FDD Media Call: Israel, Iran, and Lebanon: What's Next?

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Featuring Richard Goldberg, Bradley Bowman, David Daoud, and Hussain Abdul-Hussain
Moderated by Joe Dougherty

This transcript was edited for clarity.

DOUGHERTY: Good morning and thank you for joining us for today's call. My name is Joe Dougherty. I'm senior director of communications at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a nonpartisan research institute focused on national security and foreign policy. We're grateful that you've taken the time to join us as FDD experts, discuss the latest developments regarding Israel, Iran and Lebanon and related issues, and in particular US policy options moving forward. We're going to get right to things here. Joining us on today's call, Richard Goldberg, FDD Senior Advisor, former Director for Countering Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction at the NSC. Bradley Bowman, senior director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power, focusing on US defense strategy and policy, and also a former national security advisor to members of the US Senate. David Daud, FDD senior fellow focused on Lebanon and Hezbollah and Hussein Abdul-Hussein, Beirut-born FDD senior fellow focusing on Gulf relations with Iran, Gulf peace with Israel, with also expertise on Iranian proxies in the region.

Some quick housekeeping. First, today's conversation is on the record unless otherwise stated, but is on the record and we will share the transcript and recording of today's call within about 24 hours, hopefully sooner because we know that you have deadlines. The run of show will be as follows. First, we'll hear from Richard, followed by Brad, then David and then Hussain, and then we'll open up the conversation to your questions. During the Q&A portion, you can submit your questions via chat, or you may use the raise hand feature in which case we'll let you know when you've been unmuted and you can ask your question. Okay, let's get right to it. Richard, over to you. Thank you.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, thanks Joe. I'll do just a quick sort of scene setter state of play before turning over to Brad and some thoughts. Obviously as I reflect on the last few months, two major moments to think about in my view of where we are today and what the Israelis might be thinking of what they'll do next. First of all is the lack of a response by Iran after the killing of Ismail Haniyeh inside Tehran. As you'll recall, the supreme leader had vowed that Iran was going to respond directly from its territory to Israel after the Haniyeh killing.

It did not. It did not. And many of the assessments that you've heard about are that in fact, after the United States had indicated that severe consequences would follow, that perhaps sending a second carrier strike group in, moving forces, especially air forces into the region was a signal to Iran that, unlike in April when Israel had been restrained and did not respond forcefully to a strategic level ballistic missile attack like the one we just saw yesterday, this time, if Iran attacked Israel would have a green light from the United States to retaliate in a much more forceful way.

And that the United States really couldn't stop that from happening, that Israel had learned from what had happened there, believed that it needed to respond more forcefully in the future and would do so, and that somehow did restrain the Iranians for several weeks. But I think what the supreme leader has probably internalized is that the Israelis perceive that the Iranians could be deterred. That in fact if you threaten the use of force inside of Iran, that they would not respond forcefully and that they would back down. That gave Israel weeks of room to go on offense against Hezbollah. And I don't think anybody could have imagined in just two weeks to see the decimation of Iran's flagship terror organization at the top.

Certainly, with Hassan Nasrallah, most of the leadership decimation of its strategic level capabilities, we've heard all kinds of estimates in the percentages of precision guided missiles and then the rest of their rocket forces being depleted. And you see these strikes continuing both against leadership targets and against infrastructure. Now moving into the tunnel infrastructure and the villages where a lot of the anti-tank guided missiles and other capabilities that would be used against border towns in Israel have been hiding really the last effort and important need to try to give confidence to Israelis who have been evacuated from that northern border to come home.

Iran now sees this as Hamas being decimated in Gaza, just Sinwar and a few buddies huddled in a tunnel somewhere surrounded by hostages to protect their lives while they try to have cells reconstitute here and there with Israeli special forces mopping them up whenever they appear. Hezbollah now at a strategic level being decimated; Iran now actually fears for the regime's survival. I think they now perceive that Israel has changed its strategy, is back on offense, is moving towards the regime itself, both its most lethal, dangerous threat not just to Israel, but to the United States and to global security - its nuclear program and then separately long-term, how to destabilize that regime and help the Iranian people take it back. That is now I think what has struck the supreme leader who is now alone. His closest advisor after the killing of Qasem Soleimani was Hassan Nasrallah.

He is now, I think, shooting missiles to protect the regime, believing it's his only hope of showing strength. The aero missile system, our sea-based missile defenses being again successful in thinning out the threat, the one death that we know of as a Palestinian reminding us that the Islamic Republic of Iran doesn't care about Palestinians. They're always happy to fight for the last Arab death wherever their carnage goes. And now we wait for Israel's response, unlike in April, both for the strategic change that we've seen in the last two weeks, the deterrent that Iran had built on the Northern border having been decimated and learning the lesson from April that they do need to respond forcefully after, especially now having threatened to respond forcefully, should Iran go forward with the launch. We now await what that response will be.

US policy, US decision-making needs to support Israel in that effort, not put pressure on Israel to be restrained in any way, provide the intelligence support, logistic support necessary for the Israelis to conduct the strike they think is prudent, appropriate, necessary at this time, making sure that they continue their campaign, their strategy of how to strangle the Islamic Republic, remove the biggest threats that we mutually face, that's the nuclear program and the missile programs, and then eventually, whether that's in the near term or the long term, ensure that the world's greatest state sponsor of terrorism follows other dictatorships of the past into the dustbin of history. I'll stop there and turn it over to Brad.

BOWMAN: Great, thank you, Rich. Appreciate that, it was a great overview. I'm going to just focus my initial comments here on US security assistance to Israel because there's a lot that I think reporting has missed in recent weeks and even months. And I think these questions are obviously more relevant now that we've seen the second direct attack from Iran against Israel, and as we see combat picking up between Israel and Hezbollah. So, after October 7th, I'd say President Biden spoke with eloquence, clarity, and conviction about standing with Israel. And then the administration proceeded to implement an incredibly impressive security assistance campaign, sending a large quantity and variety of weapons to Israel – so many that a Pentagon source told me at the time that they were having a hard time finding enough aircraft to deliver them. But what's happened over time is that we've seen public criticism of Israel from this administration and serious problems and mistakes when it comes to security assistance.

A lot of you may be tracking the hold on the one shipment of 2,000 pound bombs for Israel. I'll talk about that in a moment, but there's actually a lot more concerning going on from my perspective that I want to flag for you. But before I do that, let me just provide a quick overview from general to specific. So, from my perspective, when your best friend or your best ally in the Middle East is experiencing one of its worst days or years of its life, you don't join the bullies or the terrorists in ganging up on your friend when they've been knocked down. If you have criticisms or concerns with your friend or your ally, you express those concerns privately. You do not level public criticisms that hurt your friend when they're in the fight for their life. That empowers our common adversaries.

Obviously, that invites more aggression against Israel, brings more suffering, longer wars and damages American interest. Unfortunately, that's exactly what we've seen the Biden administration doing increasingly over time with these public criticisms and spats with Israel. Our fight really is with the terrorists and more importantly, with their terror patron in Tehran, rather than our best ally in the Middle East, which has received attacks from as many as seven different fronts. And let's remember Israel is killing Hezbollah terrorists who have the blood of hundreds of Americans on their hands. We should remember that Fuad Shukr, Hezbollah's senior military commander that Israel killed, played a central role in the 1983 bombing of the US Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut, which killed 241 US service members. For decades the United States did not bring justice to individuals such as Shukr and that really risked leaving terrorists around the world with the impression that they can kill Americans and get away with it.

Israel brought justice to these terrorists. When a friend takes it to your adversaries like that, the right response from Washington, I think is to say, "Thank you, and how can I help?" Not issue condemnations, calls for cessations or ceasefires, or public criticisms. Let's be clear, the reason we're seeing this war in Lebanon right now is because the United Nations and peacekeepers in Lebanon failed to do their job. They failed to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1701. That may not be well received in New York, Brussels or Davos, but that's the cold reality, and let's call a spade a spade. And good policy starts with recognizing that reality and when international organizations fail to do their jobs and you have years of failed diplomacy, there are consequences, and they can be grave. And so Iran would prefer that Israel just kind of sit and take the attacks that commenced after October 7th, the very next day by Hezbollah.

But Israel's clearly not doing that. And now Iran has responded with a second direct attack against Israel. And so, it should not be hard for the administration to be clear about who our friends and adversaries are. We have no better friend in the Middle East than Israel and America's enemies in the Middle East have no worse enemy than Israel. And from an American perspective, think about it: If the day after September 11th, 2001, we had rockets coming in on American citizens the day after our worst day, September 11th, how do you think America would respond? We'd level that terrorist army. That's exactly what we do. You know it and I know it, and that's what Israel's been doing. And so I just want to say that.

On the weapons front, let me just run through these really quickly, watching the clock. So most everyone's familiar with this hold on the one shipment of 2,000 pound bombs to Israel, that hold as of the last 24 hours remains in place.

Let's remember the administration put that hold in place based on concerns about how those would be used in Rafah. That is no longer a relevant concern right now. Israel does not need to be using those kinds of bombs right now in Rafah, okay? Where they do need them is in Lebanon because the tunnels in Lebanon are deeply buried. There are many of them, many, many miles of these tunnels. And according to some reports, 2,000 pound bombs were used in the overdue bringing of justice to Hassan Nasrallah. So this one hold in place that is months old, the reasons for that are no longer relevant, but continuing to hold it sends a damaging message and creates an opportunity for adversaries of Israel and the United States to try to drive a wedge between us and deprive Israel some of the weapons they need. But it's much more, as I said, than that one hold on the 2,000 pound bomb shipment.

Some of you may have seen the letter that Senator Cotton and Senator McConnell sent on September 25th. If you haven't seen that, I can send it to you. We're also seeing concerning delays from this administration and a failure to fast track and approve the sale of Apache attack helicopters to Israel, Israel requested these helicopters in December, December. I'm a former U.S. Army helicopter pilot. Blackhawks not Apaches, but these Apaches would be very, very useful in Lebanon. And yet we've seen this delay since December. I mean, it does not take that long to process these requests. And so, you have to wonder what's going on here. And I think we know what's going on. We see recurring efforts that seek to curry favor with extreme elements of domestic politics in a presidential year. We're also seeing that this administration, according to that letter from Senator Cotton and McConnell, are holding up the approval for Caterpillar D9 tractors. You might say, "D9 tractor? How's that relevant?"

You know what these are used for? They're used to clear IEDs. So for these ground incursions of Israel, this is not Israeli aggression. They are trying to clear the Hezbollah tunnels and launch sites that are being used to try to murder Israeli civilians in their homes. They use these tractors to clear IEDs. So, if you deprive Israelis of these tractors, you're going to have more IDF deaths. That means more empty chairs at kitchen tables. So, this is not some notional DC policy game. These are life and death issues for Israeli soldiers trying to defend their civilians against murder by a terrorist organization.

But the administration's actions are actually worse than that. It's worse than the one 2,000 bomb shipment hold. It's worse than the delays on the Apache attack helicopters. It's worse on the delays in these tractors. There's also been some major delays on other requests from Israel.

I can rattle them off in great detail: Not only the MK-84 2,000 pound bombs, the MK-82 bombs, JDAM kits, small diameter bombs, the BLU-109, a munition designed to penetrate hardened bunkers precisely to kill terrorists and not kill civilians. JDAMs, what are those for? Those are so you don't kill civilians, and you do kill the bad guys. That's the very thing that the Israelis want to kill the terrorists and not civilians. Some of these have been requested by Israel as early as October or November of last year. Hear, what I'm saying, 11 months of delay on these things some of which have not been delivered to Israel yet. Some were requested in the February and March timeframe: Small diameter bombs, JDAMs, MK-84, MK-82, BLU-109, fuses, FMU139s, Hellfire missiles. There have been delays in delivery for all these types of weapons for Israel. And those of you who are familiar with the congressional notification process, there's an informal process where it goes to the chair and ranking members of the two foreign relations committees, and then they can put a hold on it, and then when there's not a hold, the administration can then submit the formal notification.

I have it on good authority that there is no above threshold or below threshold informal congressional notifications or formal notifications for Israel before Congress right now. What the heck? So, I just told you, Israel has requested all these things and there's no formal or informal notification sitting with Congress right now for Israel on these weapons. So what does that mean? That means that many of these are being sat on by this administration following the second direct attack on Israel from Iran. So, in sum, what you're seeing here is you're seeing a slow rolling by this administration of some weapons, namely the one shipment of 2,000 pound bombs that has already been approved by Congress, okay? Then you're seeing a slow rolling of some things that have been requested by Israel since October 7th, following its worst day, following the worst single day murder of Jews. You have this administration slow rolling some requests for the means of self-defense.

That's not going to look good in the history books. Can we just be blunt on that? And then you see the slow rolling of implementation... You see slow rolling of other things.

And the last thing I'll say is I want to highlight one more congressional letter for you. There was a letter sent by Senator Jim Risch, the lead Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Representative McCaul, the Lead Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee on May 14th. I can send it to you. They are expressing concerns in May about disrespect by this administration for Congress's constitutional prerogatives when it comes to security assistance and expressing concern about the slow rolling of arms provisions to Israel. I have it on good authority that this administration still has not responded to this letter.

So, those of you who are talking about the delaying of weapons and you're writing and reporting on that, you're only talking about the one shipment of 2,000 pound bombs, you're just looking at the tip of the iceberg, and this is a much broader problem.

And so, I just want to flag that what we're seeing here is the administration depriving Israel of some of the means of self-defense. Some of this for months, some of this potentially going back 11 months to the immediate weeks after October 7th, and the story here is much deeper than a lot of reporters have covered. Thank you.

DOUGHERTY: We're going to go do David first and then over to Hussain. Thanks, Bradley.

DAOUD: Thank you all for joining. So, I'm going to start to tell the story of where we are now through the story of two dates. The first is August 11th, 2006. That is the date that the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1701, which was supposed to obviate this war entirely. Resolution 1701 made demands of the Lebanese State, in fact its primary obligations fall upon Lebanon, to distance Hezbollah from south Lebanon, to north of the Litani River, as a preliminary step to the total disarming of Hezbollah among all other non-state armed groups in Lebanon. Lebanon was also supposed to prevent the unauthorized entry of weapons materiel and personnel, armed personnel, into the country. And none of this has happened over the course of 20 years, almost 20 years.

And the reason for that is that Hezbollah, despite how we may feel about the organization, is an integral part of the Lebanese political and social fabric. The organization earned 356,000 votes in the last parliamentary elections. That is 150,000 more votes than the second-largest party. It has a seat at the table. A recent poll by Washington Institute showed that Hezbollah has up to 93% support among Lebanese Shia in the country. 89% of those strongly support the organization. Now, whether that's out of fear or conviction is irrelevant as far as I'm concerned because you're falling in line regardless. What that means is that because of the way Lebanon's decision making is made, by sectarian consensus, all the sects have to get around the table and agree on every policy from garbage pickup, to electricity policy, to a national defense strategy – which is what would deal with disarming Hezbollah's weapons or where Hezbollah is deployed.

Because Hezbollah is such a large, if not the largest representative of the Shi'ite sect, which is in and of itself perhaps Lebanon's largest and definitely its fastest growing demographic, essentially what this means is that the Lebanese Government has to ask Hezbollah's permission to disarm or to redeploy. That is obviously not going to happen. Organizations, least of all Hezbollah, are not in the business of self-destruction. And given that Hezbollah's primary interests are those of Iran and not of Lebanon, it's definitely not going to submit to the Lebanese national interest. The alternative for the Lebanese would be Civil War because on the one hand, Hezbollah has this massive popular support, and on the other hand has its arsenal that we all know about that has been left unchecked and growing, so a Civil War in Lebanon would've ended in Hezbollah's favor in any case.

And these two factors have made Lebanon unwilling and unable to deal with Hezbollah in any way, shape, or form over the past 18 years. This allowed Hezbollah to continue building and growing. And any talk of an opposition within Lebanon to Hezbollah has been a mirage. We've seen different instances over the past, again, two decades, which gave glimmers of hope, and they all turned out to be false mirages. The last was the October 17th, 2019 protests that emerged throughout Lebanon that some tried to market as a revolution, and a revolution against Hezbollah, one that would destabilize the entire political class that would take out Hezbollah among them. These outsized and unjustified hopes were placed on this eruption of popular and uncoordinated anger. But as with prior challenges, including those challenges directed specifically at the group by less competent or non-credible actors Hezbollah managed to navigate the economic collapse and its consequences – and would have done so up until the present day had it not been for the second date I'll mention.

The second date, the second major date that I will put on the table is October 8th, 2023. This is when Hezbollah decided to, in an unprovoked manner without any prior Israeli provocation, to begin attacking Israel from the North in support of its terrorist allies in the Gaza Strip, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and others. Now, when the late Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah first addressed this war on November 3rd, 2023, he said there were two objectives here of this so-called support front. One was to bog down Israel in attrition on the North through forcing to deploy more forces, forcing evacuations from the north of civilians, dealing destruction to the infrastructure of the north. And all this would put different kinds of pressure on the Israeli government, internal pressure on the Israeli government. And the second objective as an outgrowth of that, as an outgrowth of bogging down Israel on several fronts, bleeding its resources, was to ensure, and I quote, "That the resistance in Gaza, specifically Hamas, emerges victorious." These were Nasrallah's actual words.

So, the goal was to ensure that Hamas survived. That a premature ceasefire would be implemented in Gaza. So the almost 20-year investment that Iran had put into Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad building up the military infrastructure in Gaza would be rescued, would have a chance to recoup from any damage that the Israelis had done to it, and would be able to resume its place in this ring of fire that the Iranians had built around Israel and potentially be a launching point for future October 7th-style attacks in the future. Now, this war has dragged on. The Israelis have been engaged in mutual attrition with Hezbollah, which had a sort of parity until early in September, and Hezbollah would not back down from this goal.

In his last and final speech, Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. In fact, this is after the Israeli escalation that we've seen the telecommunications attack, the onset of the Israeli escalation, rather, the telecommunications device attack, a blitz targeting 1,600 targets in Lebanon in almost one day, Hassan Nasrallah takes to his bully pulpit and says, "We're not backing down." Not only did he say that, "We are sticking to our guns when it comes to Gaza," then he added the West Bank. He also added the cessation of Israeli operations in the West Bank as a condition for halting Hezbollah's attacks from the north. And then he issued a challenge to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and to defense minister Yoav Gallant saying, "I challenge you; I dare you, your entire army, your entire country, your entire entity will not be able to return your civilians to the north without our permission."

Now, why would a ceasefire have been such a bad thing? Why not just accept those conditions? Well, for one, Hezbollah could claim a major victory, and this would provide Hezbollah longevity. They could claim that in May of 2000, they ejected Israel from South Lebanon, and in 2024, they could claim they ejected Israel from Israel. Now, if we understand the dynamics of what the May 2000 victory granted, alleged victory, granted to Hezbollah, it brought it popular support. The Lebanese collectively, even Hezbollah's opponents, have been almost shamed from denying Hezbollah's role as a resistance party, because Hezbollah has laid claim to allegedly liberating Lebanese territory.

Now, if in 2024 they can make an even bigger claim to their followers and, "Hey, all the suffering that you've endured, all this destruction, we just came one step closer to the liberation of Palestine. Look, it can be done. Stick with us, continue the path, we will move forward." And that's the symbolic end of things. The practical end of it is that any ceasefire, including the proposals on the table by the French and the Americans, would've only seen Hezbollah distanced a mere few kilometers from the border. And there was no credible enforcement mechanism to ensure that they would not return. Because going back, they relied on the Lebanese Armed Forces to do so. And as we said earlier, the Lebanese state, its apparatus, its opposition, its dissidents, the collective of Lebanese society is unwilling to stand up against Hezbollah. So having more Lebanese troops border would simply have done nothing. Because it's not a matter of lack of numbers, it's lack of will. Hezbollah would've trickled back to the border, and they had all the incentive to do so in time.

This would have put Hezbollah right back on the border to continue building up against Israel, to continue threatening the citizens of northern Israel. And if you think about it, with Hezbollah on the border now with the backdrop of October 7th, about what happened on the southern border, with Hezbollah's own plans to implement its own October 7th-style attack. Let's not forget, Hezbollah was the one that designed October 7th. This is the so-called liberation of the Galilee translated to the South. Imagine a situation if you're a resident of Metula. This is the northernmost point in Israel that is kind of the finger that goes into Lebanese territory in a matter of speaking. And you hear, you see Hezbollah operatives on the border with the backdrop of October 7th.

You see ominous billboards in poor Hebrew, but in Hebrew nonetheless, that are threatening to harm you on the border after October 7th. You see laser pointers flashed into your house at night by Hezbollah operatives. You see shepherds that are Hezbollah spies. You see Green Without Borders, Hezbollah's environmental protection arm but that also serves the group's military purposes, this entire activity by Hezbollah on the border with the backdrop of October 7th, you potentially hear the sound of tunnels being dug into Israel. How much can civilian life be sustained in the ominous shadow of Hezbollah made all the more so by the events of October 7th. This was obviously not a situation that the Israelis could tolerate. They allowed 11 months of diplomacy to run their course, to solve this problem, they allowed time for the Lebanese state to do its job. Nothing has happened, nothing worked.

And so as a last measure, they recently put the goal of returning their civilians to the north in safety not just in mere – deceptive – quiet, this illusory quiet, the type of quiet that existed on Israel's southern border on October 6, but actual safety to their homes. And the only way to do so was increasing the tempo of pain against Hezbollah to get them to back down. And because Hezbollah refused to back down, even after the assassination of its Secretary General, this necessitated the ground incursions and potentially even more ground activity in the coming days. And with that, I'll turn it over.

HUSSAIN: Okay. Thanks, David. I'll just pick up from where David stopped. Let me just say that the Israeli campaign in Lebanon is going very successful to the extent that you can see things changing already inside the country.

So, a quick reconstruction on September 17, Israel blew up Hezbollah's pagers. On 18, their walkie-talkies, which got Washington and Paris to speed up their diplomacy. And you probably might think when we deploy Amos Hochstein, who is the US envoy to Lebanon, who does he talk to? Well, the answer is that he talks to Speaker Nabih Berri, who is also a Shia politician like Nasrallah, and he's been Hezbollah's junior partner. Well, the thing is, he is a partner, but he's only a partner because he's weaker. And someone like Berri would try to take an opportunity to turn against Nasrallah if ever given a chance. In the past, they've had a few rounds of battle before Nasrallah emerged.

So, on September 24th, after Hochstein talked to Berri, Berri emerged and he said that Lebanon refused an unconditional ceasefire with Israel and that Hezbollah would only stop fighting before stopped in Gaza. On September 27th, that was a Friday, Israel killed Nasrallah. By Tuesday, October one, Berri had reversed course. He said that Lebanon is now ready to deploy its armed forces to the border, abided by UN Security Council 1701 elected president form a new cabinet. Mind you, all of these items were blocked by Nasrallah, but now Nasrallah is gone.

Now, this does not mean that the Lebanese State is ready and will stop the war if the war stops, but this shows that if there's a bit of a space, these guys will take it. Now, these oligarchs, but it has been in power since 1992, elected again and again, he's a very corrupt politician. He was joined by the interim Prime Minister Mikati, who is not Shia, who is a Sunni. And this morning the oligarch of the Druze of Lebanon also joined the three in a meeting. So you can see that the oligarchs are coming together and they're thinking maybe they have the opportunity to try to restore the government seeing that Hezbollah is on the back foot.

And really, I think the trick here is that we can't believe these guys. The trick here is to instruct them to say, "Okay, well if you deliver on disarming Hezbollah, if Hezbollah surrenders its arms to the Lebanese army, if you actually implement or enforce the 1949 truce between the two countries, which is a popular demand including by the Patriarch or the Maronite Christian Church, Al-Ra'i, if you do all these things, Israel will probably stop." If they don't, we all know that Israel will do what it'll have to do, that is push Hezbollah a few kilometers to the north to eliminate the threat.

The regional dimension of Hezbollah weakening in Lebanon is that you have to understand that Nasrallah was not only the leader of Lebanon, he was high up on the chain of the command of the Iranian IRGC structure, especially when it comes to managing Iranian activities, whether in Yemen, Iraq, Hezbollah participated in forming these militias, training them, arming them, supervising their activity. Now with not only Nasrallah gun, Nasrallah and the 20 commanders that were underneath him, also gun from Nasrallah all the way down to number 25 probably. Iran has to find an alternative. Everyone is talking about Hashem Safieddine.

To my mind, I don't think the alternative will come from Lebanon. I would suggest that everyone who's thinking about an alternative will have to focus on Iraq. The primary candidate would be Abu Ala al-Walai. He is the commander of what's called Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada, one of the pro-Iran militias in Iraq. Now, mind you, these militias in Iraq are paid or they get from the Iraqi Government, government money, $3.2 billion every year. That's an enormous amount of money that makes all of Hezbollah's and Iranian budgets look really small. So with a lot of money, with a lot of Shia and Iraq, of course, Lebanon has one and a half million Shia, Iraq has 12 million Shia. So the difference in numbers in terms of population, in terms of resources, in terms of money, plus Iraq is just across the border from Iran. There's no need to fly any airplanes from Iran and land them in the airport of Beirut, which Israel just stopped last week. There's no reason why they should set convoys and convoys of arms all the way through Iraq, Syria, and all the way to Lebanon.

Now, granted, Lebanon is much closer to Israel. Lebanon borders Israel and Iraq does not. But I think from now on, if Hezbollah falls apart, I think this will be an opportunity for the Lebanese Government to restore its sovereignty, and we will see Iran start managing its presence in Syria and Yemen and Iraq through Iraq. Thank you.

DOUGHERTY: Thank you, Hussain and David. Brad and Rich, thank you for sharing your insight there. We'll now open the call to journalist questions, and I will initiate the first question, and then we do have some that have lined up already, so thank you for those.

Brad, just kind of building a little bit off what Hussain was saying there, that other militias proxy groups may be activated. Does that put even more emphasis on the need for US military assistance to Israel?

BOWMAN: Yeah, for sure. These weapons take time to deliver. And so when you have delays on the front end and the middle and on the back end, in terms of adjudicating the request, getting them to the Hill, having the fifteen-day clock run on the Hill, and then just the logistics of getting them delivered, this all takes time. And so, what I was trying to describe earlier was just a real, at best a lackadaisical approach from this administration in adjudicating and processing Israeli requests that is dramatically, I'd say egregiously, dissonant with the urgency of the threats that Israel confronts. And one of the key things I was trying to emphasize there is that all of Israel's adversaries, they are our adversaries. And so, it's not like we're doing Israel a favor. It's like, "Oh, okay. Well, let's help Israel." No. They're literally taking it to terrorists who have the blood of hundreds of Americans on their hands. And so why would we not want them to have the means to do that effectively and do it precisely to save civilian lives? When you deprive Israel the means of self-defense, following October 7th, you're sending a signal that encourages the enemies of the United States and Israel to be more aggressive, you're extending the wars and that's resulting in more civilian casualties. And let's remember that we've also seen an extraordinary quantity of attacks on US forces in Iraq, Syria and Jordan. And that's something that we track at FDD.org. And those attacks continue to tick up with very limited or no responses. And I'll just end with this: When the US responds strongly as it did after the tragic killing of the three US service members at Tower 22 in Jordan, we saw many, many weeks with almost no attacks on US forces.

And that should not be surprising to anyone who's followed the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1979. When America is strong and it uses its power to defend its interest, Iran backs down. When we're weak, and we're talking about ceasefires and concessions that is perceived as weakness and a green light for aggression. And going back to the Reagan administration and up through the 2000s to present.

And so we had a call between Secretary Austin and his Israeli counterpart on September 30th. This was before the second direct assault from Iran on Israel. And the quote was, if Iran conducted "a direct military attack against Israel," unquote, according to the Pentagon readout, there would be quote "serious consequences." So, how did Iran respond to that threat from the Secretary Defense of the United States of America?

They shrugged and then they launched 180 or so ballistic missiles against Israel.

And so now we have Jake Sullivan talking about "severe consequences," so a lot of harshly worded statements coming from Washington D.C. If we, the United States of America, don't back up those words, then our ability to deter aggression against us, our forces, and our allies will erode further. And the perception that America is the biggest bodybuilder in the gym but is reluctant to throw a punch, that we're all bark and no punch, will only grow and we'll see more aggression against us, our troops, and our allies. This is a decisive moment, not just for this little iteration and this little bout, but the world is watching, and they want to see whether America backs up its threats with actions.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Brad. We do have a couple of questions in the queue. I'm going to ask two of them here. First is from Lena, I'm going to direct this to you Rich, "How is Israel likely to respond in the coming hours and days and what potential scenarios could unfold as the situation evolves?" And then from Karen Azhar, "Hussain, you said this is an opportunity for the Lebanese people to regain sovereignty, but the rest of Lebanon's politicians are corrupt too. What can the US do to help the Lebanese? What can be done to restore sovereignty without corruption?" Rich, you first please.

GOLDBERG: I think first of all, we should just reset all of our assumptions and the strategic paradigms that we've been operating under for a long time. Most of those disappeared after October 7th, and they've certainly gone now in the last couple of weeks in what we've seen the Israelis willing to do and be able to do to Hezbollah and therefore now changing their own strategic paradigm of what they might be willing to do and can do to Iran, now understanding that the largest deterrent has been degraded to some extent. That does not mean that you're going to see some massive attack. It might not mean you're going to see a small attack. It might not mean that you're only going to see an airstrike or a missile strike. Israel has multiple ways of attacking inside of Iran. They've demonstrated it in the past. They obviously have cyber capabilities that can be brought to bear.

They have human assets on the ground that we've obviously seen over many, many years for sabotage operations, disruptions, assassinations. We've seen them launch drones from inside Iranian territory. Certainly, the potential of things being launched near the border of Iran into Iranian territory from areas where we have seen at least reports of them operating in the past. Some combination of that, maybe one thing, maybe several things, maybe it's in one stage, maybe it's in multiple stages, but I think we should assume that the target is A, the top strategic threats to Israel. And the timing of when those strategic threats are taken out is going to be up to the best strategy that the Israelis come up with. The missiles themselves that are being used to target Israel, where they're located, where they're stockpiled, where they're launched from to the extent that you can get fixed sites, fixed structures, fixed stockpiles. Their air defenses that would interfere with a sustained campaign against key infrastructure, the nuclear sites themselves over time, obviously the biggest threat that we all share coming out of Iran.

And then IRGC command and control and key infrastructure as well, whether they would go towards the actual regime nerves into Iran is a decision for them to have to take. But obviously there's two parallel threats going on in campaigns. One is the nuclear threat, the missile threat, the actual conventional threat that Iran could pose and therefore also spread in its deterrence through its proxy forces. And then separately, just the entire ideological nature of this regime, the revolutionary nature of exploratory terrorism just being in existence. And that could be a longer-term project once its ring of fire has been dismantled once its key capabilities have been degraded to keep squeezing the regime through economic pressure, political isolation, covert action, and giving over time the people of Iran the opportunity to take back their government.

DOUGHERTY: Hussain and David, over to you for the second question on how the US can help the Lebanese and what can be done to restore sovereignty without corruption.

HUSSAIN: Okay, thanks. Well, sovereignty and corruption are not contradictory, so a country can be sovereign without having a militia and can be corrupt. Granted these oligarchs are corrupt, but there's a point where they can hold the line where you can deal with the government. Between 1949 and 1969, Lebanon and Israel had a truce and the border was peaceful, and the oligarchs, the fathers of these guys were corrupt and were in power, and there was no one who was launching any cross-border attacks. As we speak, I had just seen that Gebran Bassil was also another one of the Maronite leaders, a very corrupt person. He's met with Speaker Berri, Jumblatt and the interim Prime Minister Mikati has just issued a statement calling for a ceasefire. Mind you, the most important point here is that Berri abandoned tying ceasefire in Gaza to a ceasefire in Lebanon, so now you see all these oligarchs doing what Nasrallah didn't let them do.

Now that Nasrallah is gone, now they're not connecting Lebanon and Gaza anymore. Now they're just saying, look, a ceasefire, 1701. But like I said, what the US can do is that we can set the tone, and we can say, okay, this starts with the Army taking Hezbollah's arms, with Hezbollah surrendering its arms to the Lebanese Army. And that's the first step. The minute that happens, we can talk about 1701, 1559, 425. There are at least a dozen UN Security Council resolutions. The way we can enforce UNIFIL, the 10,000 strong peacekeeping force, give it a better mandate to monitor the border. The sky is the limit when it comes to arrangements, but the starting point is that Hezbollah can't be a player in Lebanese politics or in region politics anymore. I think if these oligarchs commit to this and show us that that's the starting point for them, I think we can work from there. After that, if you have a corrupt government, then you can start pushing these oligarchs toward less corruption, towards reform, but that'll be a different story from the one that we have now.

DAOUD: I will add that historically when Lebanese officials talk about implementation of 1701, and they love to talk about resolution 1701, but there's a certain sleight of hand that's being played here by the Lebanese government. When they say 1701, they don't necessarily mean disarming Hezbollah. They've adopted an idiosyncratic interpretation of 1701 that discounted that from the ambit of the resolution – exploiting the fact that the resolution doesn't name Hezbollah by name, it talks about "armed group.," Obviously, given that the resolution was intended to address the "causes that gave rise to the conflict", the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel conflict, it obviously related to Hezbollah. But the Lebanese government, which isn't acting in good faith, plays this game whereby, well, Hezbollah is not an armed group, it's the resistance. Every Lebanese cabinet since the 1990s, every single one, including the so-called March 14th, including everyone, has included a plank in its cabinet policy statement in support of the resistance, giving Hezbollah an official legal status.. Now, the Lebanese will come and tell you, Lebanese governments will come and tell you, oh, this is because of Lebanon's special circumstances, what we talked about earlier, Hezbollah's influence in the country and its arms.

But even now that Hezbollah has been severely degraded, it's put on its back foot, its face, the man who has become synonymous with Hezbollah for the better part of 30 years has been eliminated – We don't necessarily see this jump to take an opportunity to restore Lebanese sovereignty. In fact, we know Saad Hariri, the center prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, who was assassinated by Hezbollah, came out condemning this attack. Nayla Tueni, who is the CEO of Annahar Newspaper, the flagship of the Lebanese opposition newspaper whose own father Gebran Tueni and Samir Kassir, a reporter for Annahar were assassinated by Hezbollah and the Syrians, also came out calling for Lebanese unity and rallying around Hezbollah. Opposition figures like Mark Daou, and Abbas Ibrahim, the former head of general security who has been presented in the past as a fair broker for the United States, have all come out and condemned this attack rather than come out and take this opportunity to say, "We're going to fight for our country." So the Lebanese opposition is a mirage – to the extent it exists at all, it wants others – the Israelis, Americans – to shed blood and spend treasure to save Lebanon while the Lebanese opposition itself provides only slogans.

The problem is that there's still, if it's out of fear or if it's out of conviction, I can't say, but the problem is there's still in the mind of these people probably more to lose by confronting Hezbollah than there is by tolerating its presence. Lebanese foreign minister, Abdallah Bou Habib said in a January interview that leaving Hezbollah to its own devices would create regional war, kind of what we're seeing now. Whereas dealing with Hezbollah, trying to disarm Hezbollah, that's civil war, and we'd rather do regional war than civil war because you can't have an end to civil war. The levers of pain will always weigh against, at least are still weighing against dealing or confronting Hezbollah. And that's where the United States needs to step in to say, oh, no, there's no more consideration for Lebanon's special circumstances.

We understood before, though we arguable shouldn't have, when Hezbollah was at the zenith of its power Now the Israelis are severely degrading the organization. We give you aid, we support the LAF, we train the LAF with the express purpose of degrading Hezbollah. You need to act on this. But at the same time, we cannot in the interim fall for any promises for the implementation of 1701 by the Lebanese government when they mean something very different than the international understanding of it and the American understanding, the Israeli understanding. There needs to be aid commensurate with action, meaning the Lebanese need to act first then we continue aid, and we only provide as much aid as they act. If it's $1 worth of action, then we give $1 worth of aid. Or we perhaps threaten measures against Lebanon, carrots and sticks rather than this continuation of just accepting blindly this narrative of Lebanon's special circumstances, which will forever in their minds prevent them from acting against Hezbollah. Without US pressure, mere talk of implementing 1701, mere meetings between oligarchs without more is not going to get the job done. We need to put pressure, political pressure, use the weight of the United States in tandem with the military pressure that Israel is putting on Hezbollah.

DOUGHERTY: John Rash is coming up and then Ellen we're going to go to you. First John's question, which I'll read aloud here, "Hamas still holds hostages, reportedly including Americans. What is the best method to procure their release? And to what degree does Israel's recent strikes in Lebanon and seemingly soon in Iran factor into this?"

GOLDBERG: I'm happy to jump in and touch that.

I think it's an excellent question, and I speak with families of hostages on an almost daily basis, and if you are a family member of a loved one, dead or alive, who is still in Gaza, October 7th has never ended for you. And that's by design of Hamas and is part of the psychological warfare that's been conducted, not just on those families, but on Israel and many people throughout the world over the last year. And so we know that the Israelis have said that as one of their war objectives, is returning to hostages. We've understood that now over several months, there's been no progress in negotiations with Hamas. All the stories we had been hearing leaked out of, we were so close, and oh, it's like, oh, somebody moved the salt shaker somewhere in Doha, and that was the signal that maybe somebody in a tunnel had thought something was going to happen.

It turns out it's all baloney, and there was no real responses coming from Hamas for months. They've gone certain periods of time now without even hearing anything from Sinwar, there was leaked out information of whether or not he was still alive. Though it does sound like perhaps they did pick up some intel recently that he has moved in Gaza. And as we know, he has reportedly surrounded himself with hostages, making it difficult to strike a location where even if you detected him without killing the hostages as well. At the same time, understand that Israel now has control over the Egyptian Gaza border, both the underground Philadelphi Corridor plugging in the underground tunnels, the Rafah crossing being able to work and scrutinize what's coming into Gaza to prevent smuggling, prevent resupply to Sinwar and his forces. We understand that the humanitarian aid is actually their number one path to survival and reconstitution at the moment, not just hijacking convoys and aid and then reselling it on the black market, but the control of the distribution of aid in certain areas.

And so even though from a military perspective Israel has done an unbelievable job in destroying, degrading, dismantling Hamas as a functioning military force and turning it into something of a guerrilla organization now that is trying to hold on here and there while its command and control is hunkered down in a tunnel somewhere. In order to continue putting more pressure on while the material resupply is cut off, the financial from the outside world is cut off, being able to provide an alternative to Hamas for aid distribution and have stability in some of these communities is still a priority that needs to be addressed while everything else is going on. That said, you can't just sit around waiting for Godo or waiting for Sinwar in this case, getting no answers. While Hezbollah is raining down missiles, while militias in Iraq and Syria are raining down drones and missiles, while Iran is firing 180 ballistic missiles, while the Houthis are firing missiles and drones, you just can't... That's not a strategic way to go about business unless you want to surrender your country to Iran and it's ring of fire.

As part of this dynamic of removing all the pressure points that Iran has designed in the multi-front confrontation to put pressure on Israel to allow Hamas to survive and to get better terms for Hamas and the rest of the ring of fire, Israel is turning the tables decimating Hezbollah now taking potentially pressure to other areas of the axis as well, in addition to continuing to decimate Hezbollah, continuing to take control of those supply lines, and now figuring out an alternative in the humanitarian aid distribution and focusing on stability operations in parts of Gaza, I think are the number one priority. Last thing I'll say, where's the pressure on the Qataris? Where is the pressure on the Turks? Where is the pressure on the Egyptians? Where is the pressure on the Lebanese government for the aspect of their harboring and support to Hamas?

All of these actors should be within our policy view, subject to enormous pressure, economic, diplomatic. Why would we not use that pressure to help the Israelis as they are fighting off the ring of fire, as they're trying to improve their military leverage, as they're thinking about alternative distributions

DAOUD: ... on humanitarian as well to cut off additional financial and political support for Hamas. Why aren't we using all those levers? We should be doing it. I think that's a missing piece as well right now.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Rich. Ellen, over to you for your question. Thank you. You are now unmuted.

ELLEN KNICKMEYER: Okay, great. Thank you all for doing this and thanks, Joe. We've watched kind of the balance of power shift in the Middle East very dramatically in just a few days in ways we probably couldn't have imagined. But I will say, I was on the ground off and on for several years covering the US War in Iraq. And similarly there, we saw an unpopular regime toppled by military force with kind of surprising ease. But there were unforeseen consequences afterward that, at least unforeseen for the US, in which it really helped give rise to Iranian influence, the Shia Crescent in the Middle East. There were a surge in violent Sunni insurgency and years of war. So I mean, what comes next? Even if Iran, the regime stays in place, but is greatly weakened and with Hezbollah decapitated, turned into an insurgent forces, as you all said, what comes next? What are going to be the effects on the balance of power in the region and what comes next in Iran?

DOUGHERTY: Yeah, I'd like to give this one to Brad to start. And Hussain, you lived that. So, I'd like for you to weigh in as well on that. Brad. Great question, Ellen. Thank you.

BOWMAN: Yeah, thank you, Ellen. It's a wonderful question. It's a question I spend a lot of time thinking about, having watched the American experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. I spent a little time in Afghanistan myself. I think you can never do one thing, in life or as a nation-state. You're focused on the one thing and then obviously there are all kinds of second and third-order effects that come from those actions that are difficult to anticipate, but you should try to anticipate them.

Here's very quickly two or three things that I'm watching in terms of next steps. So, I completely agree with Rich that one of the areas of focus right now... And my heart goes out to the families of the hostages. Oh, my goodness, that's so, so horrible what they're going through. It's just a nightmare. I think from an American policy perspective, we have to be focused on depriving Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other terror groups in Gaza of the means of re-arming. Otherwise, they're going to try more October 7ths in the future. And this endless nightmare, and frankly, the suffering of Palestinian civilians and Gaza will continue. And the culprit for that is Hamas and Palestinian Islamist Jihad.

So, you want to deprive them of weapons that they'll use to continue the reign of terror and to attack Israel. And so, that means, very specifically, the construction of an underground barrier between Gaza and the Sinai, between Gaza and Egypt, that prevents the construction of new tunnels for the purposes of smuggling weapons into Gaza, and also, gaining better control of the Rafah crossing. Otherwise, they will smuggle more weapons in the future and the same cycle will commence.

So, what I'm watching is the will of the US government to use its leverage on Cairo to build that underground barrier. October 7th came across above the surface, right? They did not come through tunnels, that's because Israel had that barrier. You want that same barrier along the entire Philadelphi Corridor. Is this administration, is the next administration, going to focus on that?

And then very quickly, with Hezbollah, let's hope that Israel is effective in destroying as much Hezbollah infrastructure as possible. Launch sites, weapons depots, tunnels, south of the Litani River as possible. But unless Israel is going to do an indefinite occupation, which I would not recommend and I don't think they're anticipating, then what's going to happen when they leave? Well, of course we know what's going to happen. Hezbollah is going to move back in. And you can't count on the UNIFIL forces to do anything, of course, it passes prologue. So, that means Israel will have to have the means, the weapons and the political permission if you will, to periodically go back into Lebanon as necessary to take things out and that's where the United States comes in.

And then, obviously there's the Iran element. The bottom line here is the more we're talking about Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, and the less we're talking about the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is the puppet master here, then this is all going to continue. So, you're right, the future is unclear if this regime comes down, but we don't have to have 170,000 US troops in Iran to do this. We simply need to support the Iranian people, who clearly are unsatisfied with this regime. That means American information war inside Iran, ensuring the Iranian people know the truth about this regime that is more interested in domestic oppression and the export of terrorism than delivering for the Iranian people. So, that's where I would start.

HUSSAIN: Ellen, quickly, just let me say with one word, what Washington is missing is consistency. We've been inconsistent. I grew up in both Iraq and Lebanon, and all these corrupt oligarchs that we see today and we hope that they go against Hezbollah. In 2005, all of them lined up against Hezbollah and demanded that Hezbollah disarm and surrender its arms to the Lebanese army and they were betting on Washington. And then in 2008 when Hezbollah sent its militia to sweep their territories and Hezbollah started assassinating them, they held their line, but then eventually, we advised them to get into an agreement with Hezbollah. It's known as the Doha Agreement in 2008.

So, that was when they just folded and they said, "Okay, we can't really beat Hezbollah on our own, so let's just go with Hezbollah." And the same thing happened in Iraq. You probably remember. When the Iraqis elected Ayad Allawi with the majority in parliament, they came out against Iran, against Maliki. We overrode Iraqi democracy and we said, "No, if we accept Allawi as prime minister, that probably provoke Iran." And since we were trying to get on the good graces of Iran and make them enter into a nuclear deal, we picked Maliki who had not won the election over Allawi.

So, these people do come out from time to time against militias, against Iran, against the oppressors in Iran too. I think President Obama himself is on the record saying that we made the mistake by not supporting the Iranians and the revolution in 2009, the Green Revolution. So, the point here is that we're inconsistent so many times. We promised these people to come out against their oppressors, and the minute they do, or maybe not the minute, a month, a year, two years after they do, we just let go of them because we start thinking of de-escalation and Band-Aid solutions. So, now what I was trying to say is that now these oligarchs think that things are changing and they're trying to extend their heads out to see whether there's any chance that they can make Hezbollah surrender its arms. But if we, in Washington, keep on saying, "Ceasefire. Ceasefire. De-escalation." And just Band-Aid solutions, I don't think that these guys will come all the way that we want them to come out to support.

DOUGHERTY: Thank you, Ellen. That does conclude the Q&A portion of the call. Before I ask Brad, David and Hussain to give just a really quick wrap up, I would like to remind you that you can find all of their research and analysis on the FDD website at fdd.org. If you'd like to have a conversation with any of our experts here or any other FDD expert individually, you can reach me at press@fdd.org and me and my colleagues will work on scheduling that. I'd like to quickly thank everyone for being on the call. Ellie Bufkin, thank you for the great work in the background to make everything go smoothly. So, let us quickly go to the summary. Brad, we will start with you and then to David, and conclude with Hussain.

BOWMAN: Thanks, Joe. I appreciate you moderating this and it's great to be with my distinguished colleagues, and thanks for everyone tuning in. Yeah, so I think the bottom line is that the United States has a lot going on in the world. We see this axis of aggressors emerging that consists of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. And I view China as the number one threat we confront. But the bottom line is that the Middle East is a mess, and what happens in the Middle East matters here. That was the main lesson of the September 11th, 2001 attack on our country. And a lot of people want to put the Middle East in the rear-view mirror, but the Middle East resists that and our adversaries there resist that.

And so, the question is what do we do to protect American interests? And if we don't do enough in the Middle East, then small problems become larger and then we have to come back at a greater cost later to deal with problems that we could have kept small with a modest investment of resources.

So, in a world like that where you have China, Russia, Iran, North Korea working together more than ever, what's one of the main-take home messages? The main take-home message is you need capable and motivated allies and partners.

Well, good news, newsflash, we have one, it's called Israel. Israel is the most motivated and capable partner we have in terms of going after the subset of adversaries we confront in the Middle East. That is the Islamic Republic of Iran and its terror proxies. In the last week or two, they've demonstrated again that they are a regional power that is capable and motivated. They have shifted the momentum in a very significant way. The enemies of America and Israel are on their heels. Israel has the momentum, and that is a good thing.

So, instead of publicly criticizing our best ally in the region and depriving them of the means of self-defense, we should support what they're doing as they're going after our adversaries and give them the weapons they need to finish the job. The more we do that, the more our interests will be protected, the more small problems can be kept small and the more we can do what we need to do elsewhere in the world, not just in the Middle East. So, I think this is a decisive moment. The Biden administration's record up to this point has been mixed. Hopefully, they will make good on their promises to impose serious or severe consequences in Iran. And if they don't, we should expect more of the same from our enemies. Thanks.

DOUGHERTY: Thanks, Brad. David?

DAOUD: I will completely agree with Brad. I think when we assess the Middle East, part of why I think we are critical with the Israelis is that we've spent a lot of energy on supporting actors that were perhaps not worthy of our support. So now we're taking an even more critical look at even credible allies. I think when the United States deals with the Middle East, we need to take a very hard assessment of those actors who are clamoring for our support but have not yet proven themselves, not just the ones saying the things we want to hear, not the ones just sloganeering in a way that seems to align with our interests, but those actors that have the means, the capability, and most importantly the will to protect their interests. Those actors that also, in doing so, guarantee that American power projection remains strong in the region without a strong and direct American presence. Surrogates.

We have a set of allies like that. The Israelis primarily. I don't think we have an ally as willing to do what is necessary to maintain its survival. And this is an almost unconditional American alyl, as unconditional as it gets despite the natural differences and disagreements between allies.. We have other allies in the region as well that we need to be backing. If we don't want to be directly involved in the region, building up those allies, bringing them together, tightening their relations and security coordination between each other and ours with them. That'll obviate the need for direct American involvement in the region to maintain the region's security and quiet.

What we should not do, however, is to rely on the siren song of certain actors who have dragged us into morasses in the region. I mean, the Bachir Gemayels and the Ahmed Chalabis of history should not continue to pull on us. Nor should talk of a "Lebanese opposition" or "Shiite opposition" do so now. And in doing so, when we get involved at the behest of such actors and end up on campaigns that we never should have been involved in, it one, creates a distaste for our continued involvement in the Middle East, which will forever remain a region that is critical to our interests, but it also clouds our judgment, I think, when it comes to allies that are actually willing to act in their own interests and who are genuinely aligned with us.

DOUGHERTY: David, thank you. Hussain?

HUSSAIN: Yes. I'll just conclude by saying that we have to have a strategy, a foreign policy that's different from what we have now, that's mostly the Band-Aid way of dealing with things. There are so many things that are really great ideas, but they do not resonate domestically and vice versa. We have to untie what sounds good domestically from what's really wise and doing overseas. I'll give an example. The surge of troops under President Bush was probably the best decision he's made. He stabilized Iraq, brought violence levels down in 2011, down to pre-2003 levels. And at the time, if you remember, he ordered this single-handedly. He was opposed by everyone, not only from the Democrats, even from the Republicans, including from candidate at the time, John McCain.

So, there are ideas that really work overseas that don't really sound really good in Washington. So, this is the reason why we should keep foreign policy away from domestic politics and away from populism. And I think populism has been hurting our decision making overseas so much. It's been hindering our support of our allies, most of our allies, especially in the Middle East. We should untie these two policies for a proper foreign policy instead.

DOUGHERTY: Thank you, everybody, for participating in today's call and this does conclude the call.