

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

Featuring Richard Goldberg and Ben Cohen

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

DOUGHERTY: Good afternoon and thank you for joining us for today's FDD media call as FDD experts preview the upcoming UN General Assembly. My name is Joe Dougherty. I'm Senior Director of Communications here at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. We've got a lot to go over today, so we're going to get right to it. Our two experts available for you today: Richard Goldberg, he is an FDD Senior Advisor specializing in international organizations. Rich previously served as senior counselor for the White House National Energy Dominance Council, as senior advisor to the Secretary of the Interior, and Director of Countering Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction for the White House NSC. That was in the first Trump administration. Ben Cohen is an FDD Research Fellow also focusing on international organizations, including the UN. A former foreign correspondent, Ben reported from various spots across the globe, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Russia, Ukraine, several other hotspots and global flashpoints. This conversation is on the record. We will have time for Q&A at the end. And we'll provide a transcript and a link to the conversation here today as soon as both are available. Again, thanks for joining us. Let's get things started. Rich, over to you.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, great. Thanks for coming as we're coming up on another UNGA upon us, some reflections on the past year and sort of where we're going. It also is coming up on the end of the first two years of the Trump administration. And so it's also a good moment to reflect on that midpoint. In some ways, the midterms are also the midterms for how the United States is doing at the UN and international organizations and what will be next over the next two years to expect. I think what's interesting as I reflect especially on this past year, maybe 13, 14 months, is that for a president who historically is thought of as a unilateralist, and that's certainly the rap on him in Europe, this administration has actually been quite multilateral in its approach to diplomacy and is actually, instead of just abandoning the UN, defunding, walking away, while it has done so in specific circumstances and specific organizations, it's actually dug in and doubled down on its intensity of diplomatic participation to try to drive its own agenda and changes.

That has actually produced some results. They would point to, I think in the administration, the Haiti Gang Suppression Force, mobilizing at all the levels of government across all the members of the International Maritime Organization to stop a global carbon tax that they viewed as anti-American energy dominance, a UN Security Council resolution to endorse Moroccan autonomy in the Western Sahara and a way forward there that's been elusive for many, many years. The Board of Peace, probably one of the most historic things that's been done in the Security Council, that upends how people have done aid work and governance in Gaza and creates a whole new framework and a whole new authority with different rules of the road that the UN is not used to and getting the entire Security Council to sign off on that to move forward with a 20-point plan. At the same time, massive cuts being driven, using US assistance to the UN, the general budget as leverage to drive demands in efficiencies and savings. And so the US points to \$570 million of budget cuts so far, almost 3,000 bureaucratic positions within the UN eliminated.

So that's the year to date. You saw in the context of Iran, a massive amount of time and intensity and diplomatic effort put into building co-sponsors on a resolution to condemn Iran's hijacking of the Strait of Hormuz. Again, a multilateral tool, using the UN, using the Security Council, even in times when you can't get the resolution passed because potential veto by China or Russia, but using it to your advantage to build international pressure on an adversary. However, you get to that midterm point and you have to ask yourself, "What exactly is going to be lasting of these changes? Is this going to be hang on for two more years and see if you can get through the Trump years and the next Secretary General?" Again, that's something that's happening at this two year point as well. We have an election upon us. "Will there be a resistance for the next two years to the Trump agenda inside the United Nations? Or will there be at least some sort of willingness to be constructive and partner?"

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

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There's going to be questions like, "What does it mean when the United States wants to move forward with dismantling UNRWA? What is the United States going to be doing with organizations like the Human Rights Council and the High Commissioner of Human Rights and what the United States currently views as dozens of experts run wild, thinking of Francesca Albanese, upon which the United States has imposed sanctions under this administration? The plethora of organizations that just work on Israel or Palestinians, ESG within the United Nations and the various organizations, conferences that push what the administration would view as an anti-American energy agenda -- what are they going to be doing on migration further? What are they going to do on efficiencies further? Will there be actual combinations of organizations? Will duplicate services that might be provided by multiple humanitarian organizations, multiple migration related organizations be consolidated into one, two, three organizations instead to drive further cost savings and bureaucratic post reductions?"

These are the questions in front of us. I think the secretary general election is actually quite important for those reasons. We're in an era of great power competition. We know that China and Russia use the UN to their advantage where possible. We are trying to use the UN to advance US and US-aligned interests at the same time. And so we should expect that China and Russia will be looking to have a secretary general that is at least not resistant to them or is aligned with them. And we will want a secretary general at the same point that's either not resistant to the United States or is aligned with the United States. And so that puts the election into sharp relief that's coming up in the next few weeks. I'll pause there. I know there's a lot going on in the news that may be related or unrelated that people would have questions on as well, but I'll stop there and turn it over to my colleague.

COHEN: Rich, thanks for that very comprehensive overview. I think what I can best do in the time that I have is look ahead to some of the issues, some of the more prominent issues that the UNGA will be dealing with during high-level week, which I believe begins on September the 22nd. And I think that obviously the Middle East is a key site for all this and Gaza and Lebanon in particular. So let me deal with each of those in turn.

I think with Gaza, as Rich said, that has become, I think, one of the more prominent examples of the multilateral diplomacy which the Trump administration has pursued over the last year. I think the crowning glory was the passage of Resolution 2803 by the Security Council, effectively giving its blessing to the Board of Peace's effort to bring peace, some stability, and reconstruction to Gaza. And I think that during that week, there will be an attempt to focus now on implementation.

Of the many issues that they need to consider, one is the deployment of the International Stabilization Force. You already have about half a dozen countries that have agreed to supply personnel to staff the ISF. The ISF is not going to be an enforcement operation. I think primarily its role is to train Palestinian security forces and to assist in the delivery of humanitarian aid. But this is not being deployed in a combat role, nor is it being deployed as a blue helmet operation under the Department of Peacekeeping [sic], although you could argue that it's taking on traditional peacekeeping roles. Within that framework, I think the burning issue is the disarmament of Hamas. Again, disarmament of Hamas is something that the UN Security Council has mandated through that resolution, through 2803. And so I think there will be a lot of concentration now on getting Hamas to either voluntarily surrender those weapons. And of course, that is on something of a knife edge right now.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

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Turning now to Lebanon, again, that has a peacekeeping dimension because UNIFIL, which has been in place since 1978, its mandate has now expired and is not going to be renewed, and there will be a drawdown of UNIFIL troops from Lebanon over the next year. There's been no decision made on what or who will replace them. France has been talking about a peacekeeping force, but I think the key question that any international intervention in Lebanon is going to have to address from this point onwards is, as in Gaza with the disarmament of Hamas, in Lebanon, the removal of Hezbollah from all points south of the Litani River in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701. We marked the 20th anniversary of that resolution this year. Of course, its key point is that the only legitimate military force between the Litani and the Israeli border should be the Lebanese armed forces.

And again, this is an example I think of what Rich was saying of the creative diplomacy deployed by the Trump administration, and perhaps some people might not expect it to do so. But you had in Washington this year face-to-face meetings between Israeli and Lebanese leaders. You have more or less the buy-in of the Lebanese government to the principles of Resolution 1701. So while there is a very long and I think torturous road ahead in Lebanon, there have been some encouraging signals coming out, emerging this year. And I think in large part the responsibility for that does lie with this administration. I think that they have managed to make progress where it was elusive for others in the past. So again, both Lebanon and Gaza, major issues for the General Assembly. Equally, in terms of other global conflicts, I expect Ukraine to be a big issue for discussion at the GA. President Zelenskyy, of course, will be attending. President Putin will not be. And I think that while Zelenskyy is in New York, that will be an opportunity for him to try and stem some of the war fatigue with Ukraine that is spreading, particularly amongst developing countries. And I think that Zelenskyy will have a rare opportunity there to try and shore up support for the Ukrainian war effort and for Ukraine's diplomatic positions, particularly on the concession of territory to the invading Russians.

And then I think finally, the last point I would like to address, again, something that Rich alluded to, and that is the race for the next secretary general. I think unlike the previous two races, this one, there's a lot of smoke and mirrors here. And you have currently eight candidates in the race. It really is not clear whether there is a confident front runner right now. There is a front runner as a result of the straw poll, I think that was conducted at the end of August. And you saw someone who came fairly late into the race, Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett move ahead modestly. I think she won eight encouragement votes. And the next two candidates behind her, Rafael Grossi of Argentina and Rebeca Grynspan of Costa Rica both received seven encouraged votes.

So right now you have Rodrigues-Birkett in the lead and I think we would have, certainly this administration will have many concerns about her positions. She is very close to China. Five of the eight candidates visited China over the last two months taking their campaigns there. But Rodrigues-Birkett was the only candidate to enthusiastically endorse a General Assembly resolution from 1971, which effectively licenses the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate representative of China at the UN. That of course is a measure designed to freeze out Taiwan. So it is alarming, particularly at a time when Taiwan's security is of great concern in Washington, it is alarming that we might have a UN SG who is so closely aligned with the Chinese position there.

She has also got problematic positions on Gaza. She is, for example, an enthusiastic supporter of a continued role for UNRWA, the UN agency that is exclusively dedicated to the descendants of Palestinian refugees. And she's taken that position despite the fact that the Board of Peace, as recently as July the 1st, made very clear that they do not see a role for UNRWA in Gaza. And they also want to end, I think they used the phrase like the culture of dependency that UNRWA has fostered amongst the descendants of the original Palestinian refugees of 1948.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

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So I think in terms of a Rodrigues-Birkett nomination, obviously a nominee can only get through to be approved by the General Assembly if none of the five permanent members veto any of the candidates. And I think right now, it's reasonable to expect that the US would veto Rodrigues-Birkett and that Russia would veto Rafael Grossi of Argentina. Some of you may be aware that over the last couple of weeks, Maria Zakharova over in the Kremlin has been taking lots of pot shots at Grossi, which suggests I think that the Russians will veto his candidacy as well.

So I've seen a lot of UNGAs come and go. I think this one this year is going to be a particularly interesting one. All right, I think Joe, should I hand it back to you?

DOUGHERTY: That is great. Thank you, Ben. Thank you, Rich, for your opening remarks. We're going to move over to the Q&A section now of the call. You can submit your question via the chat feature, the Q&A feature. You can also raise your hand if you'd like to ask the question yourself and we will call on you. We'll open up your mic and then you can ask your question there. I will get things started, I'm going to turn it back over to Rich.

Rich, during your time there at the White House NSC, you got a good sense of how the administration thinks and works. What do you think are the most significant concerns within the administration today as we prepare for the UNGA?

GOLDBERG: Concerns about the United Nations?

DOUGHERTY: Correct.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, I mean, listen, I think that the mission and mandate of the UN, the fact that you have this sort of wandering organization that has lost its way from its founding mission, the fact that new alternative organizations, new alternative platforms and institutions are replacing the Security Council, are replacing the United Nations in many ways. You may not replace humanitarian agencies given their size and scope and impact on delivery of aid in certain places of the world, but when it comes to actual peace and security as a mission, you now have a Board of Peace. You have a TRIPP [Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity] in Armenia, Azerbaijan. You have all these new mechanisms that just stand up in place of the United Nations. Look, there is a new framework in place in Lebanon. We'll see how it goes. The whole basis of it is to get rid of the United Nations from its decades long perch in southern Lebanon and across the border on observation posts with respect to Syria, et cetera, in Israel. So I think that remains one of the concerns.

I think there is a concern that countries that, perhaps certainly now when Donald Trump is president, the US has certain policies with respect to, for example, energy, would use the UN as a backdoor to advance their policy agendas through instituting new rules, frameworks, regimes via groups like the IMO, like ICAO, the [International] Civil Aviation Authority, others, because maybe the EU itself or a certain European country sees that they can't get away with certain methane rules or certain anti-carbon or anti-US measures anymore. Even their sovereign wealth funds or their pension funds are coming under stress from the United States' bilateral pressure. Look at Norway having to push pause on Norges [Bank Investment Management (NBIM)] ethics committee and revise it after getting crossed with the Trump administration last year. But they still try to do it within the halls of the United Nations. And that I think troubles the United States greatly. And so that continues to be a focus.

I think the potential for money to go to terrorists and to evade anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism finance protections because you are subject to UN safeguards and UN lists of terrorism and terrorists, not necessarily US standards for that when money flows into certain countries where that risk exists. And we have seen obviously UNRWA being probably the top example, but there are concerns in Afghanistan right now. We've seen IG reports of money that's being taken off the top and going into the Taliban's pockets, perhaps other terror entities' pockets. This likely happens in parts of Africa as well. So I think the waste, the fraud, abuse, the potential for misuse of funds remains of concern.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

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And then I think there's a fundamental issue, and that is inherently whether or not those that are in the bureaucracy, those that drive the train on certain institutions are just inherently anti-American. And what do you do about that? I mean, the Human Rights Council is like the paradigm of this. You have all these experts writing all these reports with all kinds of missions and functions and focus, and there's nothing actually being done to improve the human rights situation in North Korea or Iran or parts of Africa. No, it's like, "Let's focus on the United States and Israel and just continue to bash the heck out of all of them. We're a racist country. Israel's an apartheid state." It's the Cold War all over again. It's the Marxist ideology now merged with Islamist ideology. The same things we deal with in our domestic politics have long been the problem inside the United Nations and have long been the problem in Western Europe, and we see that on full display in the last few days in the United Kingdom.

So I think there is just a... Huntington talked about a clash of civilizations. This is like a clash of direction of the century between the US and where we want to see the country go, at least where this administration would like to see the world go, and those that don't have that in mind, don't want to see the United States be a superpower, don't want to see Israel be a super technological power. And so that puts us on trajectories to continue to have a lot of showdowns in the United Nations.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Rich. Ben, I want to come back. You had mentioned Ukraine. I'd like to flush that out a little bit. You mentioned Zelenskyy is scheduled to speak. What do you think he might address? What do you think he might ask for? And then also what do you think he might actually get from this UNGA?

COHEN: Well, look, I think that Zelenskyy has close relations with a cluster of states that have been involved in backing Ukraine. I see, for example, that Canada today just announced a \$350 million, I think, spend on defense for Ukraine. So I think that that will certainly be one of the themes of Zelenskyy's speech at the UN, that Ukraine needs support and emphasizing as well that Ukraine has been receiving support from the United States, but also from other NATO allies, from France, from Germany, from the UK, from Finland. So I think Zelenskyy is going to emphasize that Ukraine remains an international cause and the UN is an ideal forum for him to show or to try to show that Russia is diplomatically isolated on the Ukraine issue.

I think as well, his primary goal at the UN is going to obviously be diplomatic. You're not going to come to the UNGA to sign an arms deal. You're coming there to win political and diplomatic backing from fellow member states. So I think it will be an opportunity for Zelenskyy to do that, but I also think it's an important opportunity for Ukraine's neighbors, the Baltic states, the states of Eastern Europe, Hungary, Poland, to come to the UN and highlight the fact that the Russian aggression against Ukraine is also a potential aggression against them. The fear in the Baltic states in particular of the Russians opening another front remains a live one. And so I think that there will be, in terms of how the Ukraine debate unfolds at the GA, we'll be hearing from a lot more leaders than Zelenskyy on the threat that Russia represents. But of course, every speech that is made highlighting that threat shores up Ukraine's position.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Ben. Thanks Rich. Appreciate that. We do have a question that came in from Aamer Madhani of AP, so I will read that out. "A couple of days after UNGA, Trump will meet with Xi in Washington. China's stockpiling of cheap oil in the lead up to the Iran war and its cut in imports has softened up. Well, not just for Beijing, but global markets at this point. But now, we're seeing oil prices again surging. First question, what do you think will Trump's message be to nervous world leaders about rising oil prices at UNGA, and in his speech and in more private conversations? Second question is what will be the ask of Xi on oil?" Rich, based on your energy experience in the administration, this one's over to you.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

Featuring Richard Goldberg and Ben Cohen

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GOLDBERG: Yeah, great questions. As always, I would expect nothing less Aamer. I would say I don't think you'll hear anything that different from what you hear the president saying now in his General Assembly address. I think he will make very strong arguments in favor of the military action that he carried out with Israel earlier in the year. I think he will talk about the current mission to get oil out of Hormuz. I think he will talk about the outrage that Iran continues to try to hold an international waterway hostage.

I think he would be right to, and it would make sense that he would put this back on the members of the General Assembly, particularly those with their own naval capabilities, those with diplomatic relations with Iran, those with economic or military leverage over Iran, and ask them while their supplies are interrupted or constrained, what have they done to try to reverse Iran's attempts to attack the Strait of Hormuz. And that would be a question that I think would not have much of an answer at this point from many in the audience.

At the same time, for China specifically, we are seeing the Chinese move back into the market on the demand side. I think the quiet demand destruction that the Chinese pulled off had stabilized the market for a while in that even though we are now getting oil out on our own terms and there is an increase in supply compared to where we were at the lowest points of supply disruption when there was no traffic moving before the MOU, we see the increasing risk activity and risk premiums from not just Strait of Hormuz, but the Red Sea and the Houthis advance and trading concerns over the Bab-el-Mandeb and simply what are Saudi export numbers in reality versus what we think they are based on what the capacity of pipelines are plus what the United States military tells us is getting out through Strait of Hormuz, plus the Chinese increased demand, putting more pressure on price.

You have a war continuing between Russia and Ukraine. Again, this is not to say it in a way where it's critical of Ukraine fighting for its life and going after various lifebloods of Putin while he continues a war on Ukraine, but there is a market reality to targeting Russian energy infrastructure, which needs to be acknowledged. And so those that are hypercritical of the Trump administration and only focused on what military operations have consequences, byproducts in the energy market when it comes to Iran, should also have the same fair-minded view of realities in the Russia-Ukraine battlefield.

And if you're a supporter of Ukraine, doesn't mean you can't also acknowledge that Ukrainian attacks on Russian energy infrastructure, while justified and good battlefield tactics to continue to gain the advantage, do have consequences both in the actual market and then particularly in the refined market when we're hitting refineries.

So I think the president needs to address it. I think he should talk about what his plan is, what he's doing. I think he should speak out against any sort of tolling plan. And I think in private session with Xi, there's a lot to cover here. There's critical minerals and supply chains, and that's one card that the Chinese have continued to play. We have trade cards that we have played in the past and can continue to play that they want to avoid.

And on the Iran showdown, they have had to go and have actual demand destruction. That does have a consequence for them domestically. They may not care about that for their people, but they've had to take that into concern. They have a situation where they also have had to tap in likely into their own strategic petroleum reserve and drain that down. Probably wanted to do that during a war over Taiwan, not over a conflict in the Gulf, but here we are.

There's a reality the United States military effectively controls the traffic out of the Strait of Hormuz, which means the United States military controls half of China's energy imports for the time being. So long as the Navy actually says, "You go, you can't go." That actually means something to the Chinese that has a consequence.

Right now for market stability, we want their product out. We want them to be able to import more and make sure that their purchases from Saudis, their purchases from the Emiratis, others are getting out. But that doesn't mean we don't control it at this point. And that's a strategic game changer for the Chinese that I think Xi has to deal with.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

Featuring Richard Goldberg and Ben Cohen

Moderated by Joe Dougherty

So there's a lot of moving parts there. It's a complicated multifaceted relationship. This will be a big piece of it, but I assume that the president does not go into a meeting like that feeling like he is without leverage. I think both sides in this relationship know that they have different cards to play and different leverage points. And when it comes to Iran right now in the Gulf, both for securing the future of their energy and supply and for the stability of the global market and economy, there is room to try to cooperate on this file between the United States and China.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Rich. I'm actually going to follow up on that because as you know, next or later this month, we've got Xi's visit to Washington to meet with the president. So what could ... And this opens this up to you as well, Ben. What should journalists on this call look for perhaps either during the open discussions or on the sidelines of the assembly in terms of prepping for the summit later this month with Xi and Trump? Rich, start with you.

GOLDBERG: Just in general, the prep for the President Xi bilateral?

DOUGHERTY: Correct.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, I mean I think it's everything I just said. I think, obviously, in the background on the United States side, there is an ongoing military operation in the Gulf. There is strain in the oil market. There is a midterm election. There are critical supply chains that remain dependent on China. And at the same time, the Chinese face a world where the United States has taken control of vast energy resources in Venezuela, de facto, and actually now de jure with an agreement for offtake and control of large swaths of those reserves.

You have a situation where the United States military has taken effective control of traffic that comes out of the Strait of Hormuz. You have instability there because of an ally of China, a client state of China in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is continuing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. There's a lot that's going on in the world of the two great powers that continue to compete for resources for political control and ambition and control of the century.

In the backdrop to all of that, of course, is an AI race between the United States and China and a lot of discussion of the future of AI, what the implications will be, powering the AI race here at home versus what China's able to do within China. So all of that is taken into account and the United States should come in with clear objectives and clear requests for Xi Jinping. I imagine Iran is very high on that list to the extent that we have intelligence of the banking relationships, of continuing access to cash, of any transfers of military technology or intelligence or targeting intelligence to hit the US Navy, that needs to be put on the table and with clear consequences attached by certain dates. And I think the lever that the Chinese are looking for is probably pressure relief in the trade arena and greater maneuverability there to have breathing room in their financial sector and their economy.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Rich. Just a reminder that you can ask any questions via the question and answer section, the chat section. You can also use the raise hand feature and we will call on you. Ben, you earlier mentioned the Secretary General's race and that concludes at the end of this year. You want to flesh out your thoughts out on that? I know that's something that you've been looking at.

COHEN: Yeah. I mean, again, I think that this has been one of the more interesting races of recent years and certainly one which has been very hard to crystal ball gaze and try and predict a winner here.

I mean, with the last two incumbents, Ban Ki-moon and of course António Guterres now. In the races that those two won, it was already clear at this point in the calendar that they were the leading candidates. And here we are approaching the middle of September. Guterres's successor is meant to be in place on January the 1st. And so, we really have something like 9, 10 weeks to go. And there is a front-runner as I said, but there is no obvious candidate.

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

Featuring Richard Goldberg and Ben Cohen

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So I think that given, as I said, that Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, the Guyanese diplomat who is currently the front-runner, assuming that she is going to be vetoed by the United States and assuming as well that Rafael Grossi, who's currently the head of the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, veteran Argentine diplomat, assuming that he is vetoed by the Russians who, as I've said, have been attacking him on the Zaporizhzhia issue in Ukraine quite intensely over the last couple of weeks. Assuming you get those two vetoes, then who is left?

I'm certainly not going to put money on this prediction at this point, but I would say that you're obviously looking at a compromised candidate. And I think that of the other six candidates in the race, Rebeca Grynspan of Costa Rica right now seems to me to be the most credible compromised candidate. She is somebody that has been running UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development. I think she's been in that position since 2021, although she suspended her role there while she's campaigning for UNSG. She is close with Guterres. She's known in the UN Secretariat. She's one of these diplomats that has had a career representing her own country, but has also spent significant amounts of time in the UN bureaucracy.

From what I hear, when I talk to people in the current Secretary General's office, she has a good reputation. People like her, people trust her, people think that she would be a good SG. I think in part because she would be an SG very much in the mold of António Guterres. And so I think in some ways that gets to the heart of the matter, because my assessment of Guterres would be that he has been underwhelming in the 10 years that he's been there.

And of course, UN secretary generals are not global dictators. They have a finite amount of power and a finite amount of resources. But even that said, under Guterres, the UN has reached a financial nadir. And Guterres himself was sort of warning about a real financial crisis in the UN at several points over the last year. So I think stemming that financial crisis is going to be probably the key task for whoever comes in here.

And I think that Grynspan would be more likely than Rodrigues-Birkett to engage in the kinds of initiatives that would encourage the US to reengage. Of course, the US provides the lion's share of the UN budget. It has defunded, as Rich pointed out, at least 30 agencies so far. It is also withholding its membership fees. But critically, it's not saying that those fees won't get paid. So I think for the US to release the sort of two or three billion that it currently owes, you would need a Secretary General who from the get-go really commits to reform. And I think that that would mean ending duplication at the UN. It would mean shrinking the bureaucracy, which, to some extent, Guterres has been already trying to do with his UN80 initiative.

And I think as a sweetener for the United States, a new Secretary General would be wise to address some of the issues that Rich mentioned before this, for example, profusion of special rapporteurs, who don't really impact policy so much, but they do impact public discourse and they impact the way that issues are debated at the UN. And you see this most acutely, I think with the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the sorts of reports that Francesca Albanese, but other rapporteurs as well, Ben Saul, Reem Alsaleem. Reigning those special rapporteurs in would be something I think that would encourage the United States.

And I think as well, the Human Rights Council, which this administration is particularly suspicious of, it's not too late to hope that it might yet expand its focus beyond this excessive focus on the Israeli-Palestinian dimension and start doing more sustained work on other issues. I think those are moves that would boost confidence with the US. And once you boost that confidence, then you're opening up the route to those funds being released and the UN being in greater financial health two years from now than it is right now.

DOUGHERTY: Ben, thank you for that. And Aamer does have a follow-up question. "Does Trump's speech at the UNGA have a greater domestic bent to it than these speeches typically do with so much of the affordability issues on the home front being so closely connected to the Iran war?" Rich, can you take that one?

FDD Media Call: Previewing the 2026 UN General Assembly

September 10, 2026

Featuring Richard Goldberg and Ben Cohen

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GOLDBERG: Yeah. I think just from a political perspective, I think the White House would have to craft remarks that connect from Turtle Bay to Main Street. That could also mean that there's increased hostility towards the United Nations. It could be calling out additional reforms that are needed. It could be taking credit for stopping things that would've increased costs like a carbon tax and the IMO. That would be an example.

It could be calling attention, as he has in the past, to inducements for migration. Maybe that has stopped, maybe it hasn't stopped. Views on that. So I could see there being tie-ins to domestic focus issues in the United States in the context of just being a few weeks out of midterm election. And obviously also addressing Iran, and it's a world stage. It's a top issue as you're looking at the impact in the energy market, affordability issues, what's going to happen there. So I think all of that certainly gets written and edited and reviewed in a context that has a domestic lens.

DOUGHERTY: Excellent. Thanks again for the question, Amir. I think we've reached the end of the call here today. First, let me thank everybody who has been on the call. Appreciate you taking the time. There are several places you could have been, and you chose to spend that time with us, so thank you. Special thanks to Ellie Bufkin and the rest of the FDD comms team for the smooth operation in the background to make everything go so well. I will ask Rich and Ben to provide a 30-second, one-minute summary of their key thoughts, their key takeaway.

But before we get to that, gents, just want to remind everybody FDD is a nonpartisan research institute. We're focused on national security and foreign policy. You can find all of our research at fdd.org. If you'd like to chat with Rich or Ben separately, please email the team here at FDD. You can reach us at press@fdd.org.

Okay, gentlemen, over to you for your final thoughts. Rich, let's begin with you.

GOLDBERG: Three final thoughts. One, I think Rodrigues-Birkett is a very flawed front-runner. I think a lot more research is being done on her record by people like Ben and myself. Stay tuned. I don't think this is a candidate that can pass muster with the United States at this moment and deserves a veto if it comes to that.

Number two, we're obviously discussing all of this on the eve of the 25th anniversary of September 11th, and we will go into the GA in New York, not far from the site of 9/11 25 years later. And we will have to think about what has happened as an international community in the fight against terrorism 25 years on, what do terror finance controls look like inside the United Nations, what does the terror sanctions list of the UN look like? Same as it was just after 9/11.

There is obviously a lot more that needs to be done to ensure that it's not just the United States and some core allies that work together on making sure that radical jihadists, transnational groups don't rise again to attack the West as we have seen multiple times in different iterations over the last 25 years since 9/11.

And then the last is a bit of a quib, but still relevant and in the news, and that is we do expect Benjamin Netanyahu to attend and speak. We do not expect Mayor Mamdani to be able to arrest him, though perhaps there will be calls for that while he's there. I think the real question is whether or not he goes to a Yankees game or a Mets game to shove it in Mamdani's face that he can go around New York and not face arrest. That would be quite something. I don't know if that'll happen for security reasons, but it's what I would do if I was Bibi.

DOUGHERTY: Or maybe he'll really draw fire and go to a Red Sox game or something. Ben, over to you.

COHEN: Yeah. No, I think what I would just underline in these closing thoughts is, again, the historic importance of this SG election, because I think it's coming at a pivotal moment for the UN. More and more people are questioning its purpose and its relevance. Its actual profile in the news is far less these days than it was say 20, 30 years ago.

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Moderated by Joe Dougherty

So I think increasingly there's a new generation of human beings emerging who don't really know what the UN is and don't really understand why it's there. So I think the new SG has an enormous amount of work to do in terms of educating people about the UN as well as ending that financial crisis and finding a way, with a very split P5 right now, finding a way to play a practical and useful diplomatic role as these great proud rivalries that we've been discussing, and particularly the rivalry between the US and China as that escalates and intensifies over the coming years.

I think, again, one issue that I would look at closely is what does happen with UNRWA. UNRWA's mandate was renewed, I believe in December of last year, but that's pretty much a rubber stamp vote in the general assembly. And I think the development since then, Finland pulling funding, but much more importantly, the Board of Peace saying there is no role for UNWRA.

It's worth keeping a close eye on that to see how the practical duties that remain in Gaza, delivery of aid, sanitation, rebuilding, education, whether those tasks can be divvied up amongst the remaining agencies there. And critically what happens, UNRWA has been, in some ways, the great guarantee of permanent refugee status for the Palestinians, which I would say has been a major element of this conflict. If UNRWA goes, what then happens to that permanent refugee status? So that's why I think the UNRA question is a particularly important one.

DOUGHERTY: Ben, Rich, thank you both for your analysis. This concludes today's call.