Israel 2040: Benny Gantz's Vision for Security and Cooperation

November 3, 2025
Featuring Benny Gantz
Moderated by Mark Dubowitz
Introductory remarks by Jonathan Schanzer

This transcript has been edited for clarity.

SCHANZER: Welcome, and thank you for joining us for today's event hosted by Foundation for Defense of Democracies. I'm Jonathan Schanzer, FDD's executive director. In the wake of the attacks of October 7, 2023, and the successes in its multi-front campaigns against the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies, Israeli leaders are now assessing how to turn battlefield successes into strategic gains amidst some rapidly shifting regional and global dynamics.

Israel now faces a critical moment in redefining its national security doctrine to address the emerging challenges and opportunities. It's time, as the Israelis say, to redefine Israel's long-term strategy.

Some enemies appear to be losing strength like Hezbollah and Hamas. Some appear to be gaining influence and power across the region – I'm thinking here about the Republic of Turkey. The Iranian missile and nuclear challenges remain. Questions about the future of Syria continue to swirl. And normalization with the Arab world remains a high priority in Jerusalem, even as the war over the last two years has touched more than a few raw nerves.

Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Benny Gantz has recently come out with Israel's Security Vision 2040. That's his roadmap for national resilience, strategic cooperation, and sustained empowerment. Minister Gantz served as the minister of defense from 2020 to 2022 before becoming deputy prime minister. In this time, he also served as alternative prime minister.

During the Israel-Gaza War, Gantz was a member of Prime Minister Netanyahu's war cabinet as a minister without portfolio. Prior to the war, he was Israel's 20th chief of staff for the IDF, a post in which he served until 2015. During his 38 years of service in the IDF, Gantz commanded the Shaldag Unit, the Paratroopers Brigade, the Liaison to Lebanon Unit, the Judea and Samaria Division, the Northern Command, and the GOC [General Officer Commanding] Army Headquarters.

Following a presentation by Minister Gantz, FDD Chief Executive Mark Dubowitz will moderate a discussion digging deeper on the issues put forward.

Before we dive in, a bit of housekeeping: FDD regularly hosts political and military figures from the Middle East for policy discussions. Their presence on our stage in no way is a reflection of our political preferences. We are simply eager to have our audience hear a wide range of views from some of the top minds in foreign policy.

On another note, for nearly 25 years, FDD has operated as a fiercely independent, nonpartisan research institution exclusively focused on national security and foreign policy. As a point of pride and principle, we do not accept foreign government funding.

For more on our work, please visit our website FDD.org, follow us on X and Instagram, and subscribe to our YouTube channel. We're everywhere now. Over to you, Mark.

DUBOWITZ: Great. Jon, thanks so much. And Minister Gantz, welcome. Welcome to FDD. It's really an honor to have you. And I'm going to turn it over to you for your presentation.

GANTZ: Thank you very much, Mark, and all the friends. This is a very important event for me. As you rightly mentioned, we came up with some kind of a concept that we need to update some of our elements of national security and security at large. And you know, it's honestly speaking, it's already there but it's still in the oven, because we are getting remarks and we are rethinking some of the issues. And maybe this meeting will also give me some ideas that I have to adopt or to emphasize within this document.

However, as I begin, I would say that the event of October 7, when I met with the people around me, when I was inside the cabinet or outside the cabinet really, I always said that I bow my head with professional shame for the event of October 7 itself. I think this event could have been prevented, should have been prevented, but nevertheless, it happened. So, we cannot ignore the fact that it happened, of course.

But I raise my head with pride for the level of heroism I've seen since then, whether it's the civilians in the kibbutzim and the villages around Gaza fighting for themselves, whether it's the Israeli IDF soldiers fighting in the first few days, and later on, of course, in a very, very chaotic situation. And it's like, you know, an unexpected event for them so they have to reorganize themselves and to fight again.

And when I joined the war cabinet, I saw all those officers who I commanded before and they all felt big shame for not succeeding. But those were the same officers and soldiers that I had to win the war with. So, I had to encourage them, to strengthen them, and to make sure that they believe in themselves. And eventually they did. And as you can definitely see, Israel throughout those two years with the same, more or less, the same commanders and soldiers and new soldiers, and incoming and rotation in different jobs and different assignments really led to a very successful military operation in all the fronts that we have operated in.

We have changed the situation in the southern place – southern border. I myself moved to a kibbutz by the border of Gaza when the war started, and I've been living there since then. And the same stand for the Northern arena and other arena, Iran and other places, we see how it worked well. So, I'm also very proud of – and maybe it is proven that though it's hard, we can be caught by surprise, but we will always win the war. No one will ever win the war upon us, and Israel is very strong, not just militarily speaking, but also the social aspects and the civilian society really reacted good and helped each other and unity was there when we needed it so much.

So, I think that we can be proud of what we achieved. And we must, and I think it's a moral duty, to ask ourselves serious questions about the last twenty years. And I've been calling for inquiry – official inquiry of the war. Not just the war, but the last decades. And I have to explain seven years out of that. So, it's not that I'm putting myself aside and said that "I was visiting the neighbors at the time." No, I was there for seven years out of those twenty years with direct responsibility as chief of defense forces and as minister of defense for three years, almost. So, I think we have many, many questions we have to ask ourselves. And one of the goals of this new concept that we are developing is coming out of those questions that we had with ourselves. We didn't wait, of course, for the committee to put itself.

(PRESENTATION)

GANTZ: So, basically those two main events, I would say, militarily speaking – before talking about the military aspect, I think the biggest loss we had was that we lost the confidence in ourselves and between our different system. But this is something we have to work on unmilitary perspective. But from the military perspective, it was the first time we have experienced a massive invasion and temporary occupation of our villages. And this is something that never actually happened.

Even in 1973, it was military lines without really influencing the civilians. And like the kibbutz I'm living in actually was taken by the Egyptian in 1948 after five days of fighting. And this in October 2023, the second time it happened, it almost happened because we succeeded to block a company size of terrorists, like 40 of them at the gates of the kibbutz and none of them entered the kibbutz itself. But we had several minutes alert, so we were lucky. But other kibbutzim, as you well know, were not as much as lucky as that. And the chaos was so big. So, it took the IDF quite a long time to react.

And then, of course, the second issue is the eruption of the first campaign, I would say, of Israel-Iran direct war. We've been fighting against its proxies in different situations, but it was the first time from Iran to Israel and vice versa. We saw massive attacks by the Iranians. The first two attempts in April and October, I believe. And over there you could see actually the strength of the Israel defense capacity combined with regional capabilities orchestrated by CENTCOM in other places.

And it was a very successful defense system that we have built together with CENTCOM since the [brokering] of Abraham Accord, which was a very positive event. We called it Middle East Air Defense, and it was very successful. And on the other way, everything we wanted to target in Iran, we actually did. So, they knew ahead of time that we are capable of reaching every place we wanted to reach, which was proven later on during the 12 days operation against the nuclear and the military missile capacity of Iran later on. But to wrap this up, those are two events that we haven't experienced before in that magnitude. So, this is something we have to remember.

Now, when you look at the Israeli history of security conceptual development, [Prime Minister] Ben-Gurion set it up on three dimensions of deterrence and early warning and decisive victory. And as history moved forward and we went into the asymmetric situation, we actually added another capacity, which is the defense element.

Now, when we're saying defense element, it's not just border defense or military defense activity, but it also has to do with counter- standoff operation capacity of our elements. And we had to build up from '91, when actually the first Iraqi war – when we experienced an attack from Iraq of 39 or 40 Scud missiles, the regulation of home front command of how each house should be built and what kind of protection should one have. So, you would have ground defense, you would have air defense, you would have protection. Of course, then came the cyber issue, and all those elements that we had to address.

And more than that, you know, it went into our civilians. It's not just, you know, the frontline. I remember in 1973, I was a teenager at the time, working in the village and helping and assisting an air defense battery that was in our backyards. And I remember we were very worried about what happened in the front, but nothing really happened to us. The same place, the same field, that was hit by rockets several decades later. And the war is not just happening somewhere there. It's influencing each and every one of the Israeli citizens, whether it's the standoff capacity of our enemies or other aspects. So, it was a very important element.

However, taking lesson learned from October 7, I think we need to add a fifth element, if you wish, and that has to do with strategic initiative. When I talk about strategic initiative, I look at it from a pol-mil perspective. It's not necessarily military operation, but when you see threat growing, you have to do something about it. So, whether you can prevent it by political or diplomatic operations or activities, or if you have no choice, then you have to do something.

Now, look at it this way. When we conduct, when you conduct special forces or limited military operation, you should do them when you can. Those kind of operations should be something which have some level of importance. You control most of the variables of it. And the impact is limited. So, you can do it when you can. But when you talk about full-scale war, you have to do it only when you have no choice, because the impact of war in all fields is much bigger than limited special forces or any other small-scale military operation. And it has to do, of course, with global impact, with economical impact, with military impact, et cetera, et cetera.

So, the big question is how can you define a strategic necessity to do something? So, if I look at the Gaza Strip, for example, what was our mistake? Hamas actually built a whole division and ready to launch. And you ask yourself, "Can I stay on high alert, 365 days a year? Because maybe I know something. But what happened with the thing I don't know? And can I find myself surprised by a more severe scenario than the one I expect to see?"

Now, of course, Israel failed to assess Hamas. And the result was painful. But nevertheless, we will still have to assess in the future because once again, you cannot stay on high alert all the time, all the country. I mean, it's a small place. We won't be able to keep, you know, so many divisions all around the country just in case something happens.

So, you should ask yourself, okay, if that's the severe optional scenario – now, I'm not talking about, you know, exaggeration. I'm not talking about, you know, "I will see submarines in the desert," because there's no sea in the desert and they don't have submarines. So, I don't come up with fantasies to frighten myself. But I should ask myself, do I think they will penetrate in three or four or five areas, but can they operate in sixty of them? And the answer is yes. If the answer is yes, I have to have flexibility to react to it. Now if I cannot hold my entire forces all the time on a high alert, which is in most cases that's the case, then I have to initiate something to prevent this option from even happening.

To that we need to add the fact that we didn't assess right the jihadic multiplier. I think Sinwar was not a stupid guy. I think he realized that Israel will act. I don't know if he thought that we will act as we did. He had several assumptions, this Sinwar. One was that others will join him, well they did not. I mean, he tried to orchestrate it with others, but it didn't work for them, and they definitely showed the, I would say operational solidarity with him in fires and things like that. But if you look up north, we were ready in high alert in 24 hours. I mean, it was done for them before they even were able to do anything.

So, this didn't work for him. He thought we will not unite within the country. Well, I moved into the government, and we did unite in the country. He thought we will never go into Gaza. Well, we went into Gaza. He thought we won't even succeed to fight the underground. Well, we show him that we are capable of fighting the underground. And the last fifth assumption, which was a fuck up for him, was that it went too well for him because what happened in October 7 was so, so severe, so difficult for us. We really, you know, we had no choice but to take Gaza out.

And I remember sitting in the Southern Command talking with one of the generals who lost his mother, and he fought in Kibbutz Be'eri and killed fifteen terrorists himself while losing part of his family. And I said, "Yossi, Hamas controlled Gaza from 2007, but it's over. I don't know how we're going to do it. I don't know how it's how long it's going to take us, but that's all." So, when we look back, we allowed an operational monster directed by jihadist approach, which is inconsistent with our logic, with our rational thinking. Hamas should have known that we will do what we did. But nevertheless, they decided to do so because of religious belief. I don't know how to explain it.

So, one of the lessons that I have from here that we should not allow high capacity or high capabilities within the head of jihadists, which I don't know how to follow the rationale. It's not a state of responsibility. Those are irrational people, or they have a rationale which I don't understand. We should not allow such a monster to grow. What are the means to make sure it doesn't happen? Hopefully, those can be diplomatic. War should not be our first option, but it should be an option that we need to consider using, if the threat is serious at that scale, or if it's nuclear, or other issues that combine big threat and jihadic approach, which I think is important. So, we conclude, as we conclude the first quarter, we must, as I said, reassess everything we believe.

So, I think we have several elements that we need to deal with. One would be the strategic global alignment and the relations we have, I would say, with the global world, mainly with United States as our biggest partner and supporter and strategic backup, which I think is very important for the state of Israel. But also, with Europe, and India, and other moderate global powers that we need to somehow work with against terror and to find many, many, I would say, shared interests that we can fight on. And the third aspect would be some regional coalition on the regional level and strengthening ourselves on the basis of MEAD. I think we should promote the camp of moderates versus the camp of radical elements. And I think this is very important, of course, strengthen Israel capacity. So, actually, the result of it should be something like that we do some kind of strategic flip, if you wish, vis-à-vis the Iranians.

So, if the idea of Soleimani before and the Iranian regime with its proxies and even its connection with the Sunni elements of the shape of Hamas, so we need to make a flip against Iran and to create those moderate countries, which I think is possible together with Abraham Accord countries, hopefully with Saudi in the future.

I hope that we can deepen the relations with Egypt and Jordan. And I think we should look what's happening in Lebanon and Syria. And maybe, I mean, it's early to say, but there are also good signs. Lebanon is trying more and re-insisting on dismantling Hayek Hezbollah as an independent, capable organization. Definitely the southern part of Lebanon that might create – don't forget Hezbollah had sixteen battalions size, plus – it's more than a battalion, it's called forge, which is still a bit bigger than a battalion – sixteen of them all along our lines. So, we had plans for that and they couldn't use them, but it's a threat that we cannot accept, of course, on our borders for the reason I've explained. So, I hope Lebanon goes to the right direction, and I hope that in Syria we'll see a better regime and that we can come up at least for the first stage with some kind of security arrangement and on that base down the road in future maybe we can achieve even more than that but currently I would settle for a security arrangement with the Syrians. And on all those fronts we need to mean business. So, if something is against what have been agreed with us, we may talk, we may send alert, but if it doesn't change, we need to act.

We cannot afford to go back to October 6, if you wish, on all those fronts that we went on this issue. A big issue is of course Iran, and I think that Iran is the major source of those capacities and capabilities in all those countries and without Iran's supports I don't think that we would see something of that scale from the Houthis or from that scale from the Hezbollah or for that scale from Hamas or others.

So, I think we must look at it, and I think really, as I said before, Iran is a global challenge, it's a regional challenge, and it's also a threat for the State of Israel. And I think the world and the region should be aware of what I've just said, and I keep saying it all the time. And it should deal with Iran, not because of an Israeli interest, because Israel will take care of itself, but for global interest. And I'm very happy with President Trump's decision to take part in this assault and use American capacity to deal with the nuclear aspect. So, I think that this is very, very important.

On the military side, we must operate against the nuclear or offensive capacity of Iran. I think we should operate in defensive aspect from our perspective but neutralizing their defensive element in case we need to use our offensive capacity. So, it goes actually together. Economic pressure, and of course creating the right legitimacy for our operation, in different capacity. And in order to be able to do that, we must maintain a collaboration of intelligence capacity of different countries and international cooperation, international inspection in Iran.

And once again, if I have to look at what I've talked so far, it's very important that we will look at reality as it is, and not as we would hope it to be. And if Iran is bluffing, we need to see Iran is bluffing. We should not find different words for what we are saying in ourselves. If Hezbollah is not dismantling himself, and it's still operating in southern Lebanon. So, that's what should be the case. Hamas is not dismantling itself as [the ceasefire] begins. That's the case. And let's not tell stories to ourselves because eventually we will have to find this. Of course, all these regional aspects are very important. We also have our, I would say, local element, especially with the Palestinian arena. It has some influence to the region and vice versa.

I think that the regional normalization can set the tone for future progress between us and the Palestinians. And I think we have to insist on performing based aspect with the Palestinians. Everybody demands for them reform and counter corruption and countering terrorism activity. I want to see results. Now, as you may know, I met with Abu Mazen three times. I don't regret meeting with him. And I think we should talk with whoever we can, and we need to fight whoever we need. But nevertheless, once again, we must look at reality as it is to include the Palestinian Authority and how it looks. And I think that we need to look at their reforms and governance capacity and all those issues which are very important.

As far as Gaza, U.S.-led civil administration is now looking for the next decade. I think it's going to be a very chaotic decade right now. We will have to be very strong on defense, making sure that nothing happens to us. And when we need to use some offensive operation, if Hamas is not dismantling itself, or we see something come up, then we'll have to do it. Once again, I think it's going to take us a decade for them to be able to rebuild something they can live with, and we can live beside. Now, I'm against resettling our settlements inside Gaza. I don't think we should do it, but we must maintain security zone in our hands.

Now, it's pretty much look like this, the yellow zone, the current operation, but maybe it can be adjusted, it will be down the road. But once again, we need to take the next decade to make sure that something is being built that they can live with and we can live beside it. I think it's good for both sides. And I think eventually some Palestinians governance will have to be practiced over there. But until that happens, we'll have to see some kind of regional and international cooperation over this issue in Gaza.

We must open our eyes to what's happening between Turkey and Syria. Once again, it's very important to reconstruct Syria and understand the Turkish involvement. And I think we should take the advantage of Turkey being part of NATO and the Western world to motivate Turkey to align Syria with the axis of moderate countries and not necessarily back to the Iranian's hand as was before the war.

And once again, from our perspective, I think we should be looking forward for those kind of development as long as we can secure our security interests, which are mainly defense, and make sure that Syria is not becoming a corridor to rearm Hezbollah in Lebanon or to reinstall the militias that might operate against Israel inside Syria itself. So, this is also a very sensitive arena that you must pay attention to and remember that. And once again, taking advantage of Turkey being part of NATO.

As far as the Eastern Mediterranean, I think a lot can be done and should be done to increase cooperation between the different countries. From intelligence to electromagnetic spectrum to radars, et cetera. Of course, navigation in the Mediterranean.

But I think also we need to work on some kind of stockpiling together, and to have some kind of international consortium because longs are very long. And we need lots of ammunition and you cannot pre-produce everything so you might have some kind of – creating reservoir of critical elements for weaponization processes. And if every country will try to do it for itself we will go bankrupt, but if we somehow work with only together on explosive or new chips and a new critical element of industry on the national level, I think we – an international, regional level, I think we can help industries run their businesses as a as a private businesses, as an industry – you know they will walk by orders and purchases and they won't stockpile anything, but countries can stockpile And we should create some kind of thing – that kind of things that will give us some level of flexibility, industrial flexibility to support our forces once those are operated.

Of course, there is all this issue of legitimacy, and I think we have to work on it. If you want to initiate something, you need to have the right basis of legitimacy to do it. So, it has to do inside Israel, of course, of how we explain what's happening to our society, and to make sure that people understand that what we are doing has security sense to it and not political sense for something, but also other countries.

And once again, here I suggest for us, really let us look at reality as it is and not as we hope it to be. And I think that will be very, very important. And as I've talked before, the capacity building of MOU, if possible, business states, of defense budget planning and joint stockpiling with countries.

We have to double our defensive export, and we have to triple our offensive and doubling our defensive stockpiles inside the country because we saw the numbers and those might come again in the future. Once again, maybe not in one time, we have to really – when we look realistically on things, let's look at reality as it is and not as we hope it to be. But let's not frighten ourselves with stories that are not in place in time, because otherwise we will kill all our budget only on security. And I think we have more issues than just security for our own consideration.

And of course, I think it's very important to maintain Israel's QME [Qualitative Military Edge]. And this is something we need to understand. There's no other democracy in the Middle East. I don't see one rising either. And we are the only democratic outpost of the Western world in the Middle East. So, either we are the strongest, with no doubt, or we don't exist. And I think Israel's existence is not just a question of national interest of the Israeli people, but also of the democratic world.

Everyone is telling us all the time; you have all the right to defend yourself. But then ask yourself, what exactly does it mean? Can we be nice with Hamas and say, "Please dismantle yourself?" Will it help? Will it help that I say, "Please Hezbollah, take yourself northern from the Awali River," will it help? It won't. So, when people are backing us up and saying you have all the right to defend yourself, does it mean? In terms of backing Israel as it fights and backing Israel as it's building its force into the case that it will need to fight.

And it's a good opportunity for me to thank the United States for this unquestioned support that we've been getting from them. All across the administration you know there are different lines and different approaches sometimes but, by and large, I think we be you know being backed up strategically speaking by, and rightly so from my perspective, of course, by the United States and I'm very, very, very happy with that.

So, if I have to wrap up everything, and what should be my core message to you, looking at reality might take you to an operational decision. And if it might take you to an operational decision, you must make sure you are capable of doing it, in terms of capacity and capabilities. In all aspects, whether those are military aspects, diplomatic aspects, legal aspects, et cetera.

I think that the war have achieved a lot, and I'm quite optimistic in terms of the strength of Israel, especially as you see the society and how it act. Now don't be confused with the political echelon, we've been fighting each other, and I think it's sometimes we make so much noise that people kind of forget to see what's happening on the street itself, and on the street itself we have great society, high level of technology, high level of education, unity that supports each other a lot. And I hope that we as politicians will behave as our military unit behaved, all of them were there: right, left, religious, non-religious, Jews, Arabs. Everybody served somehow most of the people serve. And I hope to see more of that in the future.

So, I think that would be my main message, and I can take any question that you can think of right now. Thank you very much for listening.

DUBOWITZ: So, Minister Gantz, thank you very much. A great presentation. I actually want to begin where you ended, which is with some interesting statistics about the incredible society that you're a part of and that you've had, I'm sure, the honor of leading for many years. There was a recent study that Israel is the fifth happiest country on Earth and second happiest for people under the age of thirty in the middle of a war. which I think just shows incredible, extraordinary resilience of your society.

And so, while the politicians bicker, as you say, the people have stood up for their country, incredible patriotism and commitment, and they're happy people, even given all the terrible things that your country's gone through since October 7th. I just want to put a finer point on that. The second thing is, your main message to us is, face reality. Don't look at what you hope for but look at what you have to deal with.

And I want to begin with the question of Iran, because I think in Washington there is a sense that we're telling ourselves a story, and the story is that we obliterated Iran's nuclear program and that the Axis of Resistance, or what I call the "Axis of Misery," has been destroyed, and that would be Iran's proxy network. But I think, as you've pointed out and others have pointed out, that's not true. Iran's nuclear program hasn't been obliterated. The Axis of Misery hasn't been destroyed. And Iran is reconstituting.

It's reconstituting its air defenses, its ballistic missile production capability, its terror proxy network, and certainly will look to reconstitute its nuclear program. So, I note that you've set 2028 as a target to neutralize the Iranian threat. And you've spoken of creating a credible existential threat to the Iranian regime.

Perhaps you could talk a little bit more about why 2028, and how do we actually create that credible existential threat to the regime in Iran so that it chooses a different path away from nuclear weapons and regional destruction?

GANTZ: Yes, Mark. First of all, yes, indeed. You know, we Jewish people, we say "wow," and "oy vey" in the same word, it's the same matters. And indeed, this is a very unique society. And we celebrate Memorial Day and the Day of Independence together, day after day, and moving from Memorial Day to Independence Day, it's a sign of fireworks at eight o'clock at night and that's it. People are actually capable of moving from one event to other.

But once again, I think for us as politicians, I think we should behave better, seriously speaking, I think we should behave better in order to project to our society that it can look different. But let's put this one aside.

Iran. I think the only one to decide if they become nuclear or not are the Iranians themselves. The issue is to convince them that that's the better track for them. Now, obviously, just as the threshold of shooting at Israel happened during the last two years, the threshold of the Western world led by the front of Israelis and Americans have happened as well from their perspective.

So whatever Israel did, can do more. Whatever the United States decided to do, it can do more. I would also empower the countries around us and the Europeans; it's influenced them just as well. The UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles] who are exploding Kiev are made in Tehran. That's the technology, that's the capability. It's not someone else's problem. The biggest attack in the region prior to this war was on Saudi Arabia, Aramco, by the Iranians. So, this is not a private issue.

So, as I said, intelligence, cooperation, high level of inspection. If America can come up, or the international community can come up with an excellent agreement, with no strategic blinking, fine with me. If we inspection anytime, anywhere, zero warning, and zero tolerance for any obstacles that we find, then fine with me. I have nothing against the Iranian people, obviously. But when something goes wrong, we will have to act.

So why '28? It's an assumption, hopefully not the wrong one. You also have to build your forces, to find new ammunition, to figure out what's happening. So, I would say it's a working assumption. You can find yourself earlier a year or later a year. It's not…

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Just a quick observation, not for you to make, but for me to make as an American. I mean, obviously, 2028 would be nearing the end of President Trump's term. I think President Trump has certainly shown a commitment to stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program, and not only threatened credible military force, but used it. No other president was prepared to do it in the past.

GANTZ: And I think that the threat became credible because they saw what happened. We flew with everything we wanted above Iran.

DUBOWITZ: Right. So, I think it's important that Israel understand that, you know, you've got three years to really do what's necessary because in 2029, I can't promise you, as an American, that you're going to have a president in the White House who understands the threat of the Islamic Republic and is prepared to move forcefully against it.

The other thing I just would add, just it's been a longstanding theme of FDDs is, you know, we believe in maximum pressure on the regime and maximum support for the Iranian people, because ultimately, it's the Iranian people who can help bring down this regime. And your government, my government, we should be really thinking about, how do we support the people? Because I think that that's a critical element of any Iran strategy.

I could talk to you about Iran for the entire day because what I do –

GANTZ: That's right. But just let's just remember that, as far as regime change, there should be a ratio between the weight of Israel and the weight of the United States. You guys can lift up much more than we can.

DUBOWITZ: Right, right. And again, when we talk regime change at FDD, it's not 500,000 mechanized Israeli and American troops invading Iran. It's supporting the people the way President Reagan supported anti-Soviet dissidents behind the Iron Curtain, what was a very successful strategy.

But I want to ask you, Minister Gantz, as I said, I can talk about Iran all day, but I want to move to the other great power in the Middle East, the rising power of Turkey. You know, it's a country that we've been working on at FDD for many years. It's a country that I have had the privilege of visiting probably fifteen, twenty times leading back to the early 1990's. And it's a country that has been fundamentally transformed under Erdogan into a country that I would characterize more as a frenemy of Israel. Not quite an enemy, but not quite a friend.

It's really challenging the Middle Eastern order, not only Israel, but our Arab allies like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and others. And sort of the rise of Islamism, Muslim Brotherhood-led Islamism, funded by Qatar, and I think operationalized in many ways by the Turks. How do you see Turkey in the next decade? And what role can we in the United States play? Because Turkey, after all, is a NATO country. And hopefully that does give us leverage to ensure that Turkey and Israel don't devolve into becoming enemies.

GANTZ: Yeah, well, I think "frenemy" might be an interesting definition. If I may, I want to go back to the post-Soviet Union era for a second. I think they would have made a mistake not to walk through Turkey on those former Islamic republicans of the Soviet Union. So instead of Iran influencing them, let Turkey, which is a more moderate place, get the resources and supply them to the right places in former Soviet Union countries. And by that, increasing the benefits for the Turks, but also the benefit for the West, if you wish. Okay, so let's go back. If I'm correct on this one, let's think as for now.

Turkey needs the West. It's connected to NATO. Its economy is highly connected to what's happening in Europe. And I think we should try and influence Turkey to reassess where it want to be, to rebalance where it want to be between the West and the extremists of the Muslim Brotherhood. And I think they should choose the West so they can keep their Muslim approach; they can keep supporting the Muslims. That's fine with me – but stay away from radicals. I think that that would be the main issue and the main emphasis that we need to give to Turkey.

Now, I met with Erdogan myself three years ago. I don't think it's a lost case. I don't think it's a lost case. But once again, as I said before, we should look at it step-by-step, fact by fact, reality as it is. I hope we can influence Turkey to benefit from being part of the West than being attached to the radicals. And in many ways, it stands for the Qataris as well. And they have to assess where they are and where they want to go to and who they're going to lean with. And I think there is a good chance of succeeding. And at the same time, we should prepare ourselves for the negative event. I'm not just hoping for the good but prepare for myself for the bad, worse situation.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, and if you don't want me asking, I want to sort of focus on this. Because a lot of conversations in Washington about Gaza right now, and obviously those are interesting conversations. But I do think your comment about a trilateral defense cooperation arrangement with Israel and Greece and Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean, maybe Southern Europe.

I'm also starting to look at sort of blue water issues in the Israeli Navy. I know you're a former paratrooper, but your friends in *Shayetet* and the Israeli Navy, obviously great capabilities, but relatively small given the size of the country. But a sort of Mediterranean strategy and of countering the influence of Turkey and others. It seems to me that, again, Greece, Cyprus, Southern Europe, the United States are going to play a really important role in that. So, I was struck by your comments on that, and I think that's very strategic as you look at your position over the next ten years.

GANTZ: Yeah. Once again, I'm not trying to confront Turkey necessarily. I'm looking at it from another perspective of common interest by Greece, Cyprus, ourselves, maybe even Italy, or other or even other countries in Europe that may need, may want to become part of this consortium, I would say. And once again, I think the Turks will have much more to benefit from cooperating rather than confronting, and that's where diplomacy needs to work.

And you know, even when I traveled the area at the time, defense of Greece talk with defense of Turkey, at the same time, they had to deconflict they had issues, they could talk with one another. I mean, even when you see the arguments on the upper diplomatic level down the road on the, on the defense-to-defense aspect, those guys could talk with one another. And I think we should work on it. I think everybody will benefit of it.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, and along those lines, I mean, obviously, the Abraham Accords were groundbreaking, the possibility of normalization with Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. Tell us, from your perspective, former minister of defense, IDF chief of staff, decade-long career in military and intelligence matters, how do you see that relationship being encouraged? I mean, how do we unlock Saudi's participation in a broader Abraham Accords model from a security, defense, intelligence-sharing operation framework?

GANTZ: Yeah, I think it's pretty much there. Of course, I think we need to look differently on Indonesia, which is a different story. Once we have good relations with the Saudis, and we have good relations with the Saudis. It's not a secret anymore. Not too many people talk about it, but I was in Saudi as a chief of defense forces. And we have some level of understanding – I wouldn't say cooperation but understanding. And of course, the CENTCOM right now, the fact that Israel have been moved from EUCOM to CENTCOM was a very beneficial move because now we can somehow even informally orchestrate ourselves within the region in a much more efficient way, and everybody's benefiting of it.

Now, what can the Saudi benefit from normalization with Israel? First, its security aspect. They are worried about the Iranians and the Houthis much – at least as much as we are. And then, of course, there's technology and science, and they are building all the coastline with the Red Sea, so we can cooperate in Neom, in high-tech, in so many things. I think what we need to have with them is some kind of Palestinian token, a formula that will not threaten us, but will satisfy them.

Once we find the right wording and the right concept for that, and we get the legitimacy from Saudi Arabia as one who hold Mecca and Medina, the two Islamic places which are most important, I think it would be easier for Indonesia, such a big country, to follow on Saudi to kind of increase the relations with us. So, I think it goes back to have some kind of Palestinian token. Once again, I don't want to give the Palestinians the power to neutralize our future relation with the Saudi because they will say no for everything.

But to figure out what might be, I suggested a few years ago the phrase of two entities situation. Everybody talks about two-state solution, right? Everybody talks about this two-state solution. It's a framework that came up years ago. Now, what happened was a very high vision from one perspective, but a very low reality, because we had more than a thousand people in the Second Intifada were blown up in buses in Israel. I mean, everybody says, what are you talking about? What are you talking about?

And October 7 even pushed it further away. So, it's too much of a cliff to overcome in one time. So, I think we should have a period of time of two entities situation where Israel maintain its security superiority. Each one is taking care of itself. Those are combined economies and whether we can create a better reference for us than to discuss a permanent agreement with the Palestinians. It's impossible to have something like that now.

Of course, I don't know what will happen with the Palestinians when Abu Mazen is gone, because we may see a period of chaotic governance within the Palestinian Authority as well, once Abu Mazen is stepping down and he is not getting younger on a daily basis. So, this is also something we have to bear in mind, and I hope the Saudis will join us.

Now, I want to share with you my insight with all the discussions I have with different elements within the region, whether Saudis, Emiratis, and others. And I've been talking with all of them on a constant basis. And I've been saying it so many times in different places. For them, English and the Western world are more then we evaluate. For them, it's a culture. For them, it's science. For them, it's the future.

How many students are studying in China, from Saudi Arabia, or from the Emirates? Or how many of them are studying in Europe and in the States? That shows you where their interests, future interests are. It's not that they will not deal with Asia, because it's a big money over there, but the interest go back to the States. They might have many, many economical interest in working with the East, but the real interest goes back to the West and the United States. So let us take this advantage and work with them and figure out what comes out for them. And I think we can do it. And we will all benefit from that.

DUBOWITZ: I would note, Mr. Gantz, that I was told recently that actually the Emiratis have banned their students from studying in the UK and Ireland because they're so afraid that if they send their students to British and Irish universities, that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists will get hold of them and radicalize them. And when they look at Iran as a threat, they see equally the Brotherhood and Islamism as a threat.

GANTZ: I agree. I agree. And, you know, they know that we were very right in confronting Gaza the way we did. It was just too tough on them, publicly speaking. They know the reality as well.

DUBOWITZ: Well, it does raise the question that, I mean, certainly given your positions in the military over many years, I mean, I'm seeing this interesting model that Israel has developed, that the IDF has developed, first of all, in Judea and Samaria, where IDF troops have been in Nablus and Jenin and Tulkarm. And the rate of terrorist attacks and threats have significantly dropped over the past couple of years, because of these daily and nightly raids by the IDF into Judea and Samaria.

Now, it seems in Lebanon, a similar model. I mean, differences, but similar in the sense that you have smartly negotiated the right to target Hezbollah, imminent threats to go after them, gathering threats, you know, certainly give the LAF an opportunity and if they don't do it, the IDF is there taking out Hezbollah terrorists. And perhaps that variation of that model emerging in Gaza, where, you know, the 53 percent that the IDF will control, there'll be an ability to build up that East Gaza into something that actually where Palestinians will want to live and there'll be prosperity and stability, and then perhaps military raids into Western Gaza to go after Hamas operatives. So, it seems like the IDF has developed this interesting model in three different theaters. Can you comment a bit on that?

GANTZ: Yes. I would say four elements. First, we have to recognize we have no alternative. So, it's either we do it or no one does it. And once you understand that it's a necessity, then you consider price in a different way. I mean, we must understand that we have to do it. No one else will do it instead of us. This is one aspect. Second one is intelligence superiority. It doesn't really matter. I mean, I think that's the most important investment that one can do because the efficiency of defensive and offensive operation is so much higher with high intelligence. So, this is so crucial for us to invest in all those areas that you spoke about. And it's also stand for not just the military in those areas, but elsewhere, as you can think of. And the third element would be operational flexibility.

GANTZ: Let me take you to the days I was the division commander in Judea and Samaria. You know, the Second Intifada exploded in me because I started my job a day before the Second Intifada broke. A day before. That was my welcome party as a division commander. And every time I entered Area A, which is a Palestinian zone, I was being called back by our political echelon because it was against the agreement. So, I cannot defend Area C if I'm not operating in Area A, because that's where it's at. I mean, you cannot stop me.

So, I remember one day, one of my battalions did operation. Somebody was shooting at them, and they were chasing those terrorists, and they entered Area A, that's something like 800 meters, just, you know, to get to the ridge line. So, I came there and I entered the area, and I went to the battalion commander, who I knew since he was a young soldier, and I told him, "Okay I understand what happened. You stay here. I will tell you when to pull out." I go back to my chief of defense forces, then [Shaul] Mofaz. Mofaz says that that was the situation. It was a high alert, we went after them, we chased them, we came to this point. I want to stay there 'til at night, 'til night, and I want to pull them out at night. And I looked and it was around noon time. He says, "Binyamin, one o'clock they are out." He didn't give me even an hour to stay inside the place.

But in 2002, we changed the concept. And we maintain our operational flexibility. When we have intelligence and no one is doing anything with it, we are doing it. And the Palestinians should understand the more they do, the less we do. The Lebanese should understand, the more they do, the less we do. The people of Gaza should understand, the more they do, the less we do. They have to decide.

And the fourth element would be also what are the incentives. I think we should incentivize Lebanon to build their forces, to strengthen Lebanese Armed Forces, to let them be capable of practicing their statehood responsibility. I think it is our interest to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, to operate against terrorists inside the Palestinian Authority. But once they don't do it, we do it. Once again, no strategic blinking, no reality – hoped reality rather than real reality. But if you can incentivize them, whether it's in Lebanon, in the West Bank, or Eastern Gaza, so be it. I think it's very important. I think it's part of the full element.

DUBOWITZ: So, Mr. Gantz, unfortunately, we're out of time, but I want to thank you personally, and I want to thank your country for all you've done to defend the United States.

Unfortunately, not enough Americans know how Israeli intelligence has saved countless American lives, how your military innovation helps protect the American warfighter. And so, God forbid, if our soldiers have to go and fight in Europe or in Asia, they're going to be fighting with military equipment, military innovations been provided by Israel and that you as a country, and you, certainly, have led the way as a commander. Your country fights in its own defense. You don't ask for American boots on the ground, and that's kind of the ideal ally that we possibly could ever imagine, an ally that fights and defends itself, provides intelligence to save our lives, and provides military innovation to protect our war fighters. So, thank you, sir, for everything.

GANTZ: Thank you. Thank you very much. First, for the opportunity to be speaking with you guys, but also for the United States for supporting us. And it's been, you know, when you look at it, and I've been saying it, every time that you have shared values, and shared interest, which is the case in most places between Israel and the United States, there is a great security relations between those two countries. And I've been in and out from the States, from being [with] Green Beret Special Forces [getting] qualified in Fort Bragg and people are coming in training here. And we kind of feel, if you wish, that there's no lesson learned – that from our perspective, we should share everything we have with you guys, because it's really a deep partnership.

I'm sure that the United States has a few secrets it doesn't share with Israel, and maybe Israel has very few secrets it doesn't share with the States, but by and large, I think everything is there and it creates great capabilities for both of us. And I think it's very important that we will maintain this on the military side, but also the political side. I think it's very important and really, it's painful to see Europe as it is.

I've been talking with the Spanish guy who was trying to explain me that they are fighting terrorists. You can't even compare what you're talking about. I'm facing the Iranian divisions, well-equipped, on my borders and inside my villages. You cannot talk about someone with an AK-47 and doing some special operation; it's a whole different situation. Those are – we found, and we should not let it re-rise, military terror organization. It's a combination of terror organization with military capacity. Hezbollah possess military capacity that countries in Europe don't possess. That's the reality.

It was a pleasure speaking with you, especially getting out of the whole of the Parliament to be speaking with you because over here it's much tougher than the discussion we have here.

DUBOWITZ: I can only imagine what it's like in the Knesset.

[LAUGHTER]

So, I wish you well. I wish you great courage. And Mr. Gantz, thank you.

GANTZ: Thank you again. Thank you very much. And thank the FDD for its candid discussion. I think it's very important.

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