

February 9, 2024

*Featuring Lt. Col. (Ret.) Jonathan Conricus, Eyal Hulata, and Enia Krivine*

*Moderated by Anna Schechter*

*Introductory remarks by Elizabeth Robbins*

**ROBBINS:** Welcome and thank you for joining us at today's events hosted by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Today is Friday, February 9th, and the panel before you is assembled to discuss Israel's security challenges, most specifically, the looming threat Israel faces to its north. I'm Elizabeth Robbins, FDD's vice president of communications. We're pleased to have you here, some in person, some tuning in live for this important conversation.

The big question I'm seeing here is this: Will Israel soon fight a two-front war, the ongoing one to defeat Hamas in Gaza, and then a second one to defeat Hezbollah in Lebanon? Which leads to more questions such as the role of the UNIFL, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, established in 1978.

Isn't UNIFL supposed to ensure the peace and security of the Israel-Lebanon border, and also to assist the Lebanese government maintain effective authority in southern Lebanon? Another question about U.N. Resolution 1701, passed in 2006 to end the Israel-Hezbollah war and expand UNIFL's mandate. How come UNIFL isn't effectively supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces between the Blue Line and Jordan's Litani River to remove the Hezbollah threat?

I'm reminded of recent trips to Israel's northern border where I saw Hezbollah flags clearly displayed in Lebanon with Hezbollah operatives in full view, studying us through their binoculars.

My last question – with up to 100,000 Israelis displaced from their homes in northern Israel, how long can Israel withstand this threat before taking decisive action?

I'm now pleased to introduce our panel to answer all these questions.

Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Conricus served 24 years in the Israel Defense Forces as a combat commander in both Lebanon and the Gaza Strip; as a diplomat and as an IDF international spokesperson in the wake of Hamas's October 7 attacks. He recently retired from the reserves and is a member of the Israel Defense and Security Forum, as well as a senior fellow here at FDD.

Eyal Hulata is a senior international fellow at FDD and the first foreign visiting fellow at FDD Headquarters. Formerly, Eyal served as Israel's national security advisor and head of Israel's National Security Council, serving under Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Prime Minister Yair Lapid. He has served more than 20 years in Israeli national security roles.

And Enia Krivine, the senior director of FDD's Israel Program and National Security Network. She joined FDD after nearly seven years at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, where she helped strengthen the U.S.'s relationship through education and advocacy.

Moderating today's discussion is Anna Schechter, senior producer and the NBC News Investigations Unit. Since the outbreak of the war in Israel, she has actively reported developments and updates from the region.

Lastly, before we dive into our discussion, a few words about FDD. For more than 20 years, FDD has operated as a fiercely independent, nonpartisan research institute exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. As a point of pride and principle, we do not accept foreign government funding. For more on our work, please visit our website, [FDD.org](https://www.fdd.org), and follow us on Twitter, [@FDD](https://twitter.com/FDD).

That's enough for me. Anna, over to you.

**SCHECTER:** Thanks so much. It's great to be here with you all, and this is a fascinating time right now. I was just in Israel and did multiple interviews with current and former Israeli officials about the northern border.

So Eyal, I want to start with you. Can you set the scene for us? What is the threat on Israel's northern border? And what is most concerning to you right now?

**HULATA:** Yeah. Thank you, Anna, and good to have you here with us on this stage.

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I think in order to understand the current situation in the north, we need to just remind ourselves, this is 125 days since October 7th, since the horrendous attack by Hamas on our southern communities and towns in a very devastating day in that Saturday of October 7th and over more than four months now of the most intense war Israel has engaged in any time in recent history, let's say that. Israel mobilized 250,000 reservists. That's more soldiers than participated in the Yom Kippur War 50 years ago. This is how significant this is.

And I start with this before I talk about the north because everything that's — happens now in the north is in the shadow of what's happening in the south. Israel is engaged in a intensified conflict with Hezbollah. This not a full-fledged war. We don't call it a war. I think the overall understanding for me for sure, but I think that of the war cabinet is that we also do not want to engage in a full-fledged war with Hezbollah at the moment while we are waging this wide war in Gaza. But nonetheless, over 180 Hezbollah terrorists have been killed over the last the — little bit — less than four months because it's — the conflict in the north did not start immediately. We haven't had this amount of conflict in many, many years, frankly, since the second Lebanese War back in 2006. Beth mentioned this before, and of course, we'll talk about — about the prospect.

This is what's happening at the moment. This is a low-intensity war, but a war nonetheless with Hezbollah, of which we haven't had in almost 20 years.

The significance of that, of course, is that this could have become a war. Hezbollah could have taken the opportunity to join Hamas if not on the 7th of October, on the 8th of October, and they didn't. They chose not to. Israel could have either preempted or used this kind of escalation to move ahead into a more wide war with Hezbollah, and Israel chose not to.

So we're kind of in a balanced situation where what we're seeing is intensified but this is not escalating a lot, and of course many angles to it — what are the — Iran's interests, what is Hezbollah's interest, what do the Lebanese want, what do the Americans want, and of course what Israel wants.

**SCHECTER:** And — but I — and I want to just jump in. In terms of — you're saying Israel doesn't want a more full-fledged war. Are you concerned about irresponsible people, maybe in government or in the military, that are itching for more conflict? Is that concerning to you? Because that would have major implications for the — wider region and for the US.

**HULATA:** I think what's important to realize in this regard is that this is actually maybe the main reason why the war cabinet that we have now in Israel was created. The fact that two former chief of IDF commanders, Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot, joined the war cabinet was actually in the wake of a decision to be made whether or not to preempt in Lebanon.

And the reason that they decided to come in, out of sincere sense of responsibility and also the ability to exert authority on the entire security apparatus, put them in — I think the composition of the war cabinet of Israel is very sound and balanced and very responsible.

And I have to say — and I served as National Security Advisor for the opposition of this government — I feel much better when I know that the key decision-making that has to do with the war, both in Lebanon but also in Gaza, are in the hands of experienced people whom I think the vast majority of the Israelis trust.

And I think that's important. I think that's important to understand to the audience, to everybody, that the critical decisions made in Israel right now are made by serious people, responsible people, experienced people who know exactly what are the risks that we need to evade.

It doesn't mean it cannot deteriorate. It can, not just because of wrong Israeli decisions. It can escalate because, you know, a rocket falls in the wrong place, too many civilians on our side or on the other side. We've seen wars start for far less than what happened so far, but I think that fair to say that the responsibility governs at the moment.

**SCHECTER:** And Biden just yesterday said that Israel's response in Gaza was over the top, and I'm just curious, you know, given that so much of the population had moved south, so many people in Rafah — today, Netanyahu, perhaps belatedly, said that he'd ordered some kind of investigation of how to move the population out of Rafah before this onslaught, when you have so many civilians down there — what's your take and how do you feel Israel has done on that front?

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**HULATA:** So I think we're — we're in a situation that is very — I think the — devastating, when you look at it from an Israeli perspective. And , you know, I will very frankly say I think Israel is losing on the narrative front of the war.

We started in the worst day the Jewish people has experienced since the Holocaust, with — an amount of brutality that I think everyone who have — I haven't watched the 45 minute video that you created because I couldn't — well, not you [Conricus], but the IDF while you were there — and did a good job, by the way — but it — I mean, the level of atrocity that we experienced are beyond imagination of anybody.

The fact that four months later, a lot of the criticism is faced on Israel, where Hamas is, you know, kind of shadowing in the suffering of Palestinians, which is genuine and which I'm very empathic to on a personal level, and I think that also, as a former official — high official — of Israeli establishment, this is a disastrous situation.

There are 2.2 million Gazans. Israel is not at war with Gaza, Israel is at war with Hamas — Hamas, which had repeatedly claimed that they bear no responsibility for the Gazans, it's for others to take care of them — the UN should take care of them. Who's the UN? UNRWA, who several of them participated in the atrocities of October 7?

It's — everything is really messed up. However — and I am also critical on my current government on this — Israel has not played well. The entire scenario coming this way — we're not prepared for the day after, things that, you know, I and others have been talking about for — for months now.

We cannot move around the civilians from part to part without a plan, without the — providing them the bare humanitarian necessities. We're Israel. This is who we are, these are our values. This is how we live our lives. This is how we fight our wars. And we need to be cognizant of that, not just because of the pressure for — that comes from external. This is how we should do this.

So I'm happy that Netanyahu said what he said. I hope that behind it is a good and visible plan that can actually do things reasonable about this. We cannot just wait to see what will happen in the north of Gaza when the IDF withdraws from it.

So if you ask when I'm concerned, yes, of course I'm concerned because I think that the way that this plays out not only militarily but also humanitarily and diplomatically will actually put the direction to why we can move out from this situation so that we actually do get more stability on the long run and not just on the immediate success of military, which is, I think, beyond what I expected before.

**SCHECTER:** Before we go to Jonathan, I want to ask you about Iran. You have more than two decades of experience thinking about Iran, dealing with Iranian threats to Israel via proxies primarily. Where do you think things stand in terms of what Iran wants in the region? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**HULATA:** I think what's extremely frustrating for me personally is that when I look at 2023, this is probably one of the best years Iran had since the revolution. And it's frightening and frustrating because 2022 was actually one of the worst. I — know because I was National Security Advisor working with the Americans to put pressure and to curb Iranian ambitions, and we didn't achieve everything we wanted but I think we achieved quite a lot.

And you look at 2023, it starts with a deal that provides Iran with about \$16 billion for hostages that I think the Americans should have brought back. I'm all for returning hostages. Like ours, I think it was important to bring Americans back.

But overall, Iran has gained a normalized position again. And people do not pay attention to their strategic collaboration with the Russians and how that affect the war in Europe, to their strategic collaboration with the Chinese which allows them to export more than 2.5 billion barrels a day.

And Iran is gradually going to a better place. This isn't good for the world, not just for Israel, when the outcome is what they do with Houthis on the Red Sea to affect directly global trade in ways that we haven't seen in decades in the region, and I don't think we've seen this anywhere else in the world.

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They use Israel as an excuse, but this is not about us, this is about hampering the ability of goods to traverse through the Suez Canal. It implicates the Egyptians and it has an effect on all of the Gulf countries and of course on Europe as a prime to that.

And the fact that Iran can continue this, feeling that they can actually get away with all that. They can get away with funding of Hamas for years and for training them for this operation for many months and to get away with it and to do what they're doing in the Red Sea and to get away with it. Actually to be directly implicated with killing three American servicemen.

And we'll have to see how the American response continues on this, but if this ends with Iran feeling that they have a better hand on this, this has dire consequences, I think, for the entire region, and I'm worried about it.

**SCHECTER:** So you bring up the Houthis. I'm glad you did. Enia, I would love for you to talk about the U.S. response. And if you can give us your take on how the US grades in terms of their response? I think we were all waiting for a few days what would happen and then, boom, last Friday. Can you paint us a picture of what happened there and, you know, how the US can step in here in your view?

**KRIVINE:** Sure, so thank you, first of all.

You know, I think that what Israel is looking for and what all of our allies in the region and the world are looking for right now is for America to act like a superpower. So, first and foremost, I mean, there's many tactical things that we can do, but more than anything they're looking for American strength. And that is what is lacking and I think that's what's been lacking in 2023, and perhaps we got a better — saw a little bit more of it previous.

I mean, tactically, there are some things that Congress can do. There are some things that the administration can do. I mean, if you're looking at, in a way, to sort of bring more calm to the Israeli — to what's going on between Israel and Gaza, I mean, the first thing that I would do would be to defund UNRWA [UN Relief and Works Agency]. I mean, that's a really simple one. Congress can do it. They could do it via an executive order. There's no doubt that UNRWA contributed a lot of — to the culture of hate and dehumanization that we saw sort of boil over on October 7. That was a thing that had been going on and breeding for years.

So I think that that would be a pretty easy fix to try and just channel that, those funds and those efforts into something that could actually bring about a real change in the way that Palestinians who are receiving this education can relate better towards their neighbors. So that would be number one.

There are other things that we could do. We can, you know, obviously turn the screws on Iran. I think the full snap back of the sanctions would be really great. I think trying to stop and curb some of the funding to these bad actors that have unleashed this chaos in the Middle East would all be really good moves and positive and have an effect.

And finally, I think that the US should be driving really hard towards normalization of Saudi Arabia. I think that is a bright spot, and it is something that feels that it is almost within reach. I hope we'll talk about it a little bit later with their panel, but I think that that is — you know, the Biden administration's working hard at that. Blinken's been traveling to the region. I know that's something they wanted to do.

I don't know if they're going about it correctly and that — you know, we could talk further about that, but I think it's another initiative that the US could lead that could have real positive effect on the region.

**SCHECTER:** It is an interesting time with that bigger, broader deal in the background, and there are a lot of different groups working to push this forward. And there's some dissent and disagreement between the Israelis and the Americans as to how to come about the deal. Do any of you want to talk about that, weigh in on that? Enia or Jonathan?

**CONRICUS:** I think, first of all, shalom to everyone and for those watching far away, wherever they are. I think to put it in — in a — in a — in shorter sound bite would be that Iran has set the boundaries for a situation in the Middle East where they use

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proxies in order to attack Israel. They've used proxies in order to attack America or American assets and forces and, sadly, military personnel.

And Israel and I think the US as well, but I can speak about Israel, is more or less playing along the lines that Iran has sets forward. Speak or attacking or retaliating towards the proxies and not towards the source of instability in the Middle East, terrorism, and, of course, on its way to becoming a nuclear power.

And I think that's regrettable because it allows — and I very much agree with Eyal's comment about Iran having a wonderful year — there's a sideshow going on in Gaza which is sucking out of the — all the oxygen of the conversation in the Middle East. And it's about a smaller issue.

And the big issue, the nuclear military aspirations of Iran, is left untouched, unspoken about. Nobody is discussing centrifuges or an enrichment and the militarization program weaponization and missiles because we're discussing Rafah and civilians in Khan Yunis and Israeli cabinet and what Ben-Gvir said or didn't say, but that's the sideshow. And we are still very much operating according to the boundaries that Iran has set forward. I think that is very unfortunate, not very strategically clever, and I hope that will change.

**SCHECTER:** Well yes, I understand. It is — it's a huge story. I mean, we are still really focused on telling the story of the Israel-Hamas war because it's four months in, but it continues. And so, I think we can't look away from that. But Iranian efforts for nuclear proliferation down the road is going to pose a bigger threat to the US.

So you just left as IDF's spokesperson. In terms of how Israel is telling this story of Israel, this is something that Netanyahu over the last more than a decade has really focused on, but how do you think Israel is doing? Can you give Israel a grade for how they're telling the story of Iran?

**CONRICUS:** Of Iran or of the war?

**SCHECTER:** Well, of both.

**CONRICUS:** So first of all, reality on the ground I think isn't playing along with what many people had hoped to see the IDF not succeed in defeating Hamas. And some day in the future we'll take all of the op-eds and the interviews given by very serious-looking generals and sounding generals who explained in unequivocal terms that the IDF would be sucked into Gaza. It'll be a horrible quagmire and Israel wouldn't be able to defeat such a powerful and well-entrenched enemy like Hamas.

We're — bless you [*\*audience sneeze\**] — we're four months in, and the IDF is on its way to militarily — and I agree again with Eyal, the whole strategic part that still needs to be defined and clearly directly towards the IDF — but militarily speaking, the IDF is defeating Hamas. Wherever it goes, Hamas falls, and the amount of combat casualties, the amount of dead military enemy combatants wounded, their personnel, their infrastructure, their weapons, their logistics, their funding, all of that is at a high rate of attrition.

So there's reality on the ground, which I think is going quite well considered the type of — considering the type of challenge that Israel is facing.

Telling the story, I think we should have in the beginning had a bigger leadership and initiative regarding civilians and regarding how to deal with what would eventually become and now is the biggest topic that our — that Israeli enemies are using against Israel to undermine its legitimacy.

I think early on Israel should have been very clear about who is helping and who isn't helping in alleviating civilian suffering in Gaza. Those who weren't helping from the beginning were UNRWA. And it took Israel I think two and a half, three months too long to be out and take the initiative and say that, "we are trying. We are trying to evacuate civilians here and we want them out of harm's way. And we have asked UNRWA and the other U.N. institutions in Gaza for their help. We have suggested to have a humanitarian zone in the northwestern part of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza but that has been refused and we are not getting any cooperation on the ground."

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**SCHECTER:** Couldn't they have set that up where they would arrange for a civilian refugee area in the north, once people — they moved everybody south to then bring those people back up north and create safer space for people to move to the north when they're moving now south operationally to Rafah?

**CONRICUS:** Yes. I don't think that's technically necessary and I don't think it's logistically feasible. The only area in Gaza where Hamas doesn't have underground infrastructure and the in the area isn't riddled with Hamas rockets, and tunnels, and infrastructure is that area that Israel proposed to have a makeshift temporary humanitarian zone, the al-Mawasi area.

The reason being that Hamas doesn't have assets there. So Israel doesn't have a need of attacking and dismantling whatever ...

**SCHECTER:** What happened there? Why didn't they create something?

**CONRICUS:** In my mind, simple directive from Hamas to UNRWA, "do not move people. We want the civilians in the combat areas. And we need them there," because as long as they are there they'll get hurt and that will be the biggest and most important sword that Hamas and enemies of Israel will use in order to undermine Israel's legitimacy to fight and defeat Hamas.

As long as civilians are killed or wounded then that is the most important thing that the asset, the international asset, that Hamas uses. And sadly UNRWA played along with that. And the reality that we see now in Rafah, and that we will encounter in a matter of days or weeks in — sorry, Khan Yunis — and that we will encounter in a matter of days and weeks in Rafah is a result of that decision, which was made by UNRWA, a week and a half after October the 7th.

Israel asked. Israel took the sincere steps, except for communicating it well enough, and we're facing Palestinians on the ground, they're facing it.

Now I think that Israel should have done a better job at taking the initiative and pushing through despite the fact that we — Israel wasn't getting any cooperation with U.N. institutions. And we should have led from a communications point of view and communicated that better.

But it again connects with what Eyal, spoke about, having the overarching strategy. I think Cabinet defined two clear — Israeli Cabinet defined two clear goals: dismantle Hamas's military capabilities, and their administrative governing capabilities. That's clear enough. And that's what the IDF started doing.

But the other components I think were not given the proper attention. And that is where Israel is now facing what will be I think a very long battle of justifying its actions, which I think are very justifiable, but justifying its actions and explaining what needs to be done, and then finding actual humanitarian solutions for a very acute and existing problem of civilians that are stuck in the wrong place, Khan Yunis, and in Rafah, who could have been in a properly furnished humanitarian zone in al-Mawasi. There's been enough time. There's sure is enough money and enough trucks have come in to have built a refugee center there.

**SCHECTER:** Yeah. I think people...

**CONRICUS:** But it was decided...

**SCHECTER:** ... looking at it...

**CONRICUS:** ... not to.

**SCHECTER:** ... at it — yeah. People looking at it are criticizing and say, like, this should have been figured out early on. You know, "there's been four months, this could have been figured out." And so this move south and this push south in an effort to get Sinwar, something should have been figured out. So this massive population would not be in the same place that they're looking for Sinwar.

**CONRICUS:** Yes. Well first of all the effort south isn't to get Sinwar. The effort south is to cut off the tunnels that lead weapons from Egypt into Gaza, and it is to defeat Hamas. Without taking that area militarily, Hamas won't be defeated.



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Sinwar, wherever he's hiding, Khan Yunis, Rafah, or somewhere else, eventually I think Israeli troops will get to him. So it's not about Sinwar. And the responsibility for this is I think shared between Israel and UNRWA.

Hamas again is 'exempt from any responsibility.' Despite that they govern, they attacked, they initiated the war, and basically own the Gaza Strip, yet nobody is voicing any criticism. And it's all about Israel. I think it's slightly — that's not a correct way of looking at it especially since Israel made sincere efforts early on and continued to wait, and continue to allow civilians to move. It was three weeks between when Israel asked Palestinians to leave, and until Israel started to maneuver on the ground, a lot of time. And then were — there were also humanitarian pauses, every day, to allow Palestinians in certain neighborhoods to get out of there, and find relative security in the south.

But the strategic piece of you know, linking those things together, I think wasn't perhaps strong enough.

**SCHECTER:** So I want to go to this idea of this potential wider, broader regional conflict. How worried are you all that we are heading that way?

**HULATA:** I think at the beginning of the war there was clearly huge worry that what we've seen is either an initiation of a wider regional war or something that could escalate to that. I think that the American response — and Enia of course will — I think your perspective will be important but from an Israeli standpoint, the fact that the United States of America immediately engaged, President Biden immediately came to Israel. And the Carrier Battle Groups deployed to the region, delivering a message to everybody around, "don't take advantage of this situation," I think played a significant role in making sure that everybody is cognizant to what could go wrong if this doesn't go the wrong way.

I think that Israeli preparations which were reported quite widely to preempt against Hezbollah, should they engage, I think was also very important for Hezbollah to understand how this can play out.

I think at the moment it's very difficult to say what I say because in a week things of course can go — flip the other way. I think broadly if I need to look ahead and see what are the main things looking ahead, we are potentially in a process of returning the hostages back, which could lead to a pause of the war in some way.

Of course Hamas needs to play along because at the moment they demand a complete stop of the entire war with assurances from the West that Israel cannot engage. Israel cannot agree to that. Israel will need to continue to push Hamas and to chase its leaders otherwise we can never have a new reality in Gaza.

But it doesn't mean that there isn't a scope of possible agreement on this. There is increasing talk about chances of normalization with Saudi Arabia.

We — remember we were talking about this before the war started. I actually think that derailing that normalization process even if it wasn't the one of the top reasons for Hamas to engage at the moment, clearly this is one of the benefits that Hamas and Iran have gained from that.

And we continue to talk about this because the fundamental interests of the countries in the region for stability, for collaboration with Israel, for normalization, are intact.

Everybody understands who the bad guys are. Everyone understands what the threat from Islamic brotherhood and radical Islam on all of the moderate Sunni countries in the region. This is still the case.

So I think that if we're wise with our decision makers, and this goes to the decision makers, right, this makes — goes to what kind of decisions will Netanyahu make.

Fortunately, it's the same Netanyahu that I think could have done a better job in strategizing the entire thing and making sure that we have a better day-after situation because we are four months into it.

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But it doesn't mean that it's over. They're decisions to be made. If we're able to reach a hostages deal and with it to create a gradual de-escalation this could happen.

It is my opinion that even when this happens, and we do get our hostages back, Israel will need to continue to engage because we need to get rid of Hamas leadership.

I think that we are able to square those things together. And I think that the international community, and the United States in particular, understands that Israeli fundamental need.

So I think there is enough momentum that could continue the process of limiting this conflict to what we're having in Gaza and see how this happens.

Having said that in a month from now, Ramadan is coming. And I have to say that I fear what might happen in Ramadan, if Ramadan two years ago, this was how we ended up with the Guardian of the Walls.

If this war becomes about a narrative of saving Al-Aqsa, as Hamas calls it, we can have a serious escalation that could lead to something bigger.

And I think there is a limited time window hopefully to be able to continue to place this emphasis only on Gaza, so that Israel can continue to do what we need, without this broadening to a regional conflict, that could have many bad consequences.

**CONRICUS:** I don't share the optimism. From my perspective there are a few non-negotiable things in the equation. About a hundred thousand Israelis are outside of their homes, from northern Israel. And the political pressure inside Israel is mounting for them to be able to go back to their homes. I don't think that any government can negotiate that — negotiate it away. It's been managed so far but eventually Israelis will have to go back to their homes.

In order for them to do so Hezbollah needs to voluntarily, or by force, but let's say voluntarily decide to step five miles back, and remain there, and say publicly, that it will remain there.

The problem with that is that it's not a very Middle Eastern thing to do, to step back give an achievement to your nemesis without having a significant achievement of your own.

So far, Hezbollah, their biggest achievement has been that they are forced a hundred thousand Israelis away from their homes, but they have had more than 200 trained, well-trained, seasoned, combatants, killed by the IDF. And they've had internally displaced Shiites from the villages along the south moved north.

And if they do this if they voluntarily go back, that's a tremendous loss of face and would impact their street cred in Lebanon and the whole jihadi world.

And Hezbollah has already been outdone by Hamas. Hamas out — outdid Hezbollah in the atrocities of October the 7<sup>th</sup>. Hezbollah used to be at the peak — the forefront of murderous jihadi organizations, and now Hamas is in the prime of that — not for so long, I don't know how long they will exist, but that is where Hamas positioned itself. And for Hezbollah, I think it's very challenging to do that — to give Israel that — and not have anything to show for it, which leads us to the other options.

So far — again, I'm in agreement with Eyal — Israel and Hezbollah have been very measured and strategic in how they've been approaching the conflict. And both sides — Israel perhaps going across a few times and — killing senior Hezbollah officials, which has been little bit outside of the established playground, but 10 or 20 out of a 100 of capabilities deployed.

Both sides have been strategic about it, clear about what can be done and what — cannot be done, not wanting war, both sides, the way I read it, but for Israelis to go back home, something needs to give, so it's either diplomatically — and I don't see enough talk, enough traction, enough activity around it to facilitate it, which leaves the other option.



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And if you look at the Israeli messaging, then they're definitely ratcheting up the messaging, training exercises up north, the 36th Division, which is the biggest regular size division, and statements made by the General, General Gordin, and many other things, Chief of Staff, Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, there's a whole and obvious shaping campaign that is going on, intended to facilitate the first part, let's have the diplomatic solution, because we don't want to go to war, but if we need to, then we are ready...

**SCHECTER:** Is there a diplomatic solution for that border? And Enia, I'm curious if the US can help facilitate that? Is there a way to mitigate this brewing conflict?

**KRIVINE:** So, in order to answer that question, let me go back to one of your earlier questions. You know, as far as grading the Biden administration on how they've done with all this unrest, I would say if you look at the US, the Israeli Gaza conflict in a silo, I think they've done really well. I think they would get a B+ at least, you know, certainly in the first couple of months of the conflict.

I mean sending the carrier strike groups to the region, the very clear messaging from Biden that there is good and evil, I think all of this was very positive. I think Israel felt very strongly. I know that anecdotally, IDF soldiers on the ground felt strengthened by the US support and that clear headed messaging from Blinken, Biden et cetera down the line.

So, I actually think — you know, call balls and strikes, I think they've done a good job. However, I think that there is a fundamental problem with the way that they are viewing what's going on.

And I think — it sort of boils down — Thomas Friedman wrote this article earlier this week or last week, about the Biden doctrine, right, and he's unrolling this — or whether it's he is sort of unrolling of whether it's a trial balloon, I don't know, but he talks about this — this massive peace initiative.

And I read through it and I thought wow, you know, this is very problematic, because essentially, they're looking at this conflict — and when I say "they," I mean you know, Friedman is interpreting what's going on in the White House, they're interpreting this conflict as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

And that might have been true in '48 and '67 and '73 and maybe up until the Abraham Accords happened, but that is no longer the case today. There is not an Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East anymore. There's relative peace. Israel's in a major war and not one Arab state is realistically going to get involved. And this — Lebanon might be exception, but it won't be because the people of Lebanon, it'll be — have to do — it will be Hezbollah.

So, what is going on then? And this is essentially an Iranian proxy proliferation around the region, that is trying to kill and maim and destroy US — Israel, U.S. allies, U.S. interests and Americans. And so, I think until you understand this, until you make the shift and understand this is no longer an Israeli-Arab conflict, this is a conflict between Israel and the West and this Iranian proliferation of terrorism, and it has to be tackled through totally different tools.

So, we talked about regional escalation, and Hezbollah, you know, it's a — Israel faces a terrible conundrum, because the US has said — Biden has said that he does want this to escalate regionally, but Israel's in the situation where, as Jonathan said, you have 100,000 people displaced from their homes and that it seems to people who look at it like me it — almost inevitably — inevitable that that conflict is on the table.

So, I — you know, I think there's a lot of positive moves the US still has to do. I think there's a lot of cards that it hasn't played yet. I hope that there are diplomatic resolutions to some of these — some of these bigger problems, but I don't think that we can even begin to tackle them until you see this through the — you sort of let go of that old paradigm of every — all the peace will come to the Middle East as soon as you solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

**SCHECTER:** And just jumping off from that point, diplomatically, there is something really interesting going around — going on with Saudi Arabia and then also UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, the Abraham Accord countries and the momentum building towards this broader regional potential deal.

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And I'm just wondering if you can each talk about the likelihood of landing on something that does secure a more stable Middle East, where there are pros for the US, Saudi Arabia, and the region, and for Israel as well, building off of the Abraham Accords?

**HULATA:** So, I want to continue where Enia put it, I actually think that what we're seeing on the regional momentum is actually a manifestation of that shift of mindset of most of the Arab countries understanding that their major source of problems is indeed Iran and not Israel.

This has been the case for several years. I've been engaged in behind the scenes relationship with those countries for years in my previous roles. As National Security Advisor, we worked very hard to put the foundation that would lead to regional architectures — defense architectures, intelligence architectures, economic architectures that would harness this understanding that we actually have shared interest.

Those countries and Israel share the interest that Iran is the most problematic enemy at the moment around them and that fundamental Sunni Islam, radical Islam, political Islam, Islamic Brotherhood manifested by Hamas is the threat from within. We actually share that.

I think what's important to understand is that they — when this war started and we engaged with them, and it is true that none of those countries have — you know, none of them supported Hamas, maybe they haven't publicly supported everything that Israel has done, and you know, it's difficult to do that, given their streets, they also have generations of incitement in their own countries that Israel is part of the problem, not part of the solution. But this is gradually moving.

I think that fundamentally, if I look at it — if I try to zoom out just a little bit, to look at it not from how it looks like in February of '24, but what might be the prospect if the leaders can make the right decisions.

I think the way that Israel has been able to really crush Hamas capabilities in ways that none of those countries have seen before, and the way that the United States is involved back actionably in the region, that can provide, I think, a good possibility to put all of those components together and to continue to push, both against Iran and against radical Islam.

What we need to understand is that there are always spoilers. I know when I was asked in September before the war started in a — in a different — a conference that was dealing just about the Saudi Arabia deal, and I said I don't want to talk about the prospect of the deal, I want to talk about who would have the interest to spoil this.

There were two, Iran and Hamas, and they continue to be the sole two forces that would fight any normalization or chances of improving the lives of the peoples because they're ideologic and they want it to look this way.

I'm actually optimistic. I think that we are able to prevail on this. I think that Israel, in a different setting, and I do — you know, I don't want to make this panel too political, but I think that we do bear the consequences of the way that we present ourselves as Israel around the world, and the — when the face of the government of Israel is more radical than I think it should be, then that certainly doesn't help.

But I don't think this will prevent progress in this regard. But to do that, we need to find a good way — we have to bring the hostages back. We have to continue to crush Hamas.

I agree with Jonathan that if we don't solve the Hezbollah problem — and I'm not sure that there is a diplomatic solution to [U.N. Resolution]1701, not because we can't reach a deal, I think that Hezbollah might find the terms to do it, the question is who verifies that and enforces them staying in the north? Otherwise, we will need to reengage.

But I dare say that even if we find ourselves in a conflict with Hezbollah, because they violated such an agreement, I think we'll enjoy legitimacy also in the region. I think that the Gulf countries will understand that if the proxy of Iran decides to violate the terms, and Israel needs to fight it, okay, so we'll fight it.

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I'm not shying away from the need to use force. Israel has never and I think that post October 7th, we definitely shouldn't shy away of using force, but to your questions, I think that the prospect of harnessing all of this energy into better collaboration and alignment of interests between us and the Gulf countries and the moderate Sunnis, I'm actually optimistic.

It — we may not be able to see this in the coming weeks, but I think we definitely will see this in future months or in coming years.

**CONRICUS:** I think a paradigm shift that many things, I think will be looked at differently and discussed differently after October the 7th, one paradigm shift that is really needed with regards to deal making, peacemaking, progress, stability in the Middle East will be understanding — and I think Israel had a significant problem with this and maybe still has, really listening to our enemies and listening to what they want and what they're saying.

I think we didn't listen to Hamas. I'm not sure that we are really listening to the PA [Palestinian Authority], and I am quite confident that many people around the world in the global — in the capitals of the world, definitely aren't listening to what Palestinians are saying.

When we think about, you know, any — if there is an — a stubbornness to link between any positive developments in the Middle East and Israel making peace with the Palestinians, I think that's the best recipe for it failing. If it's coupled together and if it's a condition, I think that makes it the biggest — the best way of making it not happen is doing exactly that.

And I think we have to listen to what Palestinians are saying, what their polls are indicating and where their hearts and minds are. If elections were held two weeks ago in Palestinian Authority areas, Hamas would win by a landslide. If elections were held in Gaza after October the 7th, after half of Gaza facing severe consequences as a result of the fighting, Hamas has a 60-something percent.

And they're — when we think about when things are mentioned — two-state solution and let's end the conflict — then that is the pivot through which regional stability and things that would be, I think, excellent for the US, excellent for democracies, bad for Iran, bad for terrorist organizations. If that is the hinge, then I — think that's too bad because I don't think that the Palestinians, currently and in the foreseeable future, that their mindset is there. When you vote for Hamas, you are voting for solving that conflict by killing Jews and annihilating Israel. That's the Hamas mindset.

**SCHECTER:** I'm sure you've heard this criticism, that the war in Gaza and the arrests in the West Bank and all of the increased checkpoints is actually creating more anger and more distrust, when there's already no trust between — just from the Palestinians towards the Israelis. And someone said that it's creating the next generation of people who think like Sinwar. And this is — you know, we hear this a lot in the US. How do you respond to that criticism?

**CONRICUS:** So, heard it a few hundred times, and I don't think that we'll stop hearing it. Listen, extremist Islam, fundamental jihadi Islam, the things that by the way of the sword, they can achieve local or regional or global domination isn't going to go away, not when Israel defeats Hamas, and it didn't go away when a coalition of, I think it was 38 countries defeated ISIS militarily. ISIS was defeated, but the ideas of ISIS are still existing and strong, and I'm sure that there are millions of Muslims around the world who adhere to that type of thinking.

Same thing with Hamas. They have hundreds of thousands, if not millions who believe that the way of jihad and the way of nurturing the next generation of martyrs and constantly fighting Israel, not coming to terms with the fact Israel is there, Israel is going to exist and that they lost in '48, and they're continued losing ever since. Without them coming to terms and understanding, then, you know, they're looking at the hope system of thinking, which is very rigid. I don't think that we will be able to get rid of that type of Islam.

But what I think that we should be doing is listening more and understanding what realistic possibilities exist in order to create stability, security and prosperity for those who don't exercise that kind of activity. But we have to be realistic of what can be expected of Gaza. How fast can change be implemented in Gaza? What other historical examples are there in the Middle East of a very failed area, state, and entity transitioning into a successful, functioning, prosperous society?

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I am not, sadly, aware of any such example in the Middle East. Many times, we — you know, the examples of the Marshall Plan, Japan and Germany after the Second World War are used as, OK, this needs to be a blueprint. I am not sure that they apply.

And in terms of, you know, creating the next terrorist by Israel defending itself, I think it's a very shallow thing to ask, because how much was — it's same thing as saying, OK, Americans and the world shouldn't be fighting ISIS because the mere fighting in Mosul can create the next ISIS terrorist. OK, so they'll create it and they'll be fought and they'll be defeated. But we can't go and say, oh, we shouldn't act. We shouldn't defend ourselves. We shouldn't stand strong against terrorism just because they won't like it. Yes, they won't like it, and they have to be defeated until they understand that their way is not going to bring them not political achievements and not freedom and not prosperity because it's wrong.

**SCHECTER:** Should Israel shift its policy in the West Bank and maybe in Gaza? It's a different situation. It's an act of war. But to — you know, the arrests — it's — it — there's a lot, you know, in the media. This — we're covering this story a lot. Lot of tension in the West Bank, and I'm just curious if you have thoughts on Israel's policy there.

**CONRICUS:** I think an important thing that is less discussed — it was discussed in Israeli cabinet, but maybe not enough — is how far are we from escalating tensions in what we call Judea and Samaria? And how far are we from instability?

On October the 7th, they rejoiced and felt triumphant that Hamas rubbed Israel's nose and humiliated Israel; spontaneous shows of joy on the streets, handing out candies and people — a lot of people, not everybody, but a lot of people were very happy. But then quickly, I think, they became cognizant of how dangerous of a situation that is, and they decided to — not to respond to Hamas' cries and attempts and demands to launch a third intifada for their own reasons. Maybe enough of them remember how the second intifada ended and what kind of consequences it had.

But I think we are — we have to be mindful of the fact that the pulse of the Palestinian economy are reliant on Palestinians working in Israeli cities and in Israeli settlements. They haven't been since October 7, and that's a significant factor in the way that they will, you know, calculate what's — what do they have to lose? And maybe Palestinians — you know, Israel should be more careful with that and think of not only the security and the, you know, gut feelings of, no, we don't want to give these people livelihoods, but also on the other options. That's some where — a situation where I think Israel needs to be more careful and cognizant.

But in terms of operating, in terms of arresting, in terms of conducting counterterrorism activities, I think that must continue. If it doesn't, the PA will fall and we will see a significant wave of terror activities against Israelis, which will definitely lead to escalation.

**HULATA:** And I think what's important, just to make and emphasize, because not all of the people in the audience understand potentially the different realities and factions among those areas.

The major focus of the IDF right now in Judea and Samaria, in this regard, is to curb Hamas activity and to prevent from them to going stronger to be able to manifest their ideology also there. Unfortunately, from my position and also now as National Security Advisor, the PA isn't strong enough to do this. The PA is a construct of — of previous arrangements.

When Israel says, I think, in — in vast consensus that we do not believe that the PA can be a factor in — in reforming Gaza afterwards, this goes fundamentally to the fact that they are corrupt and weak and incapable of managing it.

We have to say though the PA has not pursued violence directly, at least not in these years, and that's important to say. The IDF is operating in the territories in an attempt to get after the Hamas activities and to make sure that we're able to get them before this becomes wider.

I totally agree with the numbers because I see the pollings. The civilians, both — in the West Bank unfortunately do support violence because, from their perspective, nothing goes — has helped. But Israel cannot think that if we appease the population, things will get better.

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We have to pursue this, we have to ensure that we're limiting their ability to unleash terror on us. And then from that, we can emerge hopefully toward other solutions.

**SCHECTER:** I want to turn to questions, but really quickly, you brought up, Jonathan, the settlements, and we haven't talked about that. And Enia, I just wanted to ask you about the Biden administration's stance on the settlements.

The settlements do make it difficult for the rest of Israeli society at times to tell their story because there's a lot of animosity towards — people in the US towards violence in the settlements and — and from settlers.

You know, having spent time in Israel, there's just a lot of violence there under the surface that settlers are dealing with as well, and, you know, their response gets a lot of media attention and there has been quite a bit of violence in the last couple of years.

And I'm just curious, your take on that issue and how to move forward there and the U.S.'s position.

**KRIVINE:** Sure. So I think you're probably alluding to Biden's executive order from last week, where he sort of gave this sweeping executive order on the ability to go after Israeli settlers that are accused of violence.

And I think that many would probably disagree with settler — with the settler violence and many in — most in Israel disagree with the settler violence. The vast majority of Israelis abhor it. Usually — when there are instances, they are immediately repudiated by the government, right?

This is not a mainstream or popular phenomenon in Israel. So it's a very fringe thing. I think the timing of the executive order was very poorly timed. I don't — you know, also — you know, happened to have — have — to — happened the day that Biden happened to be on the campaign trail in Michigan, right?

All of that was reported. All of that, I think, was a bad look for the U.S.-Israel relationship. So while I — you know, I do not condone settler violence, I think it is abhorrent, I think I am with most Israelis, the vast, vast majority of Israelis when I say that, but I also want to point out — and you mentioned violence in the West Bank — I mean, we forget that before October 7th, Israelis were experiencing the worst year of terrorism, the highest deaths since the Second Intifada, since 2005, right?

That's all been forgotten now. Obviously, now it is by far — you know, nothing pales in comparison to what happened on October 7th but there were a lot of Israelis that were killed by terrorists. I mean, most of it emanated from the West Bank, right?

So yes, was — you know, were the Israelis blindsided or caught with their pants down in Gaza? Sure, they were. But there was a reason why the vast majority of the battalions were in the West Bank, and that was because Israelis were going through one of the worst years of terrorist killings since the second — in a generation.

So yeah, there's a lot — there is violence in the West Bank. I think that the Biden administration's executive order was poorly timed. I think that the important thing — it's — about settler violence is that the vast majority of Israelis and, you know, sane voices in the Israeli government repudiate it, abhor it, distance themselves from it, and I think that's the right thing to do.

**SCHECTER:** OK, I want to open it up to questions. Yes?

**WATKINS:** Yeah, hi, thank you very much. Tom Watkins with *The National*. A question for Mr. Conricus. Prime Minister Netanyahu today ordered the military to come up with a plan to evacuate civilians from Rafah. The Biden administration has said that it would not support such an operation. How would such a — an evacuation even be feasible? And what would the costs be for Israel in terms of international support?

And then a second question, if I may. You mentioned at the top some of the lessons learned in terms of how Israel handled the early days of the conflict, and you mentioned UNRWA specifically. Is there anything else that you would bring in to that kind of look back on how the IDF and Netanyahu's government have handled this and what they could or should have done differently? Thank you.



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**CONRICUS:** Yeah, thank you. So, you know, if Israel would have shaped its decisions and actions on the ground according to criticism leveled at it in media studios and in capitals around the world, then Israel wouldn't exist today and probably wouldn't do anything useful to defend itself.

The last example — I remember hundreds of times being criticized for "oh, you mustn't, and you shouldn't, and you can't absolutely ask Palestinians to move north — south from northern Gaza. It is tantamount to war crimes." That was the slogan, catchphrase.

And, well, actually you can and actually it's a good thing to do, to ask civilians not to be in a battle space, and actually they went. 900,000 of them did go — more than that — after three weeks of Israel prodding and helping it on. And eventually, Israel maneuvered into northern Gaza and defeated Hamas there. And yes, that was said by many, "oh, it can't be done."

I would apply the same logic to Rafah, and I think that it would have been smarter and better had Israel again taken a leadership position and not waited for very important officials to say things that would be — have a negative tone to them, but actually to lead and take the initiative and say "we are going to — in order to defeat Hamas in Rafah and in order to take out the tunnels, we are going to make sure that civilians are out of the battlefield and we are going to — we have built a tent city close to the Kerem Shalom border crossing, close to Israel, so we won't need UNRWA support in doing it and they won't be able to ruin it. And here's the humanitarian solution — now, we're going to defeat Hamas."

That probably would have been a smarter strategic thing to do, but at least now it's being addressed and it is possible. Tremendous suffering — and I say this very sincerely and I share what Eyal, you know, feels about what many Palestinians who are not active members of Hamas or part of the Hamas apparatus are going through — they are going through horrible times in Rafah and in Khan Yunis, and I don't envy them. They have certain responsibilities for their choices, but none of the suffering is intentional.

But at the end of the day, there are things that need to be done in war, and to defeat an enemy is what you need to do, and we cannot — Israel cannot defeat Hamas without taking out the tunnels in Rafah. There's a big campaign going on, a messaging campaign. Egypt is, I think, spending, I don't know, 90 percent of its diplomatic currency on "Israel shouldn't go to Rafah." And it's getting quite a lot of traction in foreign capitals, and it's in the media as well.

One wonders what is behind that and what the Egyptians are so afraid of in terms of what Israel will find in the tunnels and what will happen. If it's really what is at stake, is that Israel will find tunnels and dismantle Hamas in that sense, then why is Egypt so concerned? If Israel will give guarantees to Egypt that no Palestinians will go into Sinai, which I think is ultimately the only thing that the Egyptians care about, then why such a resistance?

It's interesting, and I think that we will learn in the coming weeks as events unfold and as layers of soil are peeled away, we'll see new realities and perhaps have more clarity. Regarding the second question, I think that it would have been better — if I could have given one recommendation — for if, and I hope that we don't find ourselves at war with Hezbollah.

But if we do, start counting from day one and have an official Israeli intel based and information-based count that is verified and official, and Israel stands behind it on how many combatants Israel knows have been killed and how many non-combatants because as of now, Hamas did the obvious strategic move of counting and pushing that count out to the world.

And journalists, editors, decision makers, legislators, et cetera, have taken that number, even though I think many have serious doubts about their veracities. But they take the number because that's the only number out there. So, a recommendation would be to start counting because the human perspective and the numbers and non-combatants killed in battle is very important for Israel's legitimacy to continue to carry out what it needs to do.

**MAKOVSKY:** Thanks. Excuse me. Alan Makovsky from the Center for American Progress. My question is also for Jonathan. It's a follow up about Egypt. You mentioned tunnels into Egypt. That really has not gotten a lot of publicity. It did many years ago, and supposedly the Egyptians took action. I'm just curious, can you give us an estimate? How extensive is the tunnel network into the Sinai? How active is it still? And is it possible that Hamas leadership could leave through it, or could have already left through it?



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**CONRICUS:** Thank you. So, they're a very open secret. The tunnels have been active at least 25 years. I remember as a young company commander in 2004, hunting tunnels, or searching for tunnels in Rafah, went into a house. Based on intelligence, we were told that there was a tunnel entrance or a shaft in a certain house, and we were told to go look for it and expose it.

And we found it the first place we went looking, which was the children's room, under one of the beds, and there was a very well furnished and well-equipped tunnel, and that was in 2004. Since then, Hamas has made tremendous strides in building tunnels and their tunnel technology. The whole cottage industry of tunneling has really been blooming.

It is also – I – from my point of view as an Israeli citizen, I ask my government, where were you 18, 17 years, and why was this allowed to continue? Tunnels have been open. All of the weapons that were used by Hamas to butcher Israeli civilians on October the 7th came in through Egypt. And my issue with my government is how was this able to be open for so long, and most importantly, why and what is Israel going to do in order to stop that from happening in the future?

And I think that it's a tremendous shortcoming in Israeli decision making to allow those tunnels to be open, to allow Hamas to transfer weapons. Everything that they have come in through those tunnels, all of the Iranian weapons, the Chinese weapons, the Russian variants, everything came in through those tunnels. They need to be stopped in order for Hamas to be defeated militarily. It's a tactical challenge to do.

Israel has to go quite deep in a narrow area where there's lots of Palestinian houses that will be used by Hamas as fighting platforms. There's the Egyptian barrier on one side. And it's, let's say an engineering and a tactical challenge. Can be done — Israel has the engineering and the military capability to do so. It has to create the diplomatic conditions that are conducive for it without rupturing anything with the US or with Egypt, because Egypt will be very important the day after, which is just around the bend.

And it'll have to be done smartly, but I don't think that Israel has a choice. And last part, of course, can be used, may be used, perhaps has been used by Hamas seniors to flee the battlefield. I don't know. Maybe Eyal knows more updated intel with his sources about where Sinwar is. I don't know. I don't think that anybody really knows where he is, but that's, I think, a fair working assumption that it has been used, and it can be used until they're cut and until they're rendered useless.

**LIPIN:** Thank you. Michael Lipin with *Voice of America*. I have a question for Jonathan and Eyal about what we were just discussing. The Gaza-Egypt border and the tunnels that are going underneath. If Israel is going to try to control that border in the long term, even after some engineering work is done to remove tunnels, what would a long-term Israeli presence on that border look like? Would there have to be a giant trench that spans the entire border with Israeli troops just positioned for miles and miles along it? And how would such a long-term presence play in the international community? The United States is against such a thing.

**CONRICUS:** You want to start, or should I start?

**HULATA:** I think we need to answer that to look back a little bit. When Israel withdrew completely from the Gaza Strip back in 2005 in the disengagement under Sharon, the international community demanded, the US demanded that Israel leaves the entire strip and not even stay in what we called Philadelphi, the crossing with Egypt. That has been debated at the time and it is clearly debated to date.

To stay in Gaza on the Philadelphi line, I think that if there is no other solution, Israel might be forced to do this, but hopefully we can find other solutions for that. The government I served for, we worked tediously with Egyptians to completely overhaul and reform all of the crossing mechanisms from the Egyptian Rafah into Egypt and all of the other cross spots. It is true that, by the way, I'm sure that when we get there, we will find more tunnels than the Egyptians care to admit.

But truth being told, it was so easy to smuggle things in trucks into Gaza from the Egyptian side that I don't think they needed to pay the fees of transferring all of those pieces of equipment through it. And again, this is something that for years we knew. We worked hard with the administration, American administration, with Egyptians to completely reform the crossing so that we will have verification of what's going in there.

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And the question not only of what's the equipment there, but who is the personnel that is doing this, who trains them, who verifies, who makes sure that things are not smuggled so easily into Gaza. Those are all doable things as well. Jonathan rightly explained from military perspective what can be done from military standpoint.

There are many things that can also be done with complementary agreements between the regions, and in that specific place, I can also imagine how we can do verification in the way that keep Israel relatively confident about what's getting in. I'm more cautious and suspicious about what kind of arrangements we can have in Lebanon. Open borders, and there is no ally in sight.

I don't think that the Egyptians colluded with Hamas to get all of that in. With proper structure, with proper American involvement, international presence, I think we can secure that. And I do want to say that second to crushing Hamas, that's the most important thing we need to block off Gaza.

If we're not able to prevent replenishment of arms, of explosives, of money into Gaza, it's just a matter of time until another radical group will take over. If we don't call it Hamas, then it will be a different name, and we'll have to secure the southern border of it. I don't hear enough about this from the current Israeli government negotiations, but clearly, it's something that is, I think, both doable and crucial to do.

**CONRICUS:** Shortly, just adding to that, I think there's an opportunity. I don't think that Israel has an interest in having soldiers there, mostly for diplomatic and political reasons. I think it would be wiser for Israel to find that as a way of having international involvement and buy in in the situation without being present above ground, but then relying on technology and defensive systems that Israel already has developed and has deployed around other parts of Gaza as a way of making it more difficult, never impossible.

And we've seen Gaza and ingenuity is very persistent when it comes to tunneling. But to have systems underground, once the tunnels are cut and dismantled, to have systems underground that are technology based, hard and soft capabilities, and then above ground, be smart about it and have an international involvement that doesn't say Israel is controlling all of the Gaza Strip.

**SCHECTER:** OK. I think we are running out of time. Do we have a – time for one more? Yeah, I think we're at time, but please feel free to ask our panelists once we've wrapped up. And thank you all so much for doing this.

**CONRICUS:** Thank you.

**HULATA:** Thank you.

**KRIVINE:** Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

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