wires and control fins and control and guidance equipment make them into missiles, so much more lethal, much more maneuverable, much more survivable. In — in essence, a guided projectile. And here, that is changing the balance on the northern front quite literally in front of our eyes, vis-a-vis Hezbollah and with Israel.

So it's got a neck against the knife of U.S. partners, and what it's been doing is sharpening that knife over time. So first, quantity, and then quality. First, trafficking whole systems, and then now trafficking just the capabilities to refine those systems over time.

It makes the proliferation problem, the Whack-A-Mole problem, a lot harder. Once, you'd be striking — if you were Israel in Syria during the war between the wars — a missile production facility. Now you have to find a guy with a briefcase. It's qualitatively harder to stop this.

**ALBRIGHT:** Can I add one thing?

**CRAWFORD:** Of course.

**ALBRIGHT:** You know, one of the things that's come up in Ukraine — and you saw it in the attack on Saturday — was the purchase of fairly sophisticated hobbyist drones that have fairly good GPS systems in them and — then you arm them. And that tank that was destroyed was taken out by a — by one of these kind of systems.

And you see them — in the Russian context, they're buying — which I know better than perhaps Ukrainian — they're buying drones from the commercial makers and then putting various types of armaments on them, from — from a grenade to a — RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade] that's guided by a video or through thermal methods.

So you have a new dimension to this that's going to be much harder and is going to call for the development of much better jamming systems that — exist today.

**CRAWFORD:** Talking about new dimensions, Israel has been a vital partner to the US in trying to constrain at least Iran's nuclear program.

Now with Israel sidelined, might Iran seek to use that, again, as cover, as a way of distraction so that it can advance its own nuclear program without maybe the watchful eyes of the West, to the extent that the West even can monitor what Iran's doing, given the lack of transparency with the IAEA?

**ALBRIGHT:** Yeah, I think you have to worry about this a lot. I mean, any — like, I — Behnam mentioned the ICBM. I mean, we — we're — our understanding is they did not cross the line on building re-entry vehicles.

That was — it was a measurable phenomena, and that they — Iran did not work on re-entry vehicles in any significant way. There's some — disagreement with that assessment but it — but if — fundamentally, that's assessment. That line could be crossed now.

You certainly have to worry that in the chaos of all of this, that Iran will try something in it — on the secret side of working on nuclear weapons, furthering their ability to build components. They may be thinking about a breakout.

I mean, they have a — you know, they've activated their proxies in a sense. Well, how would we react if — if Iran starts a secret breakout program, it's detected a month or two down the line, and Iran obfuscates and — then basically if Hezbollah is not in the game, can act — can use Hezbollah as a hammer against the United States and Israel to make a military strike on the nuclear program much more difficult?

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So I do think we're at — we're in a much more unstable situation and we're not really prepared to deal with it very well at all.

**CRAWFORD:** Andrea, when you look at the broader Middle East, if Israel, as Israeli officials has been warning, if it truly is geared up for a long, difficult war against Hamas, is there any other partner in the region who might step up to partially fill Israel's place when it comes to constraining Iran?

**STRICKER:** Well, I think it really has to be the United States and its European partners. And if I could just — I think what we're looking at here is, if Hezbollah is activated in the north and other proxies in the West Bank, that Iran then finds breakout to be a potentially interesting proposition.

We'd be looking at them either using safeguarded facilities, known facilities that the IAEA inspects, or potentially a covert enrichment plant. If they went with safeguarded facilities, they would have to create some kind of crisis of access, you know? I think David has mentioned maybe an explosion, something happened, you can't come in right now, there's a — there is an emergency.

At that point, I think the United States and Israel would be very concerned that a breakout was underway and may have to take preemptive action just in case. I'm not sure if the Biden administration would be willing to do that. We know our Israeli friends would be willing to do it, but we don't know how tied up they're going to be with other fronts, and particularly with the southern invasion.

If they used a covert facility, I'd be very worried about their highly enriched uranium stocks that are located at a separate plant. So they're — they have around 83, 85 percent of their HEU [Highly Enriched Uranium] stocks located at a facility called Esfahan.

And we have to wonder why. I'm curious as to why. And as David has mentioned, they're in easily movable containers. I think those — that is the scenario we want to worry about the most, that those stocks could go missing, and they — Iran has a variety of underground, highly fortified mountain facilities.

They could set up an enrichment plant using only a few hundred advanced centrifuges, and then from there, you know, once the stocks go missing, I think we might be hard-pressed to know where it has taken them. It could do weaponization, the process of creating the nuclear weapon, almost anywhere. And then they could do a demonstration test and say "look, we have nuclear weapons." And from there, the game changes.

**CRAWFORD:** We talk so often in foreign policy, really government, about the need to walk and chew gum at the same time, but a lot of the criticism — excuse me — surrounding the Biden administration on its approach to Iran has been that it has taken too much of a myopic approach, on the nuclear front at least, because really since the current President entered the White House, orchestrating a return to the JCPOA has been front of mind. Of course, those negotiations have sputtered and they've really gotten nowhere, as you point out, three years into it.

So did the Biden administration — is it taking too narrow of an approach? Is there really — with this nuclear question looming over everyone, is there any other strategy that would be more efficient, effective right now?

**TALEBLU:** I have — a view, but again, fully cognizant of the Biden administration's risk aversion towards Iran, and this view is premised on risk tolerance. Yes, it is a little bit more costlier up front. Yes, it has the chance of precipitating a crisis, but it does it on American terms.

There is a crisis coming still built into the JCPOA. Remember, it's a Faustian bargain — lapsing penalties over time, a growing Iranian nuclear capability over time, married with a growing Iranian axis of resistance capability over time, married with a growing drone and missile capability over time. These things are not happening isolated or they're not in a political vacuum.



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There was one tool — and now it's a bit too late given that Transition Day is Wednesday to pull the trigger on it — but there was one tool actually built into the JCPOA as kind of rip cord to go back to establish a new normal, and that was snapback. And we'd be remiss not to mention it here on a — panel about Transition Day.

Snapback restores this previous legal and political architecture of penalties. And that's not the last thing you do, that's the first thing you do. It's like writing an op-ed, don't put the thesis at the bottom, put it at the top, and then spend the rest of the time about the logistics, about implementing the strategy.

So there was an alternative route. The US could have worked with its E3 partners on snapping back or restoring that international legal architecture but that would have been the kibosh on the JCPOA. And that's how you can really tell risk aversion versus risk tolerance.

Even though this has not happened yet, the tool is still going to be there until 2025, so there might be room for cautious optimism, even if potentially there may be a change in 2024 or 2025 in Washington. But there's another reason for cautious optimism as well. And that's with Europe's move to keep some of these non-proliferation sanctions that it was designed to remove come this Wednesday per the JCPOA.

Make no mistake, the Europeans have the legal cover to make this move. If Iran is not meeting its obligations, they have the right not to meet their obligations. But make no mistake, this is Europe's first ever JCPOA violation. In a world where Russia and China are doing their own thing, the US left the deal in May 8, 2018 and Iran overtly began violating the JCPOA May 8, 2019, it was always the Europeans that were holding this architecture for the deal. Now, they are committing their first move outside the deal.

This is an opportunity for America to bridge the transatlantic gap, to build a new framework towards Iran, work with the European partners. Now that Europeans civilians are being killed by drones, now that Europeans see the growing missile radius, now that Europeans see the political instability in the Middle East caused by Iran and its proxies, now is the time to build a new transatlantic architecture. It starts with snapback, it doesn't end with snapback.

**CRAWFORD:** And then on to you.

**ALBRIGHT:** I think it — I think we all — I don't want to blame the Biden administration. I mean, we divided this — the world of deterrence into the proxy Iranian gaining its deterrence against Israel and others, against — through proxies and then nuclear.

And I think at least one lesson to me with this was, you know, Hamas was supposed to be working with the Israeli government, and yet they were planning to destroy Israel at the same time. I think that eliminates any of Iran -Iranian regime's credibility, that we have to more or less start thinking, yeah, they're going to go for the bomb.

I mean, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow but they will go for the bomb, because that's finally what's in their interests. And it becomes more important because they're going to be — their proxies are going to be losing some battles, key battles.

And that deterrent strategy of Iran is going to be diminished and threatened, and so I think inside Iran, they may be going — leaning more toward the nuclear. And we should be expecting things to happen on that front.

And I hope the Biden administration is paying attention. I mean, it — they love the JCPOA, that was their goal, but it wasn't their only goal. It was to come up with a longer, stronger deal. It's certainly why I could, in a certain sense, support what they were trying to do. But I think they got outfoxed by Iran and then they lapsed back to let's just save the deal as the deal was — is —you — have to admit, is collapsing.

## Terror, Sunsets, and Declining Pressure: Countering the Full Range of Tehran's Threats

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**STRICKER:** Yeah, I mean, I think, after a year of negotiations, we could have seen the writing on the wall, that Iran was exploiting the desire to restore the JCPOA and a lack of any other strategy for the Biden administration. So starting in January of his first month of office, they moved to 20 percent enrichment, they reactivated Fordow, and they made the Iranian metal, I believe, soon after.

They started making 60 percent enriched uranium the month the talks began, April 2021. And since then, they've deployed — I think they have 6,500 advanced centrifuges or more now across their three enrichment plants, and they have enough enriched uranium for 10 weapons.

And this is despite even the de-escalation effort over the spring, supposedly during the summer. Iran was supposed to stop producing as much 60 percent enriched uranium. They slowed production, but since then, since May, since our last numbers from the IAEA, they have more enriched uranium, enough for two more weapons. So now eight — they had eight, now they have enough for 10.

So I think we have to — we have to look at what are we really getting out of any sort of de-escalation effort? Clearly not much, as we've seen from the attack on Israel.

**CRAWFORD:** Talking about de-escalation, we've seen through a number of times when negotiations were looking better or when the administration wanted to prevent fomenting any kind of additional conflict with Iran, for instance, when this most recent prisoner deal was being orchestrated in its final days. And some of that sanctions enforcement has been rolled back. We've seen that both officially and unofficially as they've tried to get other things out of the regime.

So over these past three years, has Iran been able to profit off of that risk aversion, as you pointed out? Has Iran been able to substantially benefit? Has it been able to increase its own financial — a boon to its finances, a boon to its technology? What is — is it a game-changer?

**STRICKER:** I believe so. Just looking at their oil exports, I believe they have an extra \$26 to \$29 billion our — economic analyst here at FDD, Saeed Ghasseminejad, has estimated that. I think that's the main source of the income, the lack of sanctions enforcement on the oil and then also the — prisoner release, that \$6 billion. They know that money is sitting in an account and that they could devote money to proxies and terrorism.

So the failure to enforce sanctions, it just emboldens the regime. They are not — they don't understand anything besides hard power. For example, in 2003, when they stocked their crashed nuclear weapons program called the AMAD Plan, or at least put it on a shelf, they did so because — likely because of the invasion of Iraq and the United States' willingness to use force.

I think there's less of a reason to believe that they are hesitant now to go forward with their nuclear program. They perhaps think now is the time to sprint for the bomb and they don't believe that likely Biden has a credible military response.

**TALEBLU:** Yeah, I strongly second that. I mean, I have a friend and colleague in the audience who had the pleasure of sharing a panel with last week, and this is — precisely his view, it's precisely our view, it's precisely the view of many who have watched Iran expand its ring of capabilities since 2021.

That doesn't mean there was an expansion, but it simply means that with more money and more time and more unenforced penalties, the rate of that expansion is what's growing, and that is fundamentally at the heart of the problem here.

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And the pulled punch a — strategy, the — it reminds me of this phrase that I think George Herbert Walker Bush said during his inauguration. It was actually about hostage taking, Iranian sponsored hostage taking in Lebanon, and he was trying to get hostages back. And he said, “goodwill begets goodwill”. If you have to put a bumper sticker on the way the Biden administration is looking at these unenforced penalties, it's restraint begets restraint.

But it's really like restraint with a hope and a prayer and maybe an inshallah could beget restraint. And it's not because the Islamic Republic is pocketing the concessions, it's generated billions of dollars in the past two and a half, three years from unenforced oil and petrochemical sanctions, and now it's layering hostage diplomacy and exploitative diplomacy on top of that. You had the Iraq deal for at least \$10 billion. You have footsie with Oman. Iran is now eyeing the \$3 billion that is — reportedly tied it up in Japan. There is — they're making a play for all of the other frozen oil accounts, and we're kind of watching them in slow motion.

And meanwhile, you have credible reporting by other outlets, but obviously by lots of credible reporting — multiple sources for that reporting is what I'm saying, but by *Bloomberg* first in August, and I think by *Wall Street Journal* first in September, having unnamed American officials kind of hinting that, yeah, these sanctions are not actively being enforced or hinting at, yeah, we actually see Iran going over 2 million barrels per day.

And if America's goal is to get Iran back to the negotiating table for anywhere from 2.4 to 2.9 billion — million barrels per day, if you're Khamenei and you believe in death to America and you say it routinely, why would you even bother to shake hands with someone you call the great Satan? If you're able to export just over 2 million barrels per day illegally, what does that marginal utility offer you? When you had the hostage deal reported this summer, you had Iran's ultra hardline newspapers talking about — bragging about getting billions back, but without even having to deign in nuclear diplomacy, without even having to settle for something like the JCPOA.

This is the phenomenon that I want to make sure Washington understands. It's calcifying in the eyes and minds of Iran's strategic decision makers that you can get what you want with — from America without even having to do the formerly normative thing of sitting down and even doing what the Rouhani administration used to have to do, which was lipstick on a pig. You can do it, and you can still chant, “Death to America”. You can do it and still support your proxies. And that is a very dangerous world to be in.

**ALBRIGHT:** Yeah, can I just add one thing on — what often gets forgotten, this — it was a prisoner — a hostage for prisoner exchange. And it has another negative effect for those of us who spend a lot of time in the enforcement world, in that these were people released here. Four of the five were duly convicted people who were violating our export control laws to outfit Iran's nuclear missile conventional weapon programs. And the previous one had released similar people.

And Iran often recruits now. It — it'll seek out in countries where it's targeting an Iranian dual national or someone who has relatives back home. And one of the things they can say now is if you're caught, we —have a strategy to free you. And it — just undermines enforcement efforts.

And I won't — it takes 30 seconds to grab a hostage. It takes a couple of years to build these enforcement cases and see them through to a conviction. And it — and so it's a — in the enforcement community, it's a very bitter thing to have your — all your work go down the tubes because Iran illegally seizes a hostage and the administration undermines the strategy of deterrence created by enforcement, to say, look, if you break our laws to get our — our microelectronics, plane engines, jet engines, missile equipment, you'll go to jail.

**CRAWFORD:** Absolutely. Excellent point. That exchange was certainly not a one-to-one, at least in quality there.

So looking forward after Transition Day, if we do see a renewed willingness from the US, from its European partners to crack down on their unilateral sanctions that they impose, what might that look like? And Andrea, I know you've done a lot of research in this area, so let's start with you. What different strategies might they adopt now?

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**STRICKER:** So one thing they try to do is go after companies, government entities that would sell goods to Iran and route them to Iran. So I would expect to see them working with the turntable type countries like Turkey, UAE.

They really actually need to go after Chinese entities because they are such a big supplier of Iran, the dual use goods. We haven't seen them go for Chinese banks, and that's something they really should be doing. They — that actually instills fear into Beijing when they go for the financing aspect. I don't know if we're going to see that, but that is one thing they could do that would really make an impact.

**TALEBLU:** There's a couple of jurisdictions that I'll add to that list. It's a great idea. Malaysia, Singapore, and obviously now Hong Kong. Hong Kong has become a much more permissive jurisdiction as well for some of these technologies. That's one on the export control side.

Two is to take advantage of — again, I want to stress this — what's happening in Europe? The Europeans, as of this Wednesday, are going to put their foot outside the JCPOA boundaries for the first time in the history of the JCPOA. They have good legal and political cover to do it, but they are going to be taking this step.

The last time Europe had nonproliferation sanctions on Iran, to include missile, military, nuclear, was December 2012, eleven and a half months before even the interim nuclear deal, the JPOA [Joint Plan of Action] of November 2013 in Geneva.

So there is a lot of things the U.S. Treasury Department has hit. There is a lot of things State has gone after. There are a ton of things that are already being done on the drone front. Europe is quite literally active, copy/pasting, sharing information with Western, Five Eyes, transatlantic partners, to build the — to bridge the gap and to keep Iranian illicit procurers out of the drone markets, especially given how commercially available this stuff is, but there is a lot of work to do, even if only political and legal, to bridge the gap on the missile stuff.

You don't have to start in December 2012, January 2013. A good point would be May 2018. There's been a bunch of things that the US has hit on the ballistic missile front that Europe could easily hit. There's also a U.N. list lapsing this Wednesday as well, to make sure that these U.N. entities are covered in some kind of array of Western sanctions.

And then there should be a strategy moving forward to make sure that all of our friends, all of our partners see these threats the same way. Enough is enough. Iran shouldn't be able to be treated on — differently on one side of the Atlantic versus on the other side of the Atlantic.

And the same for the Five Eyes countries. Hamas, for example, shouldn't be called a political actor in one entity and then a terrorist actor in another entity. So, in this decade, in the 2020s, moving forward, the Five Eyes countries need to see 2020 in the 2020s on all of the Iran-backed threats — the terrorism threat and the proliferation threat.

And that starts with sharing this critical hard work, half open source, half intel data on Iranian terror financing, on Iranian procurement, to make sure all of these networks are covered, to make sure that if the regime is going to continue doing this stuff, that at least it's doing it with one arm tied behind back — its back.

**ALBRIGHT:** Yeah. And I think if you — we recently did a study on what the US is doing on Russia, and it is a lot. I mean, the trans-shipment countries are being targeted, they're being visited. You know, we — our government is expanding the number of items covered by a hundredfold and they're issuing clear instructions to companies to be on the watch for things.

But it — the — it's — if that was done to Iran, Iran would have many more problems. And I think one of the things that is necessary is to shift to applying the same things we do on Russia, which has tremendous support around the world on the — particularly on the enforcement side or the export control side, and then apply that to Iran.

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And I think for us, one of the doorways we're using is certainly the — this idea that we are all worried about these kamikaze drones that are really designed to strike civilian targets, industrial, energy infrastructure. Winter's coming on.

We know they can make more but they can only make the airframe. Everything else — the electronics, the motor, even the warheads — are still being exported from Iran to Russia. And that — to us is a doorway. And we are finding resonance among governments, that they do need to step up their work against Iran and that what the — all the methods used on Russia are charting a path to how to do that much more effectively.

It's a tough struggle, but it — nonetheless, it's a way forward that can be a lot more effective than we've been. We're — I know from internal — well, let me not get too far into this — but the company building the Russian drones has complete confidence that Iran will get those parts and — including the electronic components that are about 80 percent American manufactured. They're not coming from America, they're going through routes. But they need to — they're — that whole mindset needs to be shaken up, and I think with the methods being developed now and applied, it's going to shake up this company, Alabuga, if we can get to Iran.

**CRAWFORD:** If we can get to Iran, that's really the key question. I know there are so many questions that I could continue to lob them at you but I also know that there are a lot of great, smart questions in our audience. So I want to turn it over to our audience.

So we will get you a microphone. If you want to raise your hand, I know that we'll be able to bring you that microphone. Not everybody all at once.

Well, while people think about questions, maybe we'll give them a couple moments to gather. And I know that this can be hard, to really just boil it down, but countering Iran — if there's one thing — you know, maybe we'll stretch it beyond sanctions enforcement — one additional thing that the US, the UN, European powers, anybody in your line of sight really, anything they can do to crack down, to either send a message or to really create a speed bump for Iran when it comes to these missile — its missile program and its nuclear program?

**TALEBLU:** It — it's a few different lanes. I thought the question was going to go in a slightly different direction but happy to keep it in missile because I'll remix it.

But let me just — on a quick footnote on the missile is, listen, this is going to be hard to say, but the more non-responses there are, whether you want to have that in the diplomatic realm, in the economic realm, in the intelligence realm or in the military realm, the more non-responses are to the use of this tool, to the development of this tool, to the transference of this tool, the greater the confidence in this tool by the Iranians becomes, right?

September, uh, — January 2020, 16 precision strike short-range ballistic missiles at two facilities in Iraq housing Americans through an act of God because — and some advanced intel and hiding, actually, U.S. service persons were not killed. Imagine what would have happened if they were killed. There were over 140 traumatic brain injuries, but no death. Fast forward to September 2022, a U.S. national is killed by an Iranian close-range ballistic missile in northern Iraq.

Some of you may not even know that there is no significant US overt response to that. So the more non-response, the more aggressive in Iran's counter, in Iran's offset. So whatever your preference is, whether you are still in the diplomatic realm, military realm, economic realm, intel realm, there needs to be an offset to the growing use of this tool, because otherwise it's just a straight line for more and more and more use. So this is one on just missile.

But to connect the dots to what David just mentioned — and again, a friend and activist in the audience — this was actually something FDD was looking at, to develop a broader Iran policy, once the Russia-Ukraine war started. You know, there were so many sanctions lessons learned from a decade of sanctions on Iran that Washington was looking to initially put on Russia for the war in Ukraine starting February, March 2022.

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And actually, I remember working with our friend and colleague, Saeed [Ghasseminejad], on this issue, but we realized as soon as we put out an article in March and the war had only started in February, that by the spring of last year, what Europe and some in Washington were willing to do on the Russia threat, which is a nuclear power, which is quantitatively and qualitatively greater and more lethal, whether you talk about seizing bank accounts and businesses and apartments and yachts, had yet to be done to the Islamic Republic of Iran, which still actually does have low to mid-tier individuals travel, which still does have family members move money in cash and assets abroad.

So if there's one real word of advice, it is to kind of replicate and expand on this strategy against Russia David mentioned, but on a much smaller adversary like the Islamic Republic, because the pulled punches is going to only feed that confidence. And it is that confidence that lets Iran and its proxies do the things you see quite literally coming out of Gaza.

**ALBRIGHT:** Yeah, I guess — so let me mention two things we really didn't talk about. One is it's low hanging fruit. I mean, the inspection effort in Iran is in sad shape, and the IAEA is begging for support to — from the United States and the Europeans to strengthen them. And one of the obvious things that the — they can do in the governing body of the IAEA is simply pass a resolution.

Iran has completely violated these various things, and it just goes to the Security Council, that Iran, in a sense, is a violator of the fundamental non-proliferation treaty and that it sets up a new dynamic that says Iran is a lying, outlaw state and that — and this will have a very powerful impact on Iran. And Iran can't somehow claim that they're being persecuted because it'll be many, many countries have — would support this.

Another is I think we're going to have to build up our military hardware and capabilities in the Gulf region, that it's not enough to put them in the Mediterranean. I mean, Iran could be doing some pretty horrible things if things go in a bad way, including, as we've talked about, breaking out. And I think that we have to be prepared to — for that contingency and, at the same time, send a signal to Iran, don't do it.

So I think those two things in my mind would — would — would send an international signal to Iran and — and a U.S. signal.

**STRICKER:** Yeah. And just to echo David, I mean, we need a credible threat of military force against Iran if they undertake a breakout. I think Hezbollah and — unleashing Hezbollah is directly related to them thinking about a breakout.

So if we can deter Hezbollah from getting involved and make clear to Tehran that if you unleash them, the United States might get involved, this could prevent a breakout down the line as well. I think that is the opportune time that they would try to go for it. President Biden needs to be making clear in public and in private very clearly that he is willing to use force if they do.

**CRAWFORD:** Try for questions. One more? Oh, we have one here.

**QUESTION:** Thank you for your insights. It's been really interesting listening to everyone.

My question is more directed towards the Gulf region. What are your thoughts on the rapprochement between Saudi and Iran and its potential impact on Iran's WMD program? And do you think this will, perhaps, open a new path for negotiations or provide leverage to Saudi? So I would like to hear all your insights on that. Thank you.

**TALEBLU:** I have some views. I also want to hear from our nuclear scholars. But listen, that rapprochement is not borne out of a social vacuum, it's borne out of an unfortunate bipartisan U.S. foreign policy problem in Washington, as it relates to its major security partner in the region and your neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

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This constant, you know, hot and cold, literally labeling your major security partner a pariah state, his — really own goals in terms of the U.S. political relationship that causes hedging by some of our friends and partners who, quite literally, live on the front lines of not just the Iranian conventional threat, not just the asymmetric threat, but the WMD and nuclear threat.

So again, I think that the Iranians want to show that the diplomatic rapprochement or restoration of ties has more depth than breadth. I think anyone who knows our partners in the region like you do know that its more breadth than depth. So the Iranians are trying to score a PR victory. We can't let a PR victory become an actual strategic victory. I don't think there's a shift in orientation coming from Riyadh anytime soon.

But given that they have some of these asks of America, and particularly prior to this recent Gaza terrorist attack that the Hamas undertook, one of their recent asks for this normalization with Israel involved basically a domestic enrichment capability. Word to the wise to the Saudis is that would actually spur Iran in my view. And I'd be curious as to your take. But in my view, the beginning of an overt enrichment cycle in Saudi could actually spur Tehran to go.

And again, it's striking range right now. This February, March it went to 80-plus percent. When the US dropped one of its two weapons in Japan, the uranium one was enriched to only 80 percent purity. That could spur Iran to go all the way.

So, Saudi hedging and Saudi potential exploration of this nuclear option could actually be counterproductive. And it's counterproductive for U.S. arms control and non-proliferation policy, but it's also counterproductive, in my view, for regional.

But all of this cycle stems from the mismanagement of the political relationship. And there will be a time, obviously, in that Tehran-Riyadh dynamic when Tehran shoots itself in the foot.

The soccer game where the Saudi club team had to see a statue of Qasem Soleimani on the field, could be that opportunity. There are other opportunities as well. When a bigger opportunity arises, Washington needs to be there with a bear hug for Riyadh, have an honest conversation among friends and realize how to chart the course together and with the rest of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] from there.

**STRICKER:** Yeah, just a quick footnote, that the enrichment issue for Saudi Arabia, it's more of — an issue of a president, if it's not an issue of them actually using it, if it's such a facility or such a capability provided by the United States.

So especially in these times of tumult in the region, we don't want other countries to be seeking enrichment programs. The United States has never shared enrichment technology before. So I think opening that box would encourage Turkey, Egypt, perhaps the UAE to renege on its commitment not to enrich or reprocess plutonium. So very important to keep that solid.

I'm an optimist though. I think once all of this dies down, hopefully over the coming months, that we will see a normalization agreement. And I think it's in everyone's interest, clearly, to keep sidelining Iran.

**CRAWFORD:** Definitely poised to be a complication in the US-Saudi relation as well.

Thank you so much to our panelists for your deep knowledge on really so many facets of this issue. And thank you, everyone, for being here. We are running up against the end of our time, but I do see Senior Director Brad Bowman waiting in the wings. So it's my honor to turn it over to him now for part two of the show.

**BOWMAN:** Join me in thanking the — panel number one.

(APPLAUSE)

Expertly moderated. Nice job. OK. All right.

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Well, good — yeah, good afternoon. I'm —as was said, I'm Bradley Bowman, Senior Director at FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. I want to thank the first panel for that great discussion. Also want to thank everyone here in the room for joining us in person and for everyone tuning in online.

If you found that first panel informative, I think you're going to certainly appreciate the second panel as well, which I will introduce in a moment.

But first, I'd like to share a few thoughts. I think it's important to start by reminding ourselves once again how this current war started. As Cliff May said in his new *Foreign Podicy* podcast, quote, "This war began on Saturday, October 7th. Israel was evaded by — invaded by Hamas barbarians who mass murdered young people attending a peaceful music festival, raped women, slaughtered babies, and took hostages, dragging them back to dungeons in Gaza," unquote.

It is certainly painful to recite this list of atrocities, but I think we do a disservice to the victims and their families, to our allies in Israel, and to our own security if we look away from the truth, as painful as it is.

As we have learned, often at great costs, we are more likely to establish bad policies if we delude ourselves about the true nature of our adversaries. Tehran and its terror proxies often chant, "death to Israel and death to America."

As Behnam Ben Taleblu, who was just on this panel, wrote in July of 2022 article in *The Atlantic*, "when Iran says death to Israel, it means it." Some might be skeptical of that claim, but consider what Behnam wrote, quote, "the Islamic Republic emblazons death to Israel in banners and official processions, fires ballistic missiles against targets shaped like the Star of David, displays and flight tests ballistic missiles with genocidal slogans against Israel in Hebrew."

Many may have been tempted to dismiss such things as overinflated Iranian rhetoric and bombasts for popular consumption. Surely, Iran doesn't mean it. Surely, Iran doesn't really want to destroy Israel. Well, consider that Tehran has implemented a multi-year campaign to surround Israel with terror proxy ring of fire has helped fund, arm, and train terror proxies all around Israel and then deplorably — deplorably celebrated Hamas's barbaric attacks against Israel, an attack that President Biden has called, quote, "the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust."

At some point, when an adversary persistently pursues actions to make its words a reality, we should probably consider, just consider, that our adversary actually means what they're saying and respond accordingly. More fundamentally, when evil reveals itself, we should call it by name. I realize some might be uncomfortable with that word, but I for one am with President Biden on that point. On October 7 was indeed, as he said, quote, "an act of sheer evil, full stop."

Since 1979, Iran has pursued an asymmetrical strategy against the United States and Israel, it has developed a network of terror puppets to undermine and attack Israel, U.S. forces in the region and America's Arab partners. It's quite a scheme, enabling Tehran to advance its objectives while avoiding or minimizing consequences for itself and displacing those consequences on its Arab terror proxies. When we focus on the terror proxy puppets alone and ignore the puppet master in Tehran, we play right into Iran's strategy.

One note to fellow Americans listening of all backgrounds — for those of you old enough, I encourage you to take a moment and remember how you felt in the immediate days after 9/11 terror attacks on our country. Remember the feelings of grief, insecurity, and anger. I do. I remember that. If you're not old enough to remember 9/11, ask your parents, ask your family members, ask your friends how they felt.

Well, Hamas's surprise terrorist attack and subsequent onslaught has claimed the lives of at least 1,200 Israelis. To put that in perspective, Israel's losses would be equivalent to more than 40,000 Americans dying in per capita terms. That is more than 13 times those lost on 9/11.



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And to appreciate what Israelis are feeling, consider that Hamas did not come from some far away place like Afghanistan but from rather a mile or two away and they came crashing into your living room. Would you be comfortable letting a terror group like that continue to exist a few miles from your home? I don't think so, and Israel isn't willing to tolerate that either.

And finally, let's certainly not forget the Americans killed and taken hostage. Don't doubt for a minute that those Hamas terrorists would have loved to kill even more Americans. So both as a matter of principle, dare I say morality, and a matter of national security, I believe we need to move heaven and earth to provide Israel the means to defend itself, to deprive Hamas of its means of murder, and to secure our common interests.

The weeks ahead will be very difficult for Israel. They are confronting an adversary that hides behind Palestinian women and children and elderly people, sacrificing them deliberately in the pursuit of its campaign to destroy the state of Israel and kill Jews.

But as we work to tirelessly help Israel in its moment of need, we should not focus on Hamas alone. We must not forget the puppet master in Tehran. Otherwise, we risk simply seeing more of the same in the future.

So with that, let me introduce our distinguished panel. First, Congressman Brad Schneider on the end, who represents the 10th District of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives. He serves on the House Committee on Ways and Means and the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, two committee assignments that are certainly relevant to our discussion today. He's also co-founder and co-chair of the bipartisan Abraham Accords Caucus. Congressman, welcome.

Next, Eyal Hulata. From July 2021 to January 2023, Dr. Hulata served as Israel's National Security Advisor and head of Israel's National Security Council. He served under prime ministers Bennett and Lapid. During his tenure, he coordinated the national effort on Iran and co-led the Strategic Consultation Group with his American counterpart Jake Sullivan. Eyal is a senior international fellow at FDD. Welcome.

Next is Rich Goldberg. Rich is a senior advisor at FDD. He served as the Director for Countering Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction for the National Security Council and Deputy Chief of Staff and senior foreign policy advisor to former U.S. Senator Mark Kirk of Illinois in both the U.S. House and Senate. Rich is a friend and one of the smartest people I know on the issues at hand.

Moderating this conversation closest to me here will be Jonathan Schanzer. Jon is the senior vice president for research at FDD. He previously worked as a terrorism finance analyst at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, where he played an integral role in the designation of numerous terrorist financiers. He's an expert on the Middle East and literally wrote the book on the 2021 Gaza conflict.

With that, over to you, Jonathan.

**SCHANZER:** All right. Thank you, Brad, and thanks to all of you for joining us today, thanks for — attending for those online and in person.

I want to dive right in, and I want to start with Eyal. Let's just get a quick sit rep of exactly what's going on right now, and specifically what you think the strategy is that Iran is deploying. Has it changed in response to things that Israel or the United States have done? In other words, you know, the Iranians came into this with one idea. Are they leaving with the same idea or has the — have the goal posts moved?

**HULATA:** So first, I mean, no — nobody's leaving at this point, right? So it's all in the making. I can give you a — an assessment of how things have evolved over the last 10 days perhaps, but, you know, I anticipate this will go longer, maybe a lot longer. So we'll still have chances to view that.

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I'm sure — but at least for now. So first, you know, just for those who are not able to — cover it just shortly, the situation in the moment is Israel of course is on the offense in Gaza. The instruction of the people to evacuate the northern part of Gaza and to go to the south part is important because Israel does not want civilians in war zone. Israel also evacuated civilians on our side of the border, not to be in war zones. We evacuated to the roads. That's something I didn't think I'll see in my lifetime. It's 30 people — 30,000 people live in this town, of course other communities, and we're prepared to do so in the north if Hezbollah decides to join. We'll talk about this also.

So, I mean, the — this issue of keeping the civilians out of the war zone is very important. I wish we got that advanced warning for our communities before Hamas stormed into Israel 10 days ago. Of course, they had an intention to kill civilians. So this wouldn't have happened.

So at the moment, Israel is preparing. From what I hear, we're [Israel] ready with the ground maneuver. And the aim, as the government said it, is to end this when Hamas is no longer governing Gaza. And there are many questions — how will this play out? How do we do this? And what — the day after? We can talk about this later. So this is about the situation in Gaza.

On the north, at this minute, war hasn't started in the north just yet, but Hezbollah is doing whatever they can to drag us in. I think their philosopher strategy about this is they don't want to provoke this, they don't want to suffer all of the consequences of bearing responsibility for incurring the damage that will come on Lebanon. So they are allowing the Palestinians to shoot rockets here and mortars there and snipers and all those. This can enflame.

The reason I think the IDF is playing it very, very carefully — we don't need to front at the moment, we need to keep the Lebanese front for later. I will put it this way — we need to finish the work first in Hamas in Gaza and then deal with the other issues.

As for Iran, you know, I don't have second doubts on the fact that they are behind this. I don't need to wait for the piece of intel of the smoking gun. If we had it, we'd have an advanced warning of this war starting in the first place.

So clearly, it's going to be difficult to find because Hamas did everything they can that we don't know that they're operating, let alone where the orders came from. Iran funded Hamas military branch, Iran trained them, they give them equipment, they give them advice. I'm sure, you know, the Iranian fingerprints all over this.

Either Iran didn't want or couldn't have Hezbollah join in the first war — first day. I mean, if they wanted to incur even more civilian casualties on us, Hezbollah could have joined on October 7th, and they didn't. Is it because [Hassan] Nasrallah was, you know, afraid of the damage to Lebanon or Iran wanted to wait with them for a trap for later? I don't know. You know, I don't see intel, I don't work for the government at this point, so I don't know the answer to that but those are the kind of questions we need to ask or the Israelis need to ask back home regarding this.

I'm sure Iran would like to drag this as long as they want. I think Iran is waiting for the public opinion in the West to turn against Israel. The fact that it hasn't so far says a lot about the brutality of Hamas but also says a lot about the friendship and the true camaraderie that I think Israel is feeling, especially from the United States of America, from this administration, from all of the Americans that support us [Israelis] in amounts that we haven't seen before.

So this is all very, very important. How this will play out for Iran in the end, we'll see. Israel needs to be very careful on the one side but very concise and effective on the other to come out of this with gains that are strategic and unloading memories of this tragic failure on front.

**SCHANZER:** Let me — I'm going to stick with you for a second, Eyal. And I just want to — I want to put a scenario out on the table and I want to just get your response to it. If you think about — obviously, Israel did not want this, didn't ask for it, it's reeling from the slaughter of 1,300 people. I get that. But it's now in a war where it has desired outcomes.

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If I understand it right, what Israel would like is to be able to have the Gaza front fought in isolation. Hezbollah sits it out, as much as that's possible. Of course, you'll see some noise on the border. We continue to see this. But that ultimately Iran will be faced with a — fait accompli, that one of its proxies will be destroyed by the end of this and it will have no choice but to watch it unless it wants to get drawn into something bigger.

And then I'm assuming that Israel would also like to see the entire approach of the United States change as it relates to negotiations with Iran over the nuclear issue. Is this correct? Would you add anything, subtract anything?

**HULATA:** So, you know, I mean, the fact that Iran is the core of the problem is very clear. Again, I will answer from an Israeli perspective. I think there are others here who can say how this should play out from an American policy standpoint.

When I was [Israeli] National Security Advisor, I made it very clear what our goals were and what we needed to do, but I don't have that capacity at this point.

But I — do want to say this — so from an Israeli perspective, it is clear that Iran is the source of the problem. When we prioritize our problems, Iran is first and then second and third, and the proxies come later because the proxies are — you know, the tentacles that Iran uses to subvert the situation here to keep us busy with various things while they go on with the — with the core issues, which is getting closer to being nuclear and passing the time so that the sunsets of the JCPOA will pass. What day is the sunset of the — you just talked about this in the previous panel — this Wednesday [October 18, 2023], right? So in two days, Iran can practically do whatever they want on ballistic missiles. And clearly, this is what they want, right?

The second thing Iran wanted was to derail the normalization process with Saudi Arabia because the worst thing that they need is more countries normalizing with us. Their narrative is that normalization with Israel is dangerous for the region, right? But that's what they try to portray. This is what they want to gain on the long run and — which is more strategic.

Israel was focused on how we address that. Unfortunately, we're not on the defense and allow the proxy to do what they did 10 days ago, but we still need to keep the eye on the ball. That is the ball. If we now go into a session of going from proxy to proxy to proxy — and, you know, I believe we can incur a lot of damage to those proxies — but while we're at it, Iran continues with their grand strategy. On the macro level, Israel loses. We can't allow that to happen.

So, you know, we — I think we were — you know, the many questions that I got — how big is the strategic failure for Israel to keep Hamas, you know, to try to keep it quiet rather than to duel them — a round of war with Hamas at any point in time would have deflected our focus from Iran.

When I was National Security Advisor, we had a round with a Palestinian Islamic Jihad. We managed to finish this in three days without Hamas getting into it so it could keep the eye on the ball. On that same month, I was here in Washington talking to my counterparts about the JCPOA that the Americans tried to get back into August of last year. You remember that, right?

So, I mean, we — I think our ability to focus on the strategic goals is very, very important, and this is what we need to do.

My hope is that in this point in time, where there is such support from the American administration, of the Biden administration to that, there will be also some reckoning about what should the American position be like, how to utilize the fact that there are two terror groups now in the Middle East. And President Biden said it very, very clearly — we are here to deter Iran, we're here to make sure that they know that Israel got your back. These are all very, very important messages. And I hope it will allow also for a strategic shift rather than just tactical.

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**SCHANZER:** Got it. OK. Congressman Schneider, thank you for joining us. Great to have you here, an honor. What's the mood in Congress right now? I mean, we — obviously, you see a lot of support. What do you see coming out of this? How do you think the — how do you think the attacks of 10/7 has changed — has it changed anything? And specifically, I'm talking about as it relates to Iran, right? I mean, this is where I think all eyes are on.

**SCHNEIDER:** And let me start with that and I — pick up something Eyal said. 10/7 changed all the assumptions in Israel in one day. And to change the assumptions, you have to change the conclusions, and I think it's altered the strategy and that's the case there.

The same is true here in the United States. We have to — and I think it has changed the assumptions. The idea that Hamas was kind of cooling things down and focused on the West Bank — and we were — I was there in August and that was the narrative. The idea that Iran was so close to a nuclear weapon, and around 12 days from breakup, that we have to find a path and do it with a soft hand rather than an iron fist. All those assumptions, I think, are out the window.

As far as the mood, on Sunday the 8th, we started working on a resolution that was introduced with 400 — last count I had was 421 members of Congress had signed on. The — those that didn't were the usual suspects, mostly on one side but there were some on both sides.

That is the sense — Israel was attacked, Hamas started a war, Israel has to be able to defend its borders, protect its people and rescue its captives. And I think there is a uniform consensus around that.

We faced a challenge. Congress, for the last week, has not — or the House for the last week has not sat in session in the midst of all this. We may or may not be in session tomorrow. That makes it really difficult. But at the end of this moment for the House, I think it's very clear — and I'll go back — Eyal touched on this when you talked about August. Congress, or the House where I sit, Republicans and Democrats made it very clear to the administration that moving forward with Iran had to go through Congress.

And I think very clearly it'll be stated that our assumptions have changed, our conclusions have to change. We cannot look to simply contain Iran and not worry about, as you said, the tentacles. We have to address the tentacles, have to make sure that those don't become hydras, that three pop up where one is cut off, and that the center, which is Iran, is addressed in a much more clear-eyed way, that — make sure we aren't going down this — the path we've been focused on.

**SCHANZER:** So let me push you on that. I mean, obviously this administration has been committed to engagement with Iran. It took a lot of heat in — over the last week for the hostage diplomacy, where the US handed over to the — well, to a Qatari bank holding it on Iran's behalf, \$6 billion. And there's a lot of talk about whether it was used or not used. The administration says nothing's been moved from that account, and we can take them at their word I'm assuming, but does this change the overall approach, do you think, of this administration? Does it have to?

**SCHNEIDER:** I think it has to. You know, the \$6 billion moved to Qatar, my understanding — and I believe it is that not a penny of that money has gone out, but in the same time, Iran has accumulated large sums of capital from selling — the sale of oil. They've got resources from many — or revenues from many different resources, and we need to take every step to close that off.

We need an international community. We're two days from the lifting of the ballistic missiles and a few other sunsets. We need to respond to that. And it's not just the United States. It is our European partners, the — E3, and we have to work to — build that coalition.

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I am grateful at this moment — I'm not grateful for the war in Ukraine but the leadership the United States has demonstrated in that war and holding the coalition together — I think gives President Biden more credibility making the statements he has said over the last 10 days.

We're — we're seeing the world taking his — his statements seriously. I hope Iran understands and Iran's agents understand moving two carrier groups into the same location is extraordinarily — it's remarkable, but it also gives the United States the power to operate 24 hours a day. It changes the whole dynamic of what we are able to do, and it needs to be clear that it's not just that we're able but we are willing to take whatever steps necessary to make sure Israel can do what Israel must do and that united interests — United States interests are protected around the region.

**SCHANZER:** I'm going to stick with you for one more quick one.

**SCHNEIDER:** All right.

**SCHANZER:** And then I want to get to Rich. This — you talked about the usual suspects, those that were opposed to this resolution. We've seen a lot of polarization in Congress, as it relates to Israel, as it relates to Iran. Do you think that changes now? Are you beginning to sense a shift? Or do you think we're going to go back to business as usual?

**SCHNEIDER:** So, I'm going to pick up on — on something Eyal also said, is this is a long haul. And you were talking about Iran and are they leaving? We don't know. We're going to be here, and there's going to be ups and downs.

If you watch different news stations on Saturday, the initial reactions of that coverage was very hostile to Israel. As the images came out of the horrific attack, the realization that this is the worst attack on Jews since the Holocaust, that unlike the 1973 war where not a single civilian died, more than 1,200 civilians have been slaughtered, massacred — you can pick your words.

The brutality and the utter disregard for human life has, I think, lifted the veil on many people's eyes to see Hamas for what they are. Those who have followed this closely, we know Hamas is what they are. We weren't surprised that they would behave this way. We were surprised that they were able to behave this way.

Part of our task is making sure that we continue to hold that together, that people see what's at stake. They understand that, unlike Hamas who is wantonly disregarding the rule of international and humanitarian law, Israel is following it. Israel is taking steps to, remarkably, warn civilians to evacuate from what is going to be the area of conflict. It's Hamas who is holding them in.

The more we can demonstrate that — and we're going to have to demonstrate it consistently and repeatedly over the days ahead — I think the better we can make sure that people understand Israel is doing what it has to, not because they are at war with the Palestinians — they are not — but because they have to defeat Hamas and make sure Hamas not only can't threaten Israel but it can no longer operate and — and hold the people of Gaza down.

**SCHANZER:** OK. Rich, to you. You've done a lot of work on the nuclear program and you've been watching what's been going on over the last week. How are these things connected in your mind?

**GOLDBERG:** Well, I think it's all connected. Eyal sort of started drawing the lines, and I'll connect them even further. There's only one country right now in the world actively working to sabotage Iran's advance to the nuclear threshold. It's not the United States. It's Israel.

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And so if you are looking at this as a strategic picture from the regime and you have been under immense pressure for a number of years and that pressure is starting to be relieved, you cut a deal with the Saudis. The Saudis sue for peace because they don't want missiles coming down from Yemen, because the United States is nowhere to be found to protect them from Houthi attacks. MBS [Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud] looks around saying, "I got nobody nowhere. Let's cut a deal. I need to focus on Vision 2030."

The Saudis are off the table. They keep advancing the nuclear program, keep threatening American forces in the region, start taking tankers. The president's in reelection. I got to focus on a war in Ukraine. I got China. I can't do this. I don't want to do this. What's it going to take to make them go quiet?

You cut a deal, and that's what they did starting in May when Brett McGurk went over to Oman, sent the message to the Omanis. We released \$10 billion out of Iraq. It's sitting in Oman. We only talk about the \$6 billion in Qatar. We all forgot there's \$10 billion and more continuing to pile up in Oman. I hope we locked that one down too.

The oil exports start flowing, surging during the summer. Great timing. We're in a de-escalation with China, too, so it works out well. We don't threaten the Chinese. The Chinese, now you can import as much oil as you want from Iran. We'll let the Iranians know you can export as much as you want to China. Everybody wins here. Windfall for the regime. Americans are off the table.

A complete posture of all the adversaries, all of the challenges around me have been disarmed except for one — Israel still operating under that Octopus Doctrine that started under Prime Minister Bennett, where the fight started getting taken inside of Iran. All of the spectacular things you saw in the news — explosions, drone attacks, IRGC commanders being taken hostage inside Iran, videotaped, interrogated, released back into the wild — crazy stuff.

Who's behind that? Not the Kurds in Northern Iraq — maybe they're helping — but Israel. And so if the pressure is being relieved, the money is starting to flow again, the great adversaries, great challenges close to home are pulling back, that creates an opportunity to completely focus resources, attention, time on the one remaining threat — reactivate your tentacles.

And if they're coming for the head of the octopus from Jerusalem, the only way to throw them back is to completely go all in with the tentacles and force the Israelis to confront the tentacles instead. Disrupt. Create horrific attempts to bleed Israel out — not destroy Israel all at once, bleed them out, bleed them out over the summer in the West Bank — completely distracted there — bleed them out now from Gaza in the most horrific massacre. You're starting to see just little itty-bitsies up at the northern front, anti-tank guided missiles coming across, some firing some rockets, just a little bit, right as the ground incursion in Gaza's going to start.

All of this is a picture of, OK, who's minding the store back home in Tehran now? Who's focused on what they're doing on secret nuclear weapons developments? What's happening inside SPND [The Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research] right now, the IRGC military nuclear organization that is the godfather, that is the organization that really runs the nuclear weapons program?

What's happening in the missile domain as Wednesday the missile embargo lifts and Russia will go all in now with hypersonics and all kinds of missile cooperation with their great military partner in Iran, and Iran perhaps now with the embargo lifted takes the opportunity at some point to send short-range ballistic missiles back to Russia for use against Ukraine?

China still very, very happy Iran has now distracted us even more. We now have to handle a war in Ukraine that Putin is fighting with a great partnership with Xi, we now have to worry about our allies in Israel and the threat from Iran that continues to escalate, and now the China threat we're distracted from.

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So even zooming back out, not about Israel, about American interests, we were — have to remember the axis — China, Russia, Iran, all working together for strategic mutual benefit. What just happened here is horrific for Israel, horrific for Jews, and a major strategic challenge for the United States. Why? Because we believe in this word right now in Washington of de-escalation. De-escalation's going to advance our interests. It does not, it just signals weakness to our enemies, and they all seize on it.

And so I agree with you, Jon — now is the time for us to reset this policy. The Congressman said it amazingly well and made it perfectly — assumptions need to be reevaluated, conclusions therefore need to be reevaluated because it's not just about Israel, it's not just about Iran and the Middle East, this is about our broader national security framework.

**SCHANZER:** OK, I see you have a few thoughts on that.

**GOLDBERG:** I just needed to get that off my chest.

**SCHANZER:** OK, yeah — no, no, — it was perfect, it was perfect. Let me just ask you one follow-up here and then I think we'll probably let folks in the audience ask questions. But you — you've done a lot of work on ways to pressure the regime in Iran. You did it in the White House, you've done it on Capitol Hill.

If you were in one of those positions now, what would be your top three or five recommendations, what do you do at this moment to make Iran pay, not just for the attack against Israel, not just for the regional war that it's threatening to stoke, but also for its maligned activities around the rest of the region, the nuclear advancements? What do you do right now to put them back in a box?

**GOLDBERG:** Yeah, the — I think that there's some basic things you can do on Iran and some basic things you can do on the tentacles as well, and I think we need to advance on both ends, right? A policy of saying I'm against this one tentacle but I'm going to put more money into the head makes no sense. That's a failed policy, that's the current policy. A policy that says I'm only going to focus on the head but take my focus off the tentacles, that doesn't work either. There has to be two lines of effort going on against tentacles of Iran, their terror proxies, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Tehran itself.

OK, on the Tehran side, basic things — remove the waiver that was issued to allow Iraq to start moving money out of Iraq to Oman, go back to the old waiver that forces Baghdad to put money into escrow, cut off the money flow there. Obviously lock down the Qatar bank accounts as well, the Omani bank accounts. No more money flowing. All other accounts that were on the table that were being looked at, they were in negotiations, I guarantee you, going on about \$3 billion coming from Japan shortly. That's obviously not happening anytime soon. All these accounts locked.

Massive crackdown on the oil exports. I guarantee you the Treasury Department is sitting on sanctions packages right now. There is no question in my mind. I've sat in the interagency meetings, we did enforcement of our sanctions on oil, oil going to China. It is impossible for a million barrels per day of Iranian oil to increase and skyrocket to China without the intelligence community being able to know who's involved and where it leads up to a state-owned enterprise in China. And if we're willing to get tough with the Chinese, it will suddenly slow back down, I guarantee that. That's another piece there.

The UN, it takes one letter to the Security Council to stop this missile embargo from lifting and to bring back the conventional arms embargo as well that expired in 2020. A letter. We can go back to our computer, get Joe Biden to sign it, and send it to the Security Council or call [Prime Minister] Rishi Sunak and say can you send a letter from me, because our policy is, under the Biden administration, we left the deal so we can't trigger the snapback.

Where are you, Prime Minister Sunak? Great tweet, standing with Israel. Why aren't you triggering the snapback? It takes a letter, that's it — that's it. China and Russia can't stop it the way we designed in the Security Council. We're not willing to do it? Come on. So that's another thing.

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Rishi Sunak blocking the designation of IRGC as a terrorist organization in Great Britain. They're closing down Jewish schools in Great Britain today because of fear of Hamas threats, but they can't crack down on the Islamic Jihadist network that Iran funds throughout the UK by prescribing the IRGC, and the EU as well? These would be my checklists for the White House there.

And then on the proxies, we have multiple laws, two laws that the Congress has enacted to go after Hezbollah financing. They're not being used, they're not being enforced. We could be cracking down on Hezbollah's funds throughout the world.

In our own back yard in Latin America, we have a rule going through the FDA right now to ban menthol and crack down on cigarettes, opening up a potential black market on the cigarette market. Who's going to fill that void? Hezbollah. They're going to work with the cartels and they're going to bring black market cigarettes up here. Fox News just reported we just caught a bunch of Iranians at the border in the last 14 days. What do we think's going on here?

So crack down on Hezbollah's financing and — everywhere you can, don't do anything bad that's going to increase their financing. For Hamas, we don't have that kind of sanctions regime. We need it. What are we doing dancing with the Qataris right now, saying that's great, thanks for hosting the Iranians and Hamas over the weekend for a great summit, thanks for all your good offices with Hamas. Do we believe what we say about Hamas? Why are we allowing the Qataris to — to host them and — and support them? Why are we allowing the Turks to do that? We're pump — pumping money into the Lebanese Armed Forces and we let them operate and probably plan this entire operation out of Beirut?

Because Beirut, as you know, Jon, is where Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad are coordinated by the IRGC in a fusion cell. Where do you think this was hatched out of? And we're putting taxpayer money into Lebanon still?

So we got a lot of policies to reevaluate here.

**SCHANZER:** Well, actually, let me — Congressman, let me get — let me actually ask you about those issues right away. Rich raises good points. We've got this base, the Nakhlah Al Udeid in Qatar and the Qataris have been giving money and all kinds of support and a safe haven to Hamas.

We've got the Turks that are NATO allies, remarkably, and they have been providing materiel support and a safe haven to Hamas since at least 2011, maybe even before that. And then there is our policy of funding the LAF in — in Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces have done — I mean, I saw them — they dismantled 20 rocket launchers today, finally, right? 10 days into this conflict, they announced a big move, right?

But, I mean, these are countries that enjoy a relationship with the United States. Should they? And is Congress going to reevaluate?

**SCHNEIDER:** Well, I don't think it's a question of the relationship, it's a question of what are the expectations of the relationship? And it goes back to the assumptions. The assumption was having Qatar with a relationship — helping Hamas created that channel, moderate it, mediate it — whatever term you want to use — and clearly, that's not what happened. So changing that assumption and changing the expectations of being very clear.

Same with Turkey. Turkey has its own agenda, its own goals. It's created issues, whether it was Sweden coming into NATO or — other things. And it's not just the United States, it's — the — I'm not a diplomat. Sorry, I'm not a diplomat. Sorry.

**SCHANZER:** Nor am I.



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**SCHNEIDER:** I don't have that experience. But the sense of the diplomats is — "well, we need to dance and talk and do the whole thing and, you know, it'll be OK," we need to be clear of what our expectations are. Expectations lead to very explicit demands, and if they're not met, there — have to be real, concrete consequences.

**SCHANZER:** Do you think there will be consequences for any of these countries for the role that they've played? By the way, I could throw in there Malaysia, Algeria, Kuwait. I mean, there are a whole host of countries that have been providing assistance to Hamas and we've looked the other way as a policy in the United States.

**SCHNEIDER:** It's — not just — the US, it's Israel, too, and — and Netanyahu working with Qatar and — having — making certain assumptions, driving certain strategy — strategies that lead to policies that clearly have not worked.

I'm going to leave consequences to the folks who are, I assume, evaluating what our options are. I want to see the change in behavior going forward to what can we expect? What do we need to do?

Our strategy has to change. We have to be clear. You know, talk about the — JCPOA and my concerns at the time. There has to be a — fundamental belief that the United States stands by it — the position that all options are at the — on the table, that we're willing to use military force if — necessary. The more that's credible, the less likely it becomes necessary.

**SCHANZER:** So let me — I'm going to push you on that, too. I — because I think — I've heard across the region, "OK, great. The US has just put two significant naval assets right off the coast here." But does anybody believe that the US will actually use that force?

In other words, after Afghanistan, after Iraq, after not responding to Iranian aggression in the Abqaiq attack that took Saudi oil offline — in other words, the US doesn't seem to have a lot of credibility in the region. Do you think that the Iranians are deterred by this US presence right now?

**SCHNEIDER:** I think they should be, and — I alluded to the difference today from a — number of years ago. The resolve we have — demonstrated vis-a-vis Russia and Putin's attack on Ukraine I think shows that we're not backing down — and I'll point to President Biden — not backing down and not shirking from our role, and working with our allies to stand strong. I think in this case as well, the message is clear. I hope it's not tested, and I guess time's going to tell.

**SCHANZER:** OK.

Eyal, let me ask you about Israeli deterrence, because I do think that there are some questions obviously that have come up as a result of this attack. There was clearly some kind of an intelligence failure. We don't have to get into chapter and verse here but I think that's clear.

I think it's clear that Israel's lost some of the deterrence that maybe it's built up, that there may be a sense among — whether it's the Iranians or Hezbollah or others that Israel, you know, was weaker in some way.

By the way, we could make the argument that some of the domestic turmoil that was taking place inside Israel even before the — the intelligence failure contributed to this, and I suspect there'll be some tough conversations coming in Israel when this is all said and done. Curious to get your thoughts on that.

But, you know, you've worked in this system for a long time. How does Israel think about rebuilding its deterrence, right? It's going to start from the ground floor now to build back up. Is it — I mean, does your campaign between the wars all of a sudden start operating on steroids? Are there other — I mean, I — Israel's known for its surprises. Are we going to see more of those so that Israel can start to flex those muscles? What do you think comes next?

**HULATA:** First, I — think the — when we talk about deterrence, deterrence is a very elusive concept. You know, I — was in a — on a — panel with H. R. McMaster a few weeks ago and we spoke about the issues of deterrence. There are things that I — allowed myself to say back then that more difficult for me to say right now.

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But unfortunately, I think it — I mean, so if you — the fact that we have capabilities but that the other side isn't certain that we will use them if we need to, that cracks down on deterrence very, very much. I think this is a — global and — Israel had a massive defense apparatus in Gaza.

And we have the best air defense system in the world, and we were able to protect our civilians from rockets very effectively over the last several years, since Iron Dome was operational. Did it serve as deterrence for Hamas? No. I have to say I didn't think it served as a deterrent of Hamas even before that.

We had this conversation before, when I was National Security Advisor, trying to understand the outcomes of [Operation] Guardian of the Walls. I didn't like it when Israel — the military folks came to say "well, Hamas is deterred because of Guardian of the Walls."

I didn't think we reestablished deterrence in this sense, that Hamas feels that if they operate, they will be destructed. Had they thought that, maybe they wouldn't do what they did on October 7. They know that we can incur damage on them but they also know that we'd rather do other things.

And if this sounds similar to you, well, you know, that's — I'm talking about Israel right now because we are indeed in a very, as you said, low situation, need to build this back up. I think there are a few things we need to do.

The first is — and I was fully supportive of the government doing this — we need to make it clear that when this ends, Hamas is no longer ruler of Gaza. This is not an easy task and it will take time. And we need support so we can do this.

Conversations I had with friends among the region, they also understand that if Hamas can get away with this and — stay standing, this will incur risks on them as well be — if Hamas can get away with this with us, well, as you — you alluded, Rich, you know, if they — were able to surprise us when we have all of the surveillance and we are in arms reach to — literally, if we're able to, hold their throat as they pass through the fence, what are the chances of other countries, when Hamas decides to go on a — a surprise attack on them, in the region and elsewhere?

There is a message there, that we need to — make it clear that they shouldn't try this, not on us and not on — — others if others can't piggyback on our deterrence. But first, we need to reestablish this. This is also true for Hezbollah. And of course, this is true on Iran.

The toolbox is very, very wide. At the moment, we're talking about Hamas, as I said before. We need to get this done effectively. This is military work — Air Force, potential use of — ground forces in various capacities, a lot of intelligence — and to finish this when Hamas is no longer ruler of Gaza.

By the way, this can not only be done militarily. I believe that we need also to use a lot of — the diplomatic capacity because Hamas is a threat not only to us but also to Egypt and to Saudi Arabia and all of the others. They all share the risks of — Islamic brotherhood and they say that they care about the Palestinian humanitarian situation. Well, let's see you care about the Palestinian humanitarian situation.

Let's finish this, when Hamas is no longer ruling them because Hamas failed its people. Not only did they slaughter us. Instead of taking care of their people, according to the part of Congressman, you're right. We did have this paradigm and we end up — I was part of it.

We thought that we could incentivize Hamas to take care of its own people because they now rule 2.5 million people and that there will be — or — kind of a risk calculus analysis, wouldn't want to attack us. Well, we were wrong because Hamas clearly prefers to slaughter Jews than to take care of its own people. This is not only our — we'll lead this, but this is how I think we should go about this.

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You ask a question about more covert issues and — covert campaigns. Clearly, my belief is that we need to do more of this. You know, we talked before about the Octopus Doctrine. I'd — proud to serve as National Security Advisor to that government and — push towards that because Israel should not confront Iran militarily unless we have to. You know, they're 1,500 miles away. Did I convert kilometers to miles correctly? I hope so. Or — this is — not like in —Gaza. We need a wider toolbox. We have used a wider toolbox in the past and we definitely should see more of that in the future.

**SCHANZER:** OK. I do want to open up for questions here, and if you've got a question, just, you know, make yourself known and we'll get you a microphone.

**BARTSCH:** Thank you. Thank you for this illuminating panel. My question is primarily on some of the response from some news reports we've seen declaring that Iranian leaders were surprised by the assault in Gaza, that they didn't know it was coming. Therefore, Iran wasn't directly involved. Is that simply nonsense or, you know, what would be your response to that?

**GOLDBERG:** I'll jump in first, and anybody else wants to add — I'd obviously not been in the intel briefings that have been provided but it doesn't take the Director of National Intelligence to put this together, as that — some of it's in the *New York Times* and in the *Wall Street Journal* already.

Number one, obviously at the — at the high level, as the President has said, as the National Security Advisor has said, Iran sponsors, arms, equips, trains, coordinates Hamas and Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah 365, right, all — year round.

But that's sort of where their public statement stops, and we saw the President last night on *60 Minutes* say point blank that we have no evidence of Iran's direct involvement in the attack. To me, that — that's a bit absurd because, A, we have a *Wall Street Journal* story that claims to have Hezbollah, Hamas sources saying that IRGC was involved.

Now, that's been questioned, the — verification of the sources, there's some shade that was thrown on the story just last night by *Semafor*, the media critic there, the media reporter there, not the national security reporter trying to, you know, sink this *Wall Street Journal* report.

A lot of other people in Washington were trying to chase the *Wall Street Journal* and got scared off by the White House. They were saying, no, no, no, no intel. This not true — this is not true. OK?

Well, on Saturday, two very prominent journalists for *The New York Times* published a story that nobody apparently read because the headline was meant to make sure you didn't read it because the headline of the article that I would have read was "IRGC admits it was behind attack."

If you read the piece by Farnaz [Fassihi] and — Ronen Bergman, you will see that they quote Hezbollah sources, IRGC sources, and leadership Iranian sources, all saying on background that the IRGC was complicit in this attack.

Of course they were. They coordinate a fusion cell in Beirut since 2021, where they put everybody together like a war room, intel room, operations room, they go in and out of Lebanon because they've obviously gone in and out of Syria already, they can go — into Lebanon and they coordinate it all. And they figured out exactly how we detect intel and they figured out how the Israelis detect.

And they said, well, guess what? We're going to do things in a way where they don't detect. We couldn't find Osama bin Laden for 10 years because he figured it out too, because, actually, members of Congress went and gave some briefing details when they shouldn't have, and he went underground for 10 years.

And so if you don't have any intel on the planning of the attack, it stands to reason you have no intel on Iran's involvement in said attack plans. Of course you don't have the intel. You're not going to find the intel. There was no intel. It was a catastrophic intelligence failure.

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But, you know, after the fact now, we're just going to say, oh, *The New York Times*, they don't know what they're talking about. Isn't that the paper of record in the White House? *Wall Street Journal*, they don't know what they're talking about. These editors, they should never have run these stories. And yet, they're in print. We're not going to take the people at their words telling us that this is how it happened and our own logic telling us of course this is how it happened.

And look at the coordinated way this attack happened, the complexity of it, air, land and sea. New innovations, putting mortars on drones, the — — whole paragliding paradigm. All of this, you know, this is clearly the IRGC who coordinated it.

Now, you asked the question — well, we have intel coming in that DNI's [Director of National Intelligence] briefing on, that we have reactions at very senior levels in Iran that indicate that they were surprised by the attack. Oh, so it is possible then that the Supreme Leader had authorized the IRGC to go down an operational path, which it does all the time, and the IRGC Quds Force Commander took the orders and spent a year plotting and planning and coordinating and were trying to pull all kinds of stuff off. And this was the spectacular event, and it happened. And there wasn't just, like, regular, like, let's get on the VTC [Video Tele-Conference] to the Supreme Leader and talk about how the operational plan's going. That's not how it works — that's not how it works.

So yes, do I — am I surprised that they — like, there's somebody in the Supreme National Security Council or somewhere that's saying on something somebody has, "wow, can you believe it? I can't believe they did this." Well, there's somebody else who's not so surprised. Probably the Quds Force Commander.

And then if the Quds Force Commander is somehow surprised that it went so well according to the plans that were very sort of strategic level at first, there's a bunch of IRGC officers under them stationed in Beirut, stationed in Syria, who are working with Hamas and Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah who are not surprised one bit.

But, of course, as they all said, when you're conducting this in this way with courier pigeon, for God's sake, to try to get messages back and forth and coordinate this, there — it's a very tight loop, there are very few people who know, they intentionally make sure leadership and anybody who they think could be surveilled are not in the loop, to try to preserve their operational security until the end.

And so I — the only reason, in my opinion, why the administration would continue to deny this, is to try to maintain the possibility of a bifurcated policy of engagement with the Iranians, keeping the door open, keeping the money available, not triggering the snapback, not putting pressure on the regime, still having the nuclear arrangement, and trying to have a different policy just on Hamas.

**SCHNEIDER:** Let me add to that, and a — you know — so, what Richard said make sense. Someone who starts in the opposite place should end up in the exact same spot though. Because — I'll use an analogy. If you breed an attack dog, you train an attack dog, you equip an attack dog, maybe you're surprised that the dog breaks through the fence and attacks but you're still responsible for that attack.

And Iran has been training Hamas, has been equipping Hamas, funding Hamas, and this is — as — we said, it has the fingerprints of Hamas training, planning, all the way through. So even if someone takes the opposite path of what you just laid out in the *Wall Street Journal* article, you still end up at the same conclusion, that in the — at the end of the day, we have to hold Iran accountable.

How we do so is something we can have a debate about. What's the best strategy to do so is something we should have a — debate about. But is Iran responsible for Hamas? One hundred percent.

**SCHANZER:** Eyal?

**HULATA:** So I'm a — I'm going to drop the mic kind of experience. That doesn't happen often, I — you know, I mean, my God, this was a — you put it so nicely. I — but I will add one thing. This — we've seen this before.

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The fact that after something happens it clearly has consequences if there is retribution, and you see the leaders of Iran — this also happens with Nasrallah from time to time — "we didn't know anything about this, we are not to blame, it's them." This is standard procedure, right?

So I'm not in the establishment now to go and find the intel that will rebuff it, but since I was in that position in the past, you know, there — there's a — we shouldn't go for that. I think the argument of accountability, Congressman, is the one we all need to use. I think this serves also for us.

I mean, I tell my folks back home, as some of them are with their heads down because they've suffered this immense disaster of collapse of intelligence conception, operational conception, everything failed, right — step up, put your heads up. You have failed, yes. We have failed our people. We did not defend them. This is our role to do.

But fundamentally, it's the same issue. I definitely what we have to do. We know what's Iran about, we know what Hamas is about and we know what Hezbollah is about. We were hoping they wouldn't do this, of course. Am I sorry that we're hoping they wouldn't do this? No, because this was not after the war.

Israel wants prosperity in the Middle East, Israel wants prosperity for its own people, and we want to keep our people safe. They were able to take us by surprise. That's a devastating mistake that shouldn't have happened and I hope it doesn't happen again.

But — we're behind this. Now, it's action time. And we cannot shy away of all of those things that are very, very clear and imminent. Iran has been doing this because they want to surrender Israel — surround Israel with a ring of fire so they can use it when they decide to do this. This was their strategy, and here they — came the time of opportunity where they decided to ignite this ring of fire, whether Hezbollah joins or not.

**SCHANZER:** Other questions from the audience? OK, well, maybe I'll be the audience.

(LAUGHTER)

Let me — and this can be to anybody here. And by the way, keep thinking about your own questions. But the — command and control of — maybe I'll start with Eyal — the command and control of Hezbollah in particular, we hear a lot of about how Hezbollah's owned and controlled by Iran.

Do you think what we're watching right now is Hezbollah restraining itself, Iran restraining Hezbollah? I mean, how do we understand what's — we've seen these Kornet anti-tank strikes up north, we've seen infiltrations. They're trying to do sort of what Iran does, where they blame some of what's going on various Palestinian factions that have ensconced themselves in Lebanon, but what — how do we understand this northern front? How do we game out what happens next? Because this is Iran, but, you know, we're also hearing maybe it's not.

**HULATA:** So, I mean, various scenarios can be here. I can — give you my take, and I think, again, this has been evolving.

I think that Nasrallah made a sound decision not to join on October 7. I would assume that he was pushed by Iran the same way that Hamas was pushed by Iran, and if they wanted to inflict the most damage on Israel's civilian population, they should've gone together. And Nasrallah decided not to do this, then probably he decided that he shouldn't join.

Even if he was tactically unaware of the exact moment when this started, which I seriously doubt, but even if it's true, he could have joined a few hours later or the day after or that night, and he didn't do this, which, I think calls for his ability to restrain himself because he knows what will happen when we attack Lebanon in retaliation to that.

But I think that as time goes by, the balance changes. I hope that Iran is reading the administration messages well. I hope. I don't know, but I hope. And if this is the case, then we may see Iran restraining the field and saying, "OK, we've got our gains. Now we have more to lose than to win." Iran — the supreme leader is very risk adverse.

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**SCHANZER:** But let me just ask you on that ...

**HULATA:** Yeah?

**SCHANZER:** ... will there be gains? I mean, one thing that — strikes me is that if Israel goes in , as it — as it plans to, and it dismantles Hamas to the point that it doesn't exist any longer or it barely exists, then they've lost. They've lost an asset, and there might be a message to Hezbollah — you go too far and — and Iran says, well, you're on your own.

**HULATA:** I think Iran may be betting that this will not be the outcome. This is why we need to make sure that this is the outcome. When Iran delivers a — a threat through Hezbollah, I think also by themselves, that Israel should stop raiding Gaza or else they will have to intervene, they're — delivering this kind of message, maybe signaling what is — the — you know, the — ballpark that they think that they allow, right — not that we need their allowance — Israel to operate in.

And across some line, they — might join in. Maybe this is a part of their calculus. And this is why I hope and think that the Iranians are — are getting the American signals to keep away. I'm — not sure, though. They might decide to join, and — Israel is ready and will be ready to address those.

**GOLDBERG:** Can I just lay out a worrying scenario that is keeping me up a little bit, and that is — and I keep coming back to this — but the Qatari channel worries me greatly, gives me great anxiety for our security, for Israel's security, for Iran's strength and ability to play this in a way that we have not gamed out.

They've taken a number of hostages, American hostages, other countries' hostages. It is — tragically, horrifically one of their greatest leverage points right now potentially. And we are not, in any way, stopping the Qataris. In fact, quite the opposite, from what you saw Secretary Blinken say during his stop in Doha, we are thanking the Qataris for continuing to dialogue with Hamas about the hostages.

Right after Blinken leaves Doha, who arrives the next day on Saturday? The Iranian Foreign Minister. He meets with Hamas in Doha. OK, there are a lot of calculations being made here. What if you don't get that win in Gaza? What if, at some point, Hamas goes and calls the Qataris, coordinate with Iran and says we're willing to make a deal? The IDF has to stand down and we'll do something on the hostages. What's going to happen in Washington? What's going to happen in other places? That's hard. That's very hard. That is heart-wrenching stuff that we're dealing with.

And so, you know, I don't, at this moment, say yeah, Israel says we're going to destroy Hamas, we're going to take it out, we're going to own Gaza, we're going to do something else with Gaza. Really? Maybe. Maybe that's going to happen. Maybe not.

We are in a much stronger position and unified in projecting deterrence and strength if you shut down the Qatari channel, you shut down any Turkish channels, you shut down their offices, and there is full isolation and pressure on both Hamas and, obviously, the mother ship in Tehran.

As long as we have all these diplomatic dances and, you know, let's keep the phone lines open, yeah, the Israelis are — are sitting in pretty, pretty big trouble potentially, in my view.

**SCHANZER:** Congressman, concluding thoughts?

**SCHNEIDER:** Two. I'm going to — I want to respond to that and then I'll — finish on an uplifting thought hopefully.

You make a really interesting point. One of the things I've been trying to tell people when you're making a statement, the clarity and the call to act, you know, we're calling for humanitarian corridors and safe zones for the — civilians of Gaza. And everyone's clearly said in Israel and here in the United States that Israel's at war with Hamas, not with the — Palestinians.

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But I say that the — before you make that call, you have to call on Hamas to release the hostages, right? This starts with Hamas's attack and the taking of hostages. Hamas must release the hostages every single day. We'll talk more about this because I — it — don't even need the channel with the Qataris. If we keep calling, we keep calling. If Hamas was smart, they may do it on their own, and I hadn't thought of that.

But I'm going to finish with, I think, a positive thought, as hard as it is even in this moment. I was with a group of members in Israel in August, and Tal Becker spoke to us, and he talked about his view of the Abraham Accords — and I'm co-chair of the Abraham Accords — and he used the language that has changed how I talk about — well, everything's changed since October 7th — how I talked about it before October 7th.

And he says the Abraham Accords reflect a view that both Arabs and Jews belong to the land, and by embracing each other, Arabs and Jews can create an opportunity for prosperity for everyone in that land. I just like that. Rather than saying "both have a claim to this land," it's "both belong to the land."

The Abraham Accords and the progress Israel is making, the prospect of a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia is something — is an assumption I'm not willing to give up yet on. It has to be something that we hold on to now and into the long-term.

Israel has a imperative to achieve its objectives in Gaza. The United States has a responsibility and obligation to stand with Israel as long as it takes to achieve those objectives. But we also need smart people thinking about the day those objectives are achieved and the direction we move the day after that.

And I am confident there are people thinking about those things — Eyal, you may tell me otherwise — but without that hope, the purpose of why we're fighting this horrible, horrific war could lose meaning. As long as we hold onto that belief, we are on the right side of history.

And this is a — war that Israel has to win and the United States has to make sure Israel is successful.

**SCHANZER:** OK. Thank you for ending on an uplifting note. Appreciate that. And I want to thank you all for coming today and to those tuning in virtually, and of course to all of our panelists, not one but two panels today. All very insightful.

For more information on FDD and the latest analysis on all of these issues, we encourage you to visit our website, [FDD.org](https://www.fdd.org). We welcome you to look into our Iran program, our non-proliferation and biodefense program, and also our Center on Military and Political Power. We encourage you to check back for our robust lineup of events that are coming. And we look forward to seeing you at FDD again soon.

Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

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