

# U.S. POLICY IN A CHANGING MIDDLE EAST

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## HEARING

BEFORE THE

### COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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SEPTEMBER 24, 2020  
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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2020

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:02 a.m., in room SD-G50 and videoconference, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Gardner, Romney, Young, Cruz, Perdue, Menendez, Cardin, Shaheen, Udall, Murphy, Kaine, Markey, Merkley, and Booker.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing here today to discuss recent events in the Middle East and the implications that they have for United States policy, which are significant.

Since the end of the second war—the second World War, the Middle East has been dominated by intractable Arab-Israeli conflict. Today, however, much has changed. Former rivals have increasingly reached across the table to address the shared challenges posed by Iran, by radical extremism, by COVID-19, by struggling economies, and by other issues that they have.

Regional dynamics have been further shaped by growing Chinese entanglement, Russian intervention, and regional responses to an expansionist Turkish foreign policy that is increasingly aligned with Russia. The United States interests have not changed; namely, regional stability, preventing terrorist threats against the United States, preserving stable international markets, and fostering governments that address the needs of their citizens.

The historic signing of the Abraham Accords is a defining moment—it cannot be more important than it was—and has the potential to fundamentally improve the security, economic, and diplomatic environment in the Middle East.

Israel took the important step of suspending plans to annex portions of the West Bank, which I hope will reinvigorate substantive engagement with the—from the Palestinian people. The Accords also have positive implications for Iran policy. For years, the Arab-Israeli conflict created regional discord that Iran used to press to its advantage. Iran's aggressive terrorist agenda has created this opportunity for Arab countries to publicly cooperate with Israel. It is my hope that other countries will normalize ties with Israel. In-

deed, I am not alone in this. Much talk in this city of exactly that takes place every day.

Additionally, the Accords have clear ramifications for regional security. Any potential arms sales must continue congressional consultations on meeting our obligation to retain Israel's qualitative military edge and satisfying the other requirements of the Arms Export Control Act. Let me be clear. The signing of the Abraham Accords did not occur by happenstance. These events were specifically enabled by the Trump administration's exit from the flawed JCPOA, its maximum pressure against the Iran regime, and the clear signals the Administration's plan for Middle East peace sent to the region.

Anyone who suggests that the U.S. should reenter the nuclear deal with Iran is misguided at best, as that would only serve to isolate our ally, Israel, alienate our Gulf partners, and once again fund Iran's terror activities; and, most importantly, conduct a weak-kneed retreat from the hard-fought gains that we have made, and telegraph to our enemies and our allies, alike, a weakness sure to embolden Iran to move aggressively—to more aggressively pursue its malign activities and, thus, at the end of the day, hurt us badly.

Our Iran policy must look forward. I applaud the reimposition of sanctions in the executive order this week implementing CAATSA and authorizing sanctions against those who would transfer arms to Iraq. Only continued economic and regional isolation have the potential to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

Turning to our counterterrorism efforts, we have broken the Islamic State's grip on Iraq and Syria. According to our military commanders, success against the Islamic State has led to a reduction in U.S. troops resulting from our confidence in local forces' ability to operate with reduced levels of U.S. support. As the Department of Defense reduces its missions in the Middle East, it is incumbent on the State Department to build a lasting peace through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts. These efforts tied to necessary forms to reduce corruption and improve governance will ensure lasting stability.

In Syria, we continue to face one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes and major contributor to regional instability. As we impose sanctions on the Assad regime authorized by the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, we must continue with diplomatic and U.N. process towards a cease-fire, supporting the Constitutional Committee and free and fair elections. We must not repeat the mistakes of the previous Administration, where inaction opened the door to Russian intervention and let the civil war rage unabated.

In Lebanon, we see the results of a corrupt patronage system and broken political process that opens the door to deep Iranian influence. Lebanon is a nation on the brink of collapse, yet remains an important link in—to regional stability. I remain skeptical of Lebanon's ability to form a new government, free from corruption of its political allies.

Across the Middle East, there are unique opportunities to improve the region through continued normalization efforts linking economies, joining security efforts, and continued pressure on Iran.

These are real possibilities that were unthinkable just a few short years ago, and may be once-in-a-generation opportunities.

I look forward to hearing the witnesses' testimony of these and related matters.

[The prepared statement of Senator James. E. Risch follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Senator James E. Risch**

I thank our witnesses for appearing today to discuss recent events in the Middle East and the implications they have for United States policy.

Since the end of the second World War, the Middle East has been dominated by an *intractable* Arab-Israeli conflict. Today, however, much has changed. Former rivals have increasingly reached across the table to address the shared challenges posed by Iran, radical extremism, COVID-19, and struggling economies.

The regional dynamics have been further shaped by growing Chinese entanglement, Russian intervention, and regional responses to an expansionist Turkish foreign policy that is increasingly aligned with Russia.

The United States' interests have not changed—namely, regional stability, preventing terrorist threats against the U.S., preserving stable international markets, and fostering governments that address the needs of their citizens.

The historic signing of the Abraham Accords is a defining moment and has the potential to fundamentally improve the security, economic, and diplomatic environment in the Middle East.

Israel took the important step of suspending plans to annex portions of the West Bank, which I hope will reinvigorate substantive engagement from the Palestinian people.

The Accords also have positive implications for Iran policy. For years the Arab-Israeli conflict created regional discord that Iran used to press its advantage. Iran's aggressive terrorist agenda has created this opportunity for Arab countries to publicly cooperate with Israel. It is my hope that other countries will normalize ties with Israel.

Additionally, the Accords have clear ramifications for regional security. Any potential arms sales must continue Congressional consultations on meeting our obligation to retain Israel's Qualitative Military Edge and satisfying the other requirements of the Arms Export Control Act.

Let me be clear, the signing of the Abraham Accords did not occur by happenstance. These events were enabled by the Trump administration's exit from the flawed JCPOA, its maximum pressure against the Iranian regime, and the clear signals the Administration's plan for Middle East Peace sent to the region.

Anyone who suggests that the U.S. should re-enter the nuclear deal with Iran is misguided at best, as that would only serve to isolate our ally Israel, alienate our Gulf partners, and once again fund Iran's terror activities.

Our Iran policy must look forward. I applaud the re-imposition of sanctions and the executive order this week implementing CAATSA and authorizing sanctions against those who would transfer arms to Iran. Only continued economic and regional isolation have the potential to bring Iran to the negotiating table.

Turning to our counterterrorism efforts—we have broken the Islamic State's grip on Iraq and Syria. According to our military commanders, success against the Islamic State has led to a reduction in U.S. troops due to our confidence in local forces' ability to operate with reduced levels of U.S. support.

As the Department of Defense reduces its missions in the Middle East, it is incumbent on the State Department to build a lasting peace through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts. These efforts, tied to necessary reforms to reduce corruption and improve governance will ensure lasting stability.

In Syria, we continue to face one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes and major contributor to regional instability. As we impose sanctions on the Assad regime authorized by the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, we must continue the diplomatic and U.N. processes toward a ceasefire, supporting the constitutional committee, and free and fair elections. We must not repeat the mistakes of the previous Administration where inaction opened the door to Russian intervention and let the civil war rage unabated.

In Lebanon, we see the results of a corrupt patronage system and broken political process that opens the door to deep Iranian influence. Lebanon is a nation on the brink of collapse, yet remains an important link to regional stability. However, I remain skeptical of Lebanon's ability to form a new government free from the corruption of its political elites.

Across the Middle East, there are unique opportunities to improve the region. Through continued normalization efforts, linking economies, joining security efforts, and continued pressure on Iran, there are real possibilities that were unthinkable just a few short years ago.

I look forward to our witnesses' testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. With that, Senator Menendez.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, to our witnesses, of both whom have spent decades in service to our country.

The scope of this hearing could keep us here for days—Israeli's changing diplomatic fortunes, Lebanon reeling with decades of malfeasance and a deadly explosion, Yemen facing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world—but, I will try to do my best to stay focused.

While we have seen some recent positive developments over the course of the past 4 years—however, the Trump administration has only served, in my view, to create more chaos and uncertainty about our policies in the Middle East: showering autocrats with praise and, at least according to the President, “saving” one from Congress in the wake of ordering the slaughter of an American resident; drawing down, and now redeploying, troops to Syria; prioritizing arms sales in unilateral sanctions over the hard work of diligent diplomacy and strategic development. Today's hearing implies a Middle East changing for the better for U.S. interests and values. In some ways, that is true. I applaud the Administration for building on years of cooperation between Israel and some of its Arab Gulf neighbors. I think we can all agree that more regional cooperation serves the interests of all the people in the region, and of the United States, as well.

While we should celebrate these historical achievements, let us not overlook the fact that Israel's core security issues remain unresolved, and it is still contending with threats from Hamas and Hezbollah nearly on a daily basis. Indeed, we have a responsibility to look beyond the headlines and into the details, particularly when it comes to peace declarations that come with the expectations, and perhaps even the promise, of significant arms sales.

Let me be clear. Congress's role in arms sales is not something that I see changing anytime soon, to any country, in any region. While some things change, others stay the same, and, in some cases, get worse. In fact, Mr. Chairman, I think there can be little doubt that, with Iran, we are worse off now than we were 4 years ago.

Now, to be clear, I bear no sentimentality about the JCPOA, but as one who has worked for decades helping to build a careful, calibrated, and, critically, an internationally supported sanctions regime to constrain Iran, I am seriously concerned that this Administration has completely lost sight of how to achieve even its own goals, let alone safeguard our national security.

Over the past 4 years, Iran has increased its enrichment level and stockpile of enriched uranium, as well as advanced missile systems. It has continued its support for malign proxy actors throughout the region. Even in the wake of the killing of Qasem Soleimani

and a declaration of “deterrence restored,” quote, against Iran, CENTCOM Commander, General McKenzie, said recently that, “The level of attack on U.S. troops in Iraq from Iran-based militias have been higher.” So, I ask you, is this your definition of “deterrence restored”?

This Administration refuses to acknowledge what those of us who have worked this file know: We cannot confront Iran alone. Indeed, we cannot achieve any of our policy goals in the Middle East or elsewhere alone, but this Administration has so alienated our allies and partners that Russia and China did not even need to use their vetoes at the U.N. Security Council, where the U.S., embarrassingly, could muster only one vote in support of reimposing the arms embargo against Iran. How can you honestly say that, in this context, sanctions have been snapback when our European allies and the Secretary General himself questioned the legitimacy of U.S. claims? While the Secretary rails against our historical partners, China and Russia are increasing their influence, not just in the region economically and militarily, but at international fora, as well, where previous administrations had been effective in advancing our Nation’s interests.

The executive order announced Monday could have been executed months ago, and will likely have no tangible impact on Iran’s capacities. These announcements are simply a hollow echo of American leadership that once held commanding convening power and unquestioned global leadership, replacing it with a policy that seems to amount to “talk loudly and carry no sticks.”

So, while I intend to drill down some more during questions, I hope that you can provide us some level of explanation as to how it is that you believe you are actually achieving your goals in the Middle East, and perhaps you can even shed light onto exactly what those are.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Robert Menendez follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Senator Robert Menendez**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and thank you to our witnesses, both of whom have spent decades in service to this country. The scope of this hearing could keep us here for days: Israel’s changing diplomatic fortunes; Lebanon reeling with decades of malfeasance and a deadly explosion; Yemen facing the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. But I’ll do my best to stay focused.

While we’ve seen some recent positive developments over the course of the past 4 years; however, the Trump administration has only served to create more chaos and uncertainty about our policies in the Middle East: showering autocrats with praise and, at least according to the President, “saving” one “from Congress” in the wake of ordering the slaughter of an American resident; drawing down and now re-deploying troops to Syria; and prioritizing arms sales and unilateral sanctions over the hard work of diligent diplomacy and strategic development.

Today’s hearing implies a Middle East changing for the better for U.S. interests and values. And in some ways that is true. I applaud the Administration for building on years of cooperation between Israel and some of its Arab Gulf neighbors. I think we can all agree that more regional cooperation serves the interests of all the people in the region, and of the U.S. as well. But while we should celebrate these historical achievements, let’s not overlook the fact that Israel’s core security issues remain unresolved, and it is still contending with threats from Hamas and Hezbollah nearly on a daily basis.

Indeed, we have a responsibility to look beyond the headlines and into the details, particularly when it comes to peace declarations that come with the expectation—and perhaps even the promise—of significant arms sales.

Let me be clear: Congress' role in arms sales is not something that I see changing any time soon. To any country. In any region.

And while some things change, others stay the same, and in some cases get worse.

And in fact, Mr. Chairman, I think there can be little doubt that with Iran we are worse off now than we were 4 years ago.

Now, to be clear, I bear no sentimentality about the JCPOA, but as one who has worked for decades helping to build a careful, calibrated, critically, and internationally supported sanctions regime to constrain Iran, I am seriously concerned that this Administration has completely lost sight of how to achieve even its own goals, let alone safeguard our national security.

Over the past 4 years, Iran has increased its enrichment level and stockpile of enriched uranium as well as advanced missile systems. It has continued its support for malign proxy actors throughout the region. Even in the wake of the killing of Qasem Soleimani and a declaration of "deterrence restored" against Iran, CENTCOM Commander General McKenzie said recently that the "level of attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq from Iran-backed militias have been higher." Is this your definition of deterrence restored?

This Administration refuses to acknowledge what those of us who have worked this file know: We cannot confront Iran alone. Indeed, we cannot achieve any of our policy goals in the Middle East or elsewhere alone.

But this Administration has so alienated our allies and partners that Russia and China didn't even need to use their vetoes at the U.N. Security Council, where the U.S. embarrassingly could muster only one vote in support of reimposing the arms embargo against Iran. How can you honestly say that in this context sanctions have been "snapped back" when our European allies and the Secretary General himself questions the legitimacy of U.S. claims?

While the Secretary rails against our historical partners, China and Russia are increasing their influence not just in the region economically and militarily, but at international fora as well, where previous administrations have been effective in advancing our nation's interests.

The executive order announced Monday could have been executed months ago and will likely have no tangible impact on Iran's capacities. These announcements are simply a hollow echo of American leadership that once held commanding convening power and unquestioned global leadership, replacing it with a policy that seems to amount to: Talk loudly and carry no sticks.

So while I intend to drill down some more during questions, I hope that you all can provide some level of explanation as to how it is you believe you are actually achieving your goals in the Middle East. And perhaps, you can even shed light onto exactly what those are.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

We will now hear from our witnesses. We will start with the Honorable David Hale, who has served as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs since August 30th, 2018. Previously, he served as U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan and U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon. He also has extensive experience on issues pertaining his—to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, having served as Special Envoy to the Middle East Peace from 2011 to 2013, and Deputy Special Envoy from 2009 to 2011.

Under Secretary Hale.

**STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID HALE, UNDER SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ambassador HALE. Well, good morning, Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Menendez, distinguished members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before you with Special Representative Abrams to discuss the Middle East and Iran's malign influence.

America is a force for good, and we are the partner of choice for those who seek security and prosperity. It is in our national security interest to strengthen those partnerships. Nothing has done

more to demonstrate a commitment to cooperation than the signing of the Abraham Accords Declaration on September 15. As President Trump observed, these agreements mark the dawn of a new Middle East and send a strong message to malign actors, such as Iran, that their influence is waning.

Ending Iran's malign influence is the Administration's top regional priority. Success will mean an independent and sovereign Iraq and Lebanon, and a chance for religious minorities to thrive again. It will mean Gulf States that no longer live in fear of Iranian aggression and violence. It will mean a more secure Israel reaping the benefits of regional cooperation. To this end, our maximum pressure campaign has constrained Iran by depriving the regime of over \$70 billion in revenue. The sanctions are not solely an end unto themselves, they are merely one tool that we will deploy until the Iranian regime changes its behavior.

The signing of the historic Abraham Accords, witnessed by many of you, normalizes relations between both the UAE and Bahrain with Israel, the first such agreement between Israel and an Arab country since 1994. This normalization will promote peace, security, and prosperity throughout the region. Affirmation of the Abraham Accords bolsters the Administration's Vision for Peace. Israel will suspend declaring sovereignty over areas outlined in the Vision. We urge the Palestinians to come to the negotiating table. The only path to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through negotiations aimed at achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace.

Lebanon faces political gridlock and economic instability exacerbated by the horrific August 4 explosion at the Port of Beirut. America has, thus far, provided over \$19 million in essential relief, and we stand with the Lebanese people as they recover from the devastation. The tragic explosion is a symptom of the systemic problems in Lebanon: decades of mismanagement, corruption, and the repeated failure to undertake meaningful reform. When we see Lebanese leaders committed to real change, in word and deed, America and its international partners will be ready to help with the assistance needed to accomplish true reform.

Hezbollah cultivates and exploits Lebanon's corrupt "anything goes" environment and undermines the interests of the Lebanese people through the accumulation of arms and destabilizing activities across the region. Before the maximum pressure campaign, Iran provided Hezbollah over \$700 million of its approximately \$1 billion annual budget. Our ability to constrain that funding is having an effect, and we will use all available tools to hold accountable those who facilitate Hezbollah's activities. This month, we sanctioned two former Lebanese Ministers for corruptly directing political and financial favors to Hezbollah, and we will continue to press our partners across the world to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

The Gulf States are critical partners in our fight against terrorism and efforts to blunt Iranian influence. We have consistently pressed our partners in parallel with similar calls from Congress to end that rift.

Our relationship with Saudi Arabia is rooted in robust security cooperation. It is a central component of our strategy to counter Iran and defeat extremist groups. We continue to have frank con-

versations with Riyadh on human rights, and we consistently tell Saudi leaders that success on the nation's reform agenda will require protection of human, and especially women's, rights.

We support U.N. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths as he negotiates a lasting peace in Yemen, and we are working closely with Saudi Arabia on de-escalating violence in Yemen, and welcome Riyadh's efforts to reconcile the Yemeni parties.

The Houthis, armed by Iran, threaten regional security and stability through attacks against civilian targets.

In Iraq, Iran-backed elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces are an immediate challenge to Iraq's stability, and we see the Iraqi people turning against Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs. The protest movement demonstrated the Iraqi people's aspiration for democratic governance, and Mustafa al-Kadhimi, Iraq's new Prime Minister, has begun to restore Iraq's sovereignty.

In Syria, our leadership of the Global Coalition will ensure ISIS's lasting defeat. Using the tools Congress provided in the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, we have imposed over 55 sanctions on the Assad regime.

In Libya, we are supporting the U.N. as it brings together broad Libyan participation for the Libya political dialogue, which aims to prepare for elections, establish a lasting cease-fire, and support of the oil sector.

In surveying the region today, we have tangible opportunities to advance our objectives of peace, prosperity, and security, and our presence and relationships serve as a bulwark against efforts by Russia and China to extend their malign influence.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Hale follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of Ambassador David Hale**

Good morning Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished members of the Committee. It's an honor to appear before you with Special Representative Abrams to discuss the Middle East and Iran's malign influence. America is a force for good throughout the region, and we are the partner of choice for those who seek security, stability, and prosperity. It is in our national security interests to strengthen those partnerships. As we have seen in recent weeks, our partners are moving away from conflicts and taboos of the past and are committed to cooperation across a broad range of fields. We are working hard to deepen this cooperation.

Nothing has done more to demonstrate a commitment to cooperation than the signing of the Abraham Accords Declaration and related instruments on September 15. As President Trump observed, these agreements "mark dawn of a new Middle East" and send a strong message to malign actors like Iran that their influence is waning.

Ending Iran's malign influence is the Administration's top regional priority. Success will provide vulnerable religious minorities, including Christians and Yezidis, the chance to thrive again. It will mean a sovereign Iraq that can defend its national interests and hold credible elections, fulfilling a key demand of protesters who want to end Iranian influence. It will mean Gulf states that no longer live in fear of Iranian threats and violence. It will prevent famine in Yemen and enable a political solution to the conflict. It will mean a more secure Israel, reaping the benefits of regional cooperation and integration. And it will mean an independent and sovereign Lebanon. To this end, our maximum pressure campaign has constrained Iran by depriving the regime of over \$70 billion in revenue, which otherwise would have funded Iran's destabilizing activities. But sanctions are not an end unto themselves. They are merely one of a broad range of tools that we will deploy until the Iranian regime changes its behavior.

The historic signing of the Abraham Accords Declaration on September 15, brokered by President Trump, normalizes relations between both the United Arab

Emirates and Bahrain with Israel—the first such agreements between Israel and an Arab country since 1994. As President Trump observed, “In Israel’s entire history, there have previously been only two such agreements. Now we have achieved two in a single month . . .” Together, with America as a strong and committed partner, we can advance regional peace and continue to counter Iran’s malign influence. And we remain committed to helping Israel maintain its qualitative military edge, consistent with the law and longstanding policy.

These agreements are historic. After decades of division and conflict, normalization of relations and peaceful diplomacy will promote greater peace and security in the region and widen opportunities for expanded economic growth and productivity. As President Trump noted, these agreements represent a major stride toward a future in which people of all faiths and backgrounds live together in peace and prosperity.

The UAE’s Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed echoed the President, noting that we are “witnessing a change in the heart of the Middle East, a change that will send hope around the world.” Bahrain’s Foreign Minister Al Zayani declared that these agreements represent a “historic step on the road to genuine and lasting peace, security and prosperity across the region, and for all who live there regardless of religion, sect, ethnicity, or ideology.”

Affirmation of the Abraham Accords Declaration bolsters the Administration’s Vision for Peace, announced in January 2020. Israel will suspend declaring sovereignty over areas outlined in the Vision for Peace and focus its efforts on expanding ties with other countries in the Arab and Muslim world. We urge the Palestinians to come to the negotiating table. Refusal to engage with Israel only delays fulfillment of the potential of the Palestinian people. We have repeatedly said that the only realistic path to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through negotiations aimed at achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace.

Lebanon faces political gridlock and economic instability, exacerbated by the August 4 explosion at the Port of Beirut, which killed 180, wounded 6,500, and destroyed a wide swath of Beirut, Lebanon’s economic and commercial center. America has thus far provided over \$19 million in essential food, shelter, and medical relief, and we will continue to stand with the Lebanese people as they recover and rebuild from the devastation.

The tragic explosion is a symptom of the systemic problems in Lebanon which have persisted for far too long: decades of mismanagement, corruption, and the repeated failure of Lebanese leaders to put aside their parochial interests and undertake meaningful, sustained reforms. The Lebanese people deserve better, and their demands for change could not be clearer. America stands in solidarity with those who have long called for tangible reforms and a government that respond to their longstanding and legitimate demands. When we see Lebanese leaders committed to real change in word and deed, America and its international partners will be ready to help with assistance needed to accomplish true reform.

Hizballah cultivates and exploits Lebanon’s corrupt, “anything goes” environment and undermines the interests of the Lebanese people through the accumulation of arms and destabilizing activities across the region. Hizballah has proven that the group answers to Tehran, not the Lebanese state and people. Before the maximum pressure campaign, Iran provided Hizballah over \$700 million of its approximately \$1 billion budget. Our ability to constrain that funding is having an effect. Hassan Nasrallah has publicly called for financial contributions to make up the shortfall.

America will use all available tools to hold accountable those who facilitate Hizballah’s activities. This month, we sanctioned two former Lebanese ministers for corruptly directing political and financial favors to Hizballah, at the expense of the state. We also continue to press our partners across the region and the world to acknowledge reality and designate Hizballah in its entirety as a terrorist organization and use their legal authorities to restrict the group from operating on their soil.

The Gulf states are critical partners in our fight against terrorism and efforts to blunt Iranian influence. We are stronger when we stand together, and we have consistently pressed our partners—in parallel with similar calls from Congress—to end the Gulf rift. We are hopeful that they will resolve their differences and work with us to address our shared concerns.

Our relationship with Saudi Arabia is rooted in robust bilateral security cooperation. It is a critical component of our strategy to counter Iran’s destabilizing actions in the Gulf and deter, disrupt, and defeat ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other dangerous actors. Our security cooperation helps to protect over 160,000 Americans in Saudi Arabia and UAE from attacks by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen. We are working closely with Riyadh on de-escalating violence in Yemen and welcome the Saudis’ attempts to reconcile the Yemeni parties.

We continue to have frank conversations with Riyadh on human rights. This includes calling for the lifting of a travel ban on Dr. Walid Fitaihi and his family and the release of Salah Al-Haider and Badr Al-Ibrahim, all three of whom have been unjustly detained and whose cases undermine our otherwise strong partnership. We fully support the nation's reform initiatives, as articulated in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, to diversify the economy, reduce its reliance on oil revenues, and broaden Saudi women's economic and social engagement. But we have also consistently told the Saudi leadership that success will require protection of human and women's rights.

Earlier this month, Secretary Pompeo hosted his Qatari counterpart for the U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue. We signed 11 significant agreements across a wide range of sectors, including: health security preparedness; Fulbright programs and academic exchanges; agreements with NASA and the Smithsonian Institution; and the 2021 U.S.-Qatar Year of Culture, which declares the U.S. and Qatari governments' intention to cooperate to enhance cultural and art exchanges and people-to-people connections. We are also excited about an MOU signed by Secretary Mnuchin and his Qatari counterpart to conduct an economic roadshow in the United States in 2021, which will target investment in more diverse sectors to maximize mutual economic benefit. In the coming months, we look forward to holding additional strategic dialogues with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait to each deepen our ties with our Gulf partners.

In Yemen, we continue to support the diplomacy of U.N. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths as he works to bring the Republic of Yemen Government and the Houthis together to establish a lasting peace. The Houthis, armed by Iran, continue to threaten regional security and stability through attacks against civilian targets in Saudi Arabia.

We also work closely with the Republic of Yemen Government, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia to achieve further progress on the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement. We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Yemen and are working to get much-needed assistance to the Yemeni people. Nearly 80 percent of Yemenis rely on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs. Houthi obstructionism and refusal to adhere to international principles have forced us to curtail some of our aid, though we try to ensure that life-saving and critical assistance still meets those in need. America is the largest humanitarian donor to Yemen this year, and we have provided more than \$1.1 billion in humanitarian assistance since October 2018. With Congress's support, we have also provided nearly \$18.7 million in funding to support COVID-19 response efforts to help refugees, vulnerable migrants, internally displaced persons, and host communities in Yemen. We continue to call on the Houthis to allow this humanitarian aid to flow to those in need.

In Iraq, Iran-backed elements of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) are an immediate challenge to Iraq's prosperity and long-term stability. Iran-backed elements of the PMF routinely engage in widespread theft of state resources, targeted killings, and sectarian violence. They conduct attacks on Iraqi Government facilities and were responsible for the bulk of the violence against peaceful protesters and political activists over the last year.

The Iraqi people are turning against Iran's interference in Iraqi internal affairs; against the Iran-backed militias and the politicians who enable them; and against the rampant corruption that Iran's influence promotes. The protest movement demonstrated the Iraqi people's aspiration for democratic, responsive governance that works on behalf of the interests of Iraqis, not Tehran, and it led to the designation of a former human rights activist, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, as Iraq's new prime minister. Kadhimi has already begun to take necessary steps to restore Iraq's sovereignty and re-establish rule-of-law. We welcome his commitment to ensure that Iraq's future is determined in Baghdad, Erbil, Basrah, and Ramadi, and not in Tehran.

Our regular engagements with the Kadhimi government are paying dividends. After two successful rounds of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue, on June 11 and August 19, and a meeting between Prime Minister Kadhimi and President Trump, we are preparing for a series of meetings to further define the details of our relationship. We will focus on humanitarian issues, internally displaced persons, the return of Yazidis and other minority groups, economic reforms, security sector reforms, and broadening our educational and cultural programming. These engagements have strengthened the Prime Minister's position within Iraq; reminded the Iraqi people that America is a force for good and our relations serve their interests; and put Iran on notice that the U.S.-Iraq relationship cannot be broken.

In Syria, our leadership of the Global Coalition and work with increasingly capable local partners will ensure ISIS's lasting defeat. Using the tools Congress provided in the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, the U.S. Government has imposed

over 55 sanctions on those facilitating for the Assad regime to deny the regime the resources it uses to commit mass atrocities against the Syrian people and encourage a peaceful, political resolution of the Syrian conflict as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 2254. In Libya, we are supporting the UN as it shepherds the intra-Libyan dialogue toward a potential cease-fire that holds the potential jumpstart the political process and reopen the oil sector. These efforts will be more effective now that the recently adopted UN mandate for the Libya mission includes our proposed language to create a UN Special Envoy position to focus exclusively on negotiations while leaving management of the UN mission in Libya to a special coordinator.

In surveying the region today, we have tangible opportunities to advance our objectives of peace, prosperity, and security. Our presence and relationships serve as a bulwark against efforts by Russia and China to extend their malign influence into the Middle East.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

We will now hear from Elliot Abrams, who is U.S. Special Representative for Iran and Venezuela at the Department for State, and currently on leave from his position as Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies and in the Council on Foreign Relations. Previously, he served as Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor in the U.S. Administration of President George W. Bush, where he supervised U.S. policy in the Middle East for the White House.

Mr. Abrams.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ELLIOT ABRAMS, U.S. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR IRAN AND VENEZUELA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you. Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today with Under Secretary Hale, and the opportunity to provide an update on our policy toward Iran. I will try to be brief, and I look forward to your questions.

Our strategy to deal with the threats from Iran has two primary objectives. First, to deprive the Iranian regime of the money it needs to support its destabilizing activities. Second, to bring Iran to the negotiating table to conclude a comprehensive deal that must address four key areas: its nuclear program, its ballistic missile development and proliferation, its support for terror groups and proxies, and its wrongful detention of U.S. citizens.

Our efforts to disrupt the regime's malicious agenda have met with real success. By any measure, we believe the Iranian regime is weaker today than when President Trump took office. The regime faces unprecedented and worsening economic and political crises.

U.S. sanctions have denied Iran more than 90 percent of its oil export revenue, depriving the regime access to well over \$70 billion in income that could otherwise have gone to fund terror operations. The consequence of this economic pressure is a change in Iran's malign behavior, willing or not. Iran's partners and proxies, like Hezbollah and Hamas, are under austerity plans to deal with a lack of funds from Iran. As a result, the lives of enumerable Iranians, Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis, and other innocent civilians in the regime's crosshairs have been saved.

In addition to our economic pressure, we have enlisted many partners in the effort to confront the threats from Iran. Since the

beginning of 2019, for example, nations such as Germany, the U.K., Argentina, and others, have taken far-reaching actions against Hezbollah. Many other nations have now banned Mahan Air, Iran's terror airline.

We are further isolating Iran by brokering the peace agreements with Israel, the UAE, and Bahrain as part of the historic Abraham Accords. There is a reason that those Accords were orchestrated by the United States and signed in Washington. Nations in the Middle East have renewed confidence in the United States because we are standing up to Iran.

Our negotiations with Iran have already shown dividends. Our model of how the United States ought to approach the regime by starting from a principled position of strength, we have brought back two Americans, Xiyue Wang and Michael White, back to the United States from Iranian detention. There was no payment for them, no sanctions relief granted, no pallets of cash. We will not rest until every American wrongfully detained in Iran is free.

The fact that Americans can end up in Iran's jails to be used as political pawns is another demonstration of the regime's daily mockery of justice that Iranians know too well. Just recently, the regime brutally tortured and then shamefully executed champion wrestler Navid Afkari to send to its own people an unmistakable message of intimidation. The U.S. is committed to holding accountable those who deny freedom and justice to people of Iran. Later today, the United States will announce sanctions on several Iranian officials and entities, including the judge who sentenced Navid Afkari to death. I look forward, as you all do, to the day that Iranians enjoy the freedom and dignity they so deeply deserve.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Menendez, and other members of the committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Mr. Elliott Abrams**

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today with Under Secretary Hale and for the opportunity to provide an update on our policy toward Iran.

This Administration harbors no illusions about the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is the principal driver of instability and violence in the Middle East, and it remains the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and anti-Semitism. It remains in power through brutal repression of the Iranian people.

We have approached the threats from Iran with a strategy that has two primary objectives. First, to deprive the Iranian regime of the money it needs to support its destabilizing activities. Second, to bring Iran to the negotiating table to conclude a comprehensive deal, as outlined by Secretary Pompeo in May 2018.

The legally binding agreement we seek with the Iranian regime must address four key areas: its nuclear program, its ballistic missile development and proliferation, its support to terror groups and proxies, and its wrongful detention of U.S. citizens, including Siamak and Baquer Namazi, and Morad Tahbaz. The United States is also calling on the Iranian regime to provide a full accounting of the fate of retired FBI agent Robert Levinson, who went missing in Iran in 2007. The United States is open to negotiate with Iran and meet without preconditions. The regime need only meet our diplomacy with diplomacy, not with violence, bloodshed, and attempted extortions.

Our efforts to disrupt the regime's ability to carry out its malicious agenda have met with real success. By any measure, the Iranian regime is weaker today than when President Trump took office. The regime faces unprecedented and worsening economic and political crises that are exacerbated by the poor choices the regime makes in an effort to advance its radical ideology.

In response to the Islamic Republic's choice to pursue hostility and aggressive acts, this Administration has implemented the unprecedented Maximum Pressure Campaign. We have imposed the toughest sanctions ever against the corrupt leadership of the regime. Our sanctions are having a significant impact on the regime's ability to fund its malign activities and keep a stranglehold on the Iranian people.

According to the IMF, Iran's economy contracted by 5.5 percent in 2018 and 7.6 percent in 2019; the IMF expects it to shrink by another 6 percent in 2020. Iran's budget deficit for 2020 is a staggering and unsustainable 26 percent of GDP, while its budget is based off an unrealistic oil exports projection of 1 million barrels per day at \$50 per barrel. Our sanctions have denied Iran more than 90 percent of its oil export revenue, depriving the regime access to well over \$70 billion in income that could have otherwise gone to fund terror operations. Going forward, our oil and petrochemical sanctions will continue to deprive the regime of as much as \$50 billion annually. As a result, Iran is struggling to access foreign currency. You can see the impact of all this pressure by looking at the Iranian Rial, which has fallen in value on the open market from about 60,000 to the dollar in 2018 to about 270,000 to the dollar today.

The consequence of this economic pressure is a change in Iran's malign behavior, willing or not. Multiple Iranian state propaganda television channels have had to shut down in 2020 and others are on the verge of closure because they can no longer afford to pay the satellite providers. And that is because the government is running out of foreign currencies. Iranian proxies and partners in Syria and elsewhere are going unpaid, and the services they once relied upon are drying up. Iran-supported militants can no longer rely on steady and consistent Iranian support. Hizballah and Hamas are under "austerity plans" to deal with a lack of funds from Iran. As a result, we believe the lives of innumerable Iranians, Syrians, Iraqis, Yemenis, and other innocent civilians in the regime's crosshairs have been saved.

The United States has not stood by idly in the face of Iran's malign activities. Working with our partners and allies, we have redoubled our commitment to preserving peace and stability in the region. We have shown Iran that if it chooses to threaten American lives, President Trump will not hesitate to take decisive action. Iran understands strength and the credible threat of military force.

We can observe the same successes of deterrence at sea. In 2015 and 2016, during the time that the conclusion and implementation of the JCPOA was to have allegedly moderated Iran's behavior, the U.S. Navy recorded 58 incidents of unsafe and unprofessional naval conduct by Iran, including the illegal detention of U.S. sailors. From the earliest days of this Administration, the United States made clear we would not tolerate Iranian naval harassment, leading to a sharp decline in Iran's provocative maritime behavior.

In addition to our economic pressure and military deterrence, we have rallied the world to treat the regime as the pariah its actions have demonstrated it to be.

We have called on nations to sanction or ban Iran's terrorist proxy, Hizballah as a terrorist organization, in its entirety. Since the beginning of 2019, nations such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Argentina, as well as many others, have taken far-reaching actions against Hizballah. We warned the world of Mahan Air, Iran's airline that ferries terrorist personnel, arms, and assets around the world. Germany, France, and Italy have joined many other nations in banning Mahan Air flights from landing at or taking off from their airports.

Following the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions in 2018, SWIFT de-listed 33 Iranian banks. We continued to urge the international community to hold Iran accountable for its illicit financial activities, and in February 2020, the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) re-imposed full countermeasures on Iran for its failure to adhere to basic standards. Iran joined North Korea in ignominy as the only countries on FATF's "blacklist." This powerful decision is isolating the regime's financial and banking sector.

Most visibly, we are further isolating Iran by brokering the peace agreement between Israel and the UAE, and the Israel-Bahrain Declaration as part of the historic Abraham Accords. We are hopeful more nations will follow their courageous acts and embrace the opportunity of peace. There is a reason that these accords were orchestrated by the United States and signed in Washington. Nations in the Middle East have renewed confidence in the United States because we are standing up to Iran.

This Administration will never hesitate to protect our national security and prevent Iran from endangering the world. Unfortunately, in August, the U.N. Security Council failed to uphold its stated mission to maintain international peace and security and did not extend the U.N. arms embargo on Iran, which has been in place in various forms for 13 years. The Security Council's inaction would have paved the way for Iran to buy a wide array of conventional weapons on October 18. We have

been clear that we would not permit this to happen. In accordance with our rights under U.N. Security Council resolution 2231, and in light of Iran's continued and significant non-performance of its JCPOA commitments, we initiated the snapback process to restore virtually all previously terminated U.N. sanctions on Iran, which includes removing the sunset provision on the arms embargo. These sanctions returned this past Saturday, September 19. Further, on September 21, this Administration took action to strengthen our domestic sanctions authorities to counter Iranian conventional arms activity.

Because of the failures of the JCPOA, Iran is nearly 5 years closer to the expiration of restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment program and reprocessing-related activities, bringing it unacceptably close to a dangerous nuclear breakout capability. However, thanks to the snapback of U.N. sanctions, Iran is now obligated to suspend enrichment, reprocessing, and heavy-water-related activities. The United States expects all U.N. Member States to fully comply with their obligations regarding re-imposed restrictions on Iran, as the U.N. Charter requires all Member States to do.

The United States will never let the world's leading state sponsor of terror obtain the world's most deadly weapon. Iran would be wise not to repeat and expand its tactic of nuclear and military extortion to extract concessions. The regime's malign actions only steel our resolve and increase the regime's economic and diplomatic isolation. Instead, Iran should cease its violence and come to the negotiating table.

If Iran is willing to put the needs and desires of its people ahead of its dangerous ideological ambitions, it has much to gain from negotiations. The people of the United States and Iran should have diplomatic ties again. Our embassies could be reopened so that the brightest minds of our countries could work together and solve the problems for our two peoples. We can end all sanctions, and instead work on trade deals and direct flights to Houston, New York, and Los Angeles. We are willing to reestablish diplomatic relations, help bring economic prosperity, and more if Iran is ready to behave like a country rather than a cause.

Our negotiations with Iran have already shown dividends and are a model of how the United States ought to approach the regime. By starting from a principled position of strength, we have brought two Americans, Xiyue Wang and Michael White, back to the United States from Iranian detention. And there was no payment for the Americans, no sanctions relief granted, and no pallets of cash loaded on planes to the Iranian regime in exchange for their release.

We are delighted that Xiyue Wang and Michael White are reunited with their families, and we are committed to bringing every American home who is wrongfully detained abroad. Our team works every single day—literally every single day—to make that happen.

That Americans can end up in Iran's jails to be used as political pawns is just one demonstration of the regime's daily mockery of justice that Iranians know all too well. Just recently, the regime brutally tortured and shamefully executed champion wrestler Navid Afkari to send to its own people an unmistakable message of intimidation that protests will not be tolerated. The greatest victims of the Islamic Republic of Iran are the Iranian people, and they too are increasingly standing up to the regime.

In response to widespread protests in November 2019 the regime executed a brutal crackdown, killing as many as 1,500 of its own citizens while jailing thousands more. In an attempt to hide its actions from the world, the regime simultaneously imposed a near-total shutdown of access to the internet.

Every year, the regime loses the support of more and more Iranians. This year's legislative elections saw the lowest turnout of voters in the regime's history. Most Iranians boycotted the election, in which candidates were pre-approved by Supreme Leader Khamenei's cronies and clerics. The Iranian people are suffering under a corrupt and radical regime whose leaders care more about filling their own pockets and sending weapons and cash abroad than providing for their people.

As President Trump has said, Iran is a country with enormous untapped potential. If Iran were to work alongside its neighbors to foster stability and welcome peace rather than drive conflict, the Iranian people would thrive and once again enjoy prosperity. I look forward, as you do, to the day that all Iranians enjoy the freedom and dignity they so deeply deserve.

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and other Members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you. I welcome the opportunity to answer your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.  
We will now enter a round of questioning.

Before we do, I want to respond briefly to some of the remarks made by my friend and colleague, the Ranking Member.

I understand that we have a different opinion of what is going on in the Middle East as a result of this Administration's activities, but I want to drill down very, very specifically, on the outside chance that the Iranians are monitoring this. I want to say clearly, deterrence has been restored. Soleimani is dead. His replacement is a weak, weak substitute for Soleimani. He does not have the influence, and he does not have the abilities to conduct the kind of warfare that Soleimani did.

Since that happened, there have been no bombings of oil facilities, as they did prior—as Iran did prior to that. There has been no sabotaging of oil tankers, which they did prior to that. There has been no shooting down of our drones.

Most importantly, what is happening on the ground in Iraq has changed dramatically. I have spoken directly with the military commanders on the ground. I have spoken with the policymakers in the Administration. They are laser focused on this. There has been no American killed. Let there be no mistake, Iran. If you wind up killing Americans in Iraq, there will be serious, serious consequences. That message was transmitted when Soleimani was taken out and killed. There will be consequences for that. So, any suggestion that somehow we are backing away from that, any suggestion that somehow we are weakening on that, any suggestion that the military commanders on the ground are not dedicated to protecting American troops and to do what is necessary if, indeed, Iraqi attacks take the life of American citizens, American soldiers, American men and women in Iraq, there will be serious, serious consequences.

What happened when Soleimani was taken out was a clear message. Iran, listen to that message, because it is meant to transmit what American determination is in Iraq—on the ground in Iraq.

With that, we will go to a series of questions. I will turn it over to the Ranking Member.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you.

Representative Abrams, do you dispute what CENTCOM Commander General McKenzie said, when he said the level of attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq from Iran-backed militias have been higher?

Mr. ABRAMS. Higher than when? I guess that is the question, Senator. Right now, we are seeing Iran—

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, you—have you talked to General McKenzie, in terms of a statement?

Mr. ABRAMS. I talked to General McKenzie yesterday about what is going on in Iraq.

Senator MENENDEZ. All right. So, did you dispute his statement with him?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not dispute the statement. I think it is a question of comparisons.

Senator MENENDEZ. Okay.

Ambassador Hale, the Foreign Relations Committee has statutory authority over reviewing and approving arms sales, which are a critical tool of U.S. foreign policy that has to be considered in a wide context: our interests, the recipient country's needs and interests, their human rights record, and, of course, how they have

treated U.S.-origin weapons in the past. We have seen a lot of conflicting reporting, and no clear answers, regarding the sale of F-35s to the United Arab Emirates. So, let me ask. What, precisely, has the U.S. agreed to, in terms of selling F-35 aircraft to the UAE?

Ambassador HALE. Thank you for the question, Senator.

We are not at a point now where we have something to bring to the Senate, but we understand fully our obligations to notify Congress and make sure that we have met all of the requirements that exist.

Senator MENENDEZ. So, you are having conversations about sales of F-35s to the UAE.

Ambassador HALE. We are having consultations about their security needs and what would it take in order to improve their security.

Senator MENENDEZ. Have they suggested to you how many and what timeline of delivery?

Ambassador HALE. No, not to my knowledge.

Senator MENENDEZ. Has a formal letter of request been received by the UAE for these aircraft?

Ambassador HALE. I do not know of any such letter.

Senator MENENDEZ. Could you check and get back to the—

Ambassador HALE. Absolutely.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, what specific threats to the UAE does the F-35 address that cannot be met by existing weapon systems and alternative sales?

Ambassador HALE. I am not an expert on various weapon systems. What I would say is that is subject to our experts to engage on. Above all, it is important that we preserve Israel's QME, but also meet the legitimate security and defense needs of our partners in the Gulf.

Senator MENENDEZ. So, let us talk about what you clearly do know, which is the qualitative military edge that exists in law for Israel. I do not see how anyone can reasonably assert that a sale of F-35 aircraft will, in fact, not reduce Israel's qualitative military edge, based on the simple fact that right now Israel is the only country throughout the Middle East that has that aircraft. So, how are you going to deal with U.S. law as it relates to not reducing Israel's qualitative military edge?

Ambassador HALE. Well, we consult with the Israelis on any sale prior to proceeding with it. Once we determine a particular course of action—and then I know that the Congress will also evaluate whether or not any proposed sale meets the standard of preserving QME.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, let me just say that, with all due respect, I am a big fan of consulting with the Israelis, but I am talking about United States law. United States law is not subject to a foreign power deciding when it would be waived. So, again I ask you, how is it that you will deal with U.S. law as it relates to the qualitative military edge that U.S. law commits to the U.S.-Israel relationship?

Ambassador HALE. Well, the same we do it all the time. I mean, we have a large group of people at the Pentagon and at the State Department to evaluate, based on technical criteria and assess-

ments of security, and what it is that the Israelis have, and what it is that our partners need, and they will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State. Then we have a consultative process with Israel that occurs every year. There is as an executive session in which—it is a closed session in which we talk about these things.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, with all—

Ambassador HALE. First, we bring all of this to Congress.

Senator MENENDEZ. With all due respect, it is a rather—it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that, if Israel is the only country in the Middle East that has F-35s, that selling it to someone else no longer produces that qualitative military edge in the air.

Representative Abrams, I have to disagree with much of your characterization of the approach towards Iran. Continuing the U.S.—the U.N. arms embargo against Iran has been a bipartisan goal of Congress and one of our European allies. However, the U.S. efforts to renew the arms embargo of the Security Council were ineffective and definitely a how-to lesson in terrible diplomacy. How is it possible that the United States failed so utterly and completely to build international support for our position that a number of allies even chair?

Mr. ABRAMS. It is a good question, Senator, about the behavior of the EU-3, in my view, all of whom told us privately that they thought the U.N. embargo should be extended, but they did not take any action to get it extended. We saw no activity on their part in the United Nations. We, therefore, took the one step that we were able to take unilaterally, which was snapback.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well—I know, but a snapback, when, in fact, I do not know you can sustain an arms embargo if the international community, including our European allies, refuse to enforce it.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, first, the EU has its own arms embargo, which extends another 3 years. Second, this is clearly true of all sanctions on Iran; ultimately, the decisions are not made in Foreign Ministries about complying with U.S. sanctions. They are made by 10,000 or 100,000 individuals—company officers, company lawyers, bankers, financiers—who will look at these sanctions and say, “This is too dangerous. We are not going to do it.” We heard this argument in 2018, that unilateral American sanctions will not work, but they do work.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I will just close by saying, our unilateral sanctions always clearly have a value, but the reason we created an international coalition originally that, first of all, brought Iran to the negotiating table, was the internationalization of our sanctions regime. There is no question that the dissipation of that internationalization of the sanctions regime has less consequences on Iran. Iran today is more advanced than it was in its nuclear program than before. That is, I think, a pretty much undisputed fact. That is concerning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Menendez.

We have a number of people that are online with us. This is always awkward, going through this, but I am going to use seniority, as opposed to first-come/first-serve, because it is easier to do.

The next one I have in seniority on the Republican side is, I have Senator Gardner, who I am told is with us online.

Senator Gardner, are you with us?

[Pause.]

Senator GARDNER. Senator Risch, I will defer to Senator Romney, I believe, who is—who came in before me.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Gardner has not responded.

So, if Senator Romney, you are up.

Senator ROMNEY. Yes. I hope you can hear me, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity to speak with these individuals about this critical part of the world.

Mr. ABRAMS, how does our support for the Lebanese Armed Forces advance our strategic interests in that country? I know we continue to support the Lebanese Armed Forces. We are very concerned about stability there. We want to make sure that we do not see a resurgence of strength on the part of Hezbollah. I, for one, believe that our support of the Lebanese Armed Forces advances our—the position of our friends there, and it deters the growth of Hezbollah influence, but I am interested in your informed opinion.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would ask, Senator, that Under Secretary Hale take that question, as Under Secretary, first, and as the former Ambassador of Lebanon.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Ambassador HALE. Thank you, Senator. Thank you for your support for that program.

It is of critical importance to our strategy to counter Hezbollah and Iranian malign influence in Lebanon. We have been supporting the Lebanese Army for a number of years. Our military experts believe that it has paid off. The Army is far more capable today than it was when we began to do the job of protecting Lebanon's borders and supporting UNIFIL in trying to make sure that the south is as quiet as it can be.

We will continue this program. We believe that the Army has shown that it is capable of those tasks, and that it has a sterling end-user record; the equipment that we provide is all accounted for. If we were not building up the security arm of the State of Lebanon, Hezbollah would have even further ability to extend its sway over Lebanon. There would be no alternative to point to for the Lebanese people as the provider of security—the legitimate provider of security, which is the Army, and not a militia.

Thank you, Senator.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Ambassador Hale, let me ask, also, with regards to the reports that China was going to invest some \$400 billion in Iran—and I presume that would have been on a loan basis—but, clearly, China has its eyes on Iran and on the Middle East. Do you have a sense of what their objectives are in the Middle East and, particularly with regards to Iran, what their strategy appears to be? How is it that we might want to counter what they are doing, and whether we are already taking steps to do so?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Senator. If you will allow, I will try to reply to that one.

We saw the announcement of the \$400 billion trade deal—25-year deal. The annual rate would be ten times the current level of

trade between China and Iran, which is really unrealistic. So, I think it is—that number is more of an announcement than it is a reality.

We are concerned about China's presence in the Middle East. We are concerned about the potential for Chinese arms sales, not only for Iran, but other countries in the Middle East.

China's interests, of course, start with oil. China's a big oil importer, and we are obviously trying to make sure they get the oil supplies that they are going to need, but they also want political influence.

So, we are watching that very carefully. In all of the countries that are friends of ours, including Israel, we have conversations about the need to be very careful about the level of Chinese involvement, because the economic involvement very frequently becomes a source of difficulty, both economically and politically, for the countries that permit it.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Let me ask one more question. That is with regards to Iraq. I happen to be, I think, one of many who believe that Iraq is critical to our long-term interests in the Middle East, to stability in the Middle East, and can be a—an example of the potential of a democratically elected government, but it is obviously in a fragile position, given its neighbors. I do believe that, historically, our commitment of troops in Iraq has helped provide stability, obviously helped expel ISIS from territory in Iraq, but I would anticipate that ongoing troop presence is important to continue to provide those same benefits.

Are American troop commitments there remaining critical to the objectives we have in Iraq, and, if so, why do we continue to reduce that level? To what level do you anticipate we should, or should not, go?

Ambassador HALE. Thank you, Senator.

I agree that the U.S. troop presence in Iraq is critical for achieving our goals. They are, as you described them, we are trying to increase the capacity and the resiliency of Iraqi Security Forces. We want to counter the instability and violence spewed by, not just ISIS, but Iranian-backed militias that were referenced earlier. We are very focused on that. I would defer to our military colleagues in defining how many troops are required in order to continue to perform those objectives.

There is a transformation underway in Iraq. There is a strong popular demand for reform. We are talking to the new Iraqi Prime Minister, who met with President Trump just a couple of weeks ago here in Washington, in the context of a strategic dialogue, how he is going to address those urgent reform needs, which we agree on, that are essential to Iraq's stability.

We also look to this leadership to protect our diplomatic and military facilities in Iraq, so we do not have to act on our own, although we will, as I think Chairman Risch so eloquently put it earlier.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I will return the time to you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Romney.

I now have indication Senator Cardin is on the line.

Senator Cardin, are you with us?

Senator CARDIN. I am with you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

Let me thank both of our witnesses.

First, Mr. Abrams, let me just qualify this by saying I have a deep respect for your service to our country. You have really served our Nation well, but I strongly disagree with your assessment as to where we are in Iran by the U.S. policy that has isolated us from our allies. Let me just give you the background. Then I really want to get your response to this.

My assessment is that the maximum pressure campaign has been to isolate the United States. We look at Iran today, and where they are. Without our allies' support, you indicate that our sanctions are working because we have companies that will respond to the U.S. sanctions. I acknowledge that, but then you said that our traditional allies wanted to help us in the United Nations, but they did not vote with us. The reality is that we have all had conversations with our European allies, our traditional allies, and yes, they recognize Iran as a serious—as a real threat, but they are absolutely against what the U.S. did in pulling out of the Iran nuclear agreement, and they are taking steps to counter what the United States has done in regards to the effect of sanctions against Iran, particularly now that we have announced that we are reimposing our sanctions.

Then you talk about what China is doing. The United States has been isolated in its global politics so that China can be bolder in reaching out to Iran than they would before, when we had the unity of Europe. So, we are isolating America's effectiveness in global politics, and that is affecting how well we can isolate Iran. We have legitimated Iran in some quarters because of what we have done in violating and pulling out of the Iran nuclear agreement.

So, when I look at Iran today, I see a very dangerous country. What Senator Menendez said is absolutely right, there is strong bipartisan support to take effective action to isolate Iran and to minimize their ability to cause the type of damage that they do, and to make sure they never become a nuclear-weapon state, but we do that by working with our allies. This Administration has isolated us.

Now, I know your background, and I have a hard time believing that you really believe America is stronger when we act by ourselves and not with our allies. Tell me how we are stronger when America is alone rather than having our traditional allies on our side as we combat Iran.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Senator.

Sometimes we have to be alone. We have been alone about 40 times in the United Nations, for example, in defense of Israel. Literally alone. That was the right thing to do in those votes.

We are trying to maintain this coalition, as you rightly say. That is a strong coalition, both domestically here and in Europe. I will give you an example. This week, 2 days ago, Tuesday, there was a vote in the IAEA General Conference. Iran presented itself to be the chairman of the Committee of the Whole. It was defeated in a landslide. No other country voted for it, because countries do recog-

nize, as the Senate does, and as this committee does, the danger that Iran presents. We are in continuing conversations with the British, the French, and the Germans. We did have one very big disagreement, which was about the JCPOA, which we regard as a very—

Senator CARDIN. I am going to just interrupt you for one second. We have had more than one disagreement with our traditional allies. Look at some of our trade policies, look at our climate positions. It is not just Iran. We have had major disagreements with our traditional allies. On NATO, we have had disagreements with our traditional allies.

You are mentioning the IAEA. The only reason we have had those actions is because of the nuclear agreement.

Mr. ABRAMS. In this case, the—what happened was that Iran presented itself to be chairman of the Committee of the Whole, and it was defeated in a landslide. This is unrelated to the JCPOA.

On the question of Iran, I think there is very broad agreement within what I call the Western Alliance. I have been in touch with British, French, and German colleagues in the last few days, and it is clear to them, as it is clear to us, that we need to work together in the months and years ahead to deal with this terrible problem of Iran. Where we had a deep disagreement was, should we value retaining the JCPOA and allowing the arms embargo to go away, or should we say no, the arms embargo has to stay? On that one, I think, as you know, we were right, the arms embargo is critical, and the EU-3 really made a mistake here in thinking that they could allow it to disappear.

Senator CARDIN. My last point—I know I have run out of time—is that if we were still in the Iran nuclear agreement, our allies would have been with us at the United Nations on this vote. The only reason they are not with us is because of the action taken by the United States in withdrawing from the nuclear agreement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cardin.

We will now go to—the next one I have on my list is Senator Young, who is with us online, I believe.

Senator Young.

[Pause.]

The CHAIRMAN. If not, we will try Senator Perdue.

[Pause.]

The CHAIRMAN. The next one I have on my list, we will now go to Senator Shaheen, who is here in person.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, to both of you, for your service to the country and for being here today.

I was pleased to see, this week, that Britain agreed to renew information-sharing with the United States with respect to bringing a case against the two terrorists known as “the Beatles,” who are suspected of being responsible for the killing of Americans James Foley, Peter Kassig, Steven Sotloff, and Kayla Mueller. I wonder if you—the goal is to bring those two terrorists back to the United States, to try them in a civilian court, to get justice for the families, and to send a signal to the rest of the world. Can you, Under Sec-

retary Hale, speak to the message that that sends to terrorists around the world if we are able to do that?

Ambassador HALE. Yes, it would be, I think, a very powerful message, Senator, that we will be relentless in pursuing justice on behalf of American citizens who have been killed or injured in any way by terrorist organizations. We simply will not rest until we are able to see justice done.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Can you tell me, is the State Department supportive of that effort?

Ambassador HALE. Absolutely.

Senator SHAHEEN. Are you working with the Attorney General?

Ambassador HALE. Yes, Senator.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Last month, the U.N.'s counterterrorism chief confirmed that 10,000 ISIS fighters remain active—obviously, the Beatles were ISIS fighters—and that attacks have significantly increased. We also have heard, from Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, who is the State Department's Envoy, expressing concern over ISIS regroupings and attacks. So, I wonder if you can speak to the reason we sent additional troops into Syria. They were speaking with respect to ISIS presence in Syria. I had a chance to visit Syria in 2018. I saw the difference that our presence in northeast Syria made to the Syrians to maintaining stability in northeast Syria, preventing the Russians and the Iranians from coming in, the Turks from coming in. The President precipitously withdrew those troops. Now we are sending troops back into northeast Syria. Can you speak to why we are doing that?

Ambassador HALE. Well, we have had a continual presence. There has been a small adjustment downward, relatively minor, from, I think, 1,000 to 800 soldiers. Again, I defer to my military colleagues on assessing just who they need on the ground to complete the mission, but from your travel and your close work on this, that, while we have made great progress, we have not achieved our success yet in the enduring defeat of ISIS in Syria. We will continue to work with the Turks. We will continue to deconflict with the Russians. Job is not yet done.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, I appreciate your saying that, because we have heard from a number of officials, including the President, that we have defeated ISIS in the Middle East. So, you would disagree with that statement? You believe that we still have work to do with respect to ISIS?

Ambassador HALE. We have made tremendous progress, and we are very close to completing the task, but the task is not yet done.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Representative Abrams, I am concerned that the Administration has really lost the focus on our policy towards Iran. I share the concerns that you have heard from some of my colleagues here about our ability to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions without the JCPOA. So, can you talk about just what is most important as we think about how we address Iran's malign activities across the Middle East? What are we most focused on? How do we engage the international community, as Senator Cardin has suggested we need to do, in order to be successful?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Senator.

I would say two things. We are focused on Iran's nuclear program, and we are focused on its malign activities in the region—support for terrorism, primarily, its activities in Yemen, in Iraq, in Lebanon.

Our view of the JCPOA, which some members of the committee shared when it was first introduced, is that it is really not a permanent obstacle for the Iranian nuclear program. It almost paves the way, because there are sunsets at 5 years first—

Senator SHAHEEN. No, I appreciate that. I voted for it, so I understand the limitations that it had. However, it kept Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and we do not have those same constraints today.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, in our view, the path ahead should be to negotiate a comprehensive agreement that is a permanent block for Iran getting a nuclear weapon.

Senator SHAHEEN. Are we trying—excuse me for interrupting, but I am about—

Mr. ABRAMS. Oh—

Senator SHAHEEN. —to run out of time. Are we—what are we doing to bring Iran to the negotiating table? What hope do we have that that might happen sometime in the near future?

Mr. ABRAMS. Obviously, Iran does not want to do it, does not want to give up the nuclear program, does not want to give up the support for terrorism. So, in our view, the only way to get them to do it is what we call a maximum pressure campaign. If you look at the Iranian economy, with—even now, this week, the rial falling to an all time low. Today, 290,000 to the dollar, which is an all time low. We think that, with that pressure, once our election is over, they will come to the negotiating table.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, can I have another minute to ask a question about —

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead.

Senator SHAHEEN. —Lebanon?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Senator SHAHEEN. Under Secretary Hale, I know you understand what is happening in Lebanon, having served there, but one of the things that I have been concerned about is, as we look at the challenges facing Lebanon, we were very quick to respond to the humanitarian situation after the explosion, but now we have backed off somewhat. China has already offered a billion dollars to rebuild the port there. Russia is in there, angling for more influence for warm water ports south of Tartus. Can you speak to what more we are doing to try and help the Lebanese people who are really struggling at this time?

Ambassador HALE. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we have contributed \$19 billion to the immediate humanitarian crisis—

Senator SHAHEEN. Billion, with a “b,” or million—

Ambassador HALE. Million. The million—we are, I believe, the largest, or maybe second-largest donor, in response to this crisis. Over the years, we have provided \$10 billion in support to Lebanon, both for the security services, on the one hand, and to private NGOs, on the other, for economic development and humanitarian

support. No one else has contributed as much foreign assistance as we have.

I have little faith that the Chinese will make good on these kinds of promises. I was in Beirut, days after the explosion. I met with all of the leaders. I met with a wide sector of activists and protesters—normal, common people. The level of anger is quite high, directed toward the political elite and their corruption. So, our focus is on that and getting in place a government that is going to be actually responsive to the needs of the people. If that occurs, and they are committed and acting upon reform, that will unlock our support and the support of the French and other donors, for several—I think \$21 billion that has been put on the shelf of IMF, World Bank, and so-called CDR money, which is bilateral assistance, that can all be unlocked if the Lebanese leadership make the right decisions and break from the past.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

I—that is a good line of questioning. I think everybody is concerned about that situation in Lebanon. I do not know what the path forward is there, what it—where it is going to take everyone, but it is a serious, serious situation.

Do I have any more members of the Majority online?

[Pause.]

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. If not, the next one I have on the list that told me they are online is Senator Udall.

Senator Udall, are you with us?

Senator UDALL. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. You are not online.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. It does not look like online, but could be. Welcome.

Senator Udall, the floor is yours.

Big enough room. You should be able to find a chair, Senator Udall.

Senator UDALL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for you and Senator Menendez calling this hearing, and, I think, very important subjects we are talking about today on the Middle East.

After 20 years of uninterrupted war, the forever wars in the Middle East continue. Contrary to the Trump administration's pronouncements, we are even more entrenched in the region than before, and no closer to revoking the 2001 AUMF being used to justify wars that Congress never authorized.

Just last week, instead of drawing down from a war in Syria that no one in Congress voted for, the Administration sent more troops to a country where no strategic U.S. interest exists and threats to American forces are everywhere. Maximum pressure is an abject failure. I agree with Senator Cardin on that. It has traded an agreement that placed limits on Iranian enrichment for bluster, increased enrichment, and threats of war, all enacted out of spite for the previous Administration's progress.

Let us be clear. The United States left the Iran nuclear agreement, and now wants to be the arbiter of how it is enforced. That

is ludicrous. As a result, the U.S. is now more isolated around the world.

I want to reaffirm that neither—and this question is directed to both witnesses—that neither the 2001 nor 2002 AUMF give this President the authority to go to war or to enter into any hostilities with Iran. Iran has responded to the maximum pressure campaign by increasing its nuclear activities, and our allies are rejecting our approach. What is the next step? Do you expect the Iranian regime to collapse or give up? Or should the American people prep for more unconstitutional attacks on Iran that might precipitate a new war?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Senator.

The next step, we hope, would be a comprehensive negotiation—

Senator YOUNG. Hey. Should I direct the Yemen question at Mr. Abram?

Senator UDALL. Both witnesses.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I will start.

That is the goal. The goal of the maximum pressure campaign is to deny Iran the money with which the regime is doing the many things to which all of us object, and to get them to the table to negotiate a comprehensive agreement that would deal with the nuclear program and its conduct in the region.

Senator UDALL. Mr. Hale.

Ambassador HALE. Well, I might address your question about the use of AUMF. The Administration has not, to date, interpreted the 2002 AUMF as authorizing military force against Iran, except as may be necessary and appropriate to promote stability in Iraq and address terrorist threats emanating there.

Senator UDALL. Mr. Abrams, you have a lot of experience in Latin America with coups, authoritarians, and failed democratic transitions of power. Politico's morning newsletter asks a question: Is the United States turning into a banana republic under President Trump? President Trump, yesterday, said, and I quote, "Well, we are going to have to see what happens. You know that I have been complaining very strongly at—about the ballots, and the ballots are a disaster. Let us get rid of the ballots, and we will have a very peaceful—and there will not be a transfer, frankly, there would be a continuation. The ballots are out of control. You know it, and you—and who knows it better than anybody else? The Democrats know it better than anybody else," That is the President of the United States talking about the election.

Senator Romney replied to these comments by posting on social media that, "Fundamental to democracy is the peaceful transition of power. Without that, there is Belarus. Any suggestion that a President might not respect this constitutional guarantee is both unthinkable and unacceptable."

As a high-ranking official in the U.S. State Department, which has a mission to promote democracy, who do you agree most with, and why?

Mr. ABRAMS. Senator, I am not going to parse the President's remarks. I think we are all proud of American democracy, and we continue, in this Administration, as did our predecessors, to promote the expansion of democracy around the world.

Senator UDALL. Well, then some of you should be standing up and saying this is unacceptable, and tell him that he should not be talking and demeaning our democracy, and demeaning the peaceful transition of power.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Udall.

We will now move to Senator Young, who I am told is joining us online.

Senator YOUNG. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We continue to witness the destabilizing effects of Iranian-backed proxies throughout the Middle East, but especially in Yemen, where the war and COVID-19 continue to ravage and decimate a people that have already endured unspeakable suffering. The Houthis continue to deflect humanitarian assistance, food deliveries, and medical assistance. The war is so complex in Yemen, with many different facets deserving blame, but Iran's role certainly cannot be overlooked.

From a global commerce perspective, Iran regularly threatens the—threatens the Straits of Hormuz. Now, through their Houthi proxies, they may be able to also gain control of the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. If successful with gaining control over the key straits on both sides of the Arabian Peninsula, Iran would completely change our ability to access the region and alter how commerce is able to flow.

Further, we are seeing Iran develop the Houthis into what some characterize as a Hezbollah-like entity within Yemen that could have an enduring effect and further prolong the conflict that has already inflicted unspeakable humanitarian costs.

So, either Ambassador Abrams or Secretary Hale, could you address what we are doing to end the conflict in Yemen? I know you had some—you spoke to this at some length in your opening remarks, but maybe you could expand on that.

Ambassador HALE. Yes, thank you, Senator.

I think you described the situation quite accurately. You asked what we are doing about this. We have a multifaceted strategy. First, we are supporting the efforts of the U.N. Special Envoy, Martin Griffiths, who has been tireless in trying to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict, because ultimately we do not believe that there is a military solution. I was out in Saudi Arabia late last year, and I met with the Yemeni leadership, I met with the U.N. leadership, I met with the Saudi leadership, and encouraged them to continue down that path.

We are also doing our utmost to interdict the weapons flows from Iran that you have cited, and encouraging our allies to do likewise and disrupt the Iranian smuggling networks that are supplying these weapons and materiel to the Houthis.

We are also doing our utmost to work with our partners to ensure that extremist groups are not using Yemen and its stateless areas as a safe haven from which to conduct attacks. We are trying to keep the aid moving on the humanitarian needs of the Yemeni people, but the Houthis have been interfering severely with that.

We are doing our best, but there have been real gaps as a result of that.

We share all of the concerns that you have. As I say, we are doing this so you—deploying this multi-pronged strategy in order to see that our interests are protected there.

Thank you.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Ambassador Abrams.

Mr. ABRAMS. The only thing I would add, Senator, is that we are also clearly maintaining the level of military strength in the region that we think is necessary to protect those two chokepoints that you mentioned, the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you.

Thank you both.

How is the Administration preventing Iran from replicating the Hezbollah model in Yemen? You can expand that to address other geographies, as well.

Ambassador HALE. Well, essentially, the tools that I outlined in my answer a moment ago. We believe that a political solution that is brought to bear as rapidly as possible can prevent the transformation of the Houthis into a Hezbollah-like asset for Iran. It is certainly essential. We have seen how Hezbollah grew from a relatively small, if potent, terrorist cell to what it is today, with its arms in every direction. We definitely want to prevent that from happening. So, we are doing our utmost to combat the Iranian influence. We have been encouraged that the Republic of Yemen Government has reached out to the Southern Transition Council and reached an agreement with the South, so that is beginning to put pressure from both directions on the Houthis, but there is a lot of work still ahead of us.

Senator YOUNG. Okay. We will continue to monitor that.

I think I have about 90 seconds left, but I will go ahead and pivot to Turkey, Under Secretary Hale.

Many have discussed how the Abraham Accords might influence Israel and Arab State efforts to counter the regional influence of Iran, but what about Turkey? Turkey and Iran have similar ambitions for recreating the empires that they once had, and both desire to lead the Muslim world. Clearly, Turkey is—has rapidly radicalized as—under Erdogan's regime. There are a lot of challenges and implications for the broader region. We have not seen any comparable actions taken by the Administration to help change Turkey's trajectory. I know this is very challenging. Turkey remains a member of NATO.

Are you concerned that, under Erdogan's leadership, Turkey poses a greater—perhaps an even greater challenge to our security over the longer term?

Ambassador HALE. Well, we have a complex relationship with Turkey, and there are many factors in play, here. Our interests in some areas overlap. Our interests differ in other areas. We try, obviously, to build on our areas of agreement and try to work out our areas of disagreement. They are a NATO ally. We count on that. Their geography means that they do have legitimate interests in the Middle East. That cannot be ignored, but it is important that they be channeled in the ways in which Turkey is supporting ef-

forts to bring peace and stability, particularly through multilateral formats in places like Libya and in Syria, support of the political process there. So, we have a very extensive dialogue with the Turks to move them in that direction. That is our objective.

Senator YOUNG. Okay. I will follow up—

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator—

Senator YOUNG. —and inquire as to what action the Administration may have taken within NATO to send messages to Turkey.

Thank you so much, both of you, for your appearance before the committee.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Young.

Senator Murphy, you are up.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, to both of you, for your service.

I understand that, when Administration officials come before this committee or any committee, they try to put the best possible spin on the effect of their policies. Obama administration officials did it. We have come to expect it, but there are some times in which the case just does not pass the straight-face test. I will say, this argument that Iran is on the run, that they have less influence in the region because of our maximum pressure campaign, just does not pass the straight-face test. They have closer relations with the Houthis than they did 4 years ago. They have closer relations with the Qataris than they did 4 years ago. Their proxy in Syria is closer to command over the majority of the country than 4 years ago. This narrative about Iraq is just not true. I mean, it is true that rocket attacks have increased from the first half of this year to the first half of last year. I do not know that there is any expert that would tell you that Iran has less influence in Iraq than they did at the end of the Obama administration. So, I think it is important for us all to be sober and realistic, because you cannot make good policy if you do not understand the consequences of your actions.

That is a statement. Here are my two questions, both for you, Ambassador Hale.

I think we also have an accountability crisis in the region. Part of the reason we are so weak right now in and around the Middle East is because our allies and our adversaries, generally do not believe that there is much consequence for taking action against the United States or taking action in contravention of U.S. interests. The, obviously, most high-profile example is the dismemberment of Jamal Khashoggi. There were no consequences of any serious nature against Saudi Arabia for that brutal murder, but the region is populated with other instances in which U.S. law has been violated, and there seemingly has been no accountability, which is just an invitation for our so-called allies in the region to continue to treat us shabbily. I think it has consequences for the next Administration, as well.

So, Ambassador Hale, let me pose two of—two examples for you and ask for an update on whether there has been any accountability.

The first is in UAE. We have talked about the potential pending sale. I have asked this question several times, but UAE admitted, about a year and a half ago, to taking U.S. weapons and transferring them to very dangerous Salafist militias that have interests on

the ground in Yemen. This was not just reported. This was admitted to by UAE. For a year and a half, this committee has been told that it has been under investigation. So, my question is, What specific steps have been taken to hold UAE accountable for the illegal transfer of U.S. weapons to militia groups on the ground in the region?

Second, in Egypt, on July 13, American citizen Mustafa Kassem died in an Egyptian prison. His death was entirely preventable. He had submitted the paperwork to renounce his citizenship so that he could be released to the United States. On February 26, Assistant Secretary Schenker said that the State Department's deliberations about what actions to take in consequence were a work in progress.

So, let me ask you, Can you provide us an update? Has there been any public action—and I think public action is important, because if you do not—if the world does not see us engaging in accountability, then it is hard for it to have an effect—has there been any public accountability measures taken for the transfer of weapons in UAE or the killing of Mustafa Kassem in an Egyptian prison?

Ambassador HALE. I would be happy to get you a full answer in writing to your two questions.

What I have to say this morning is that we have had very serious conversations with both of those governments about those activities. In the case of the Emirates, I am confident that the Emirates understand exactly what is permitted and what is not, and how serious these allegations are about what happened, and that there can be nothing like that again, because it is jeopardizing our ability to meet their legitimate security needs.

In the case of Egypt, again, we have a confidential dialogue with the Egyptians. I emphasize “confidential” because I think we are more likely to get results, in terms of protecting American citizens, relatives of American citizens who are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention and other forms of mistreatment there. We have had some success in getting them released, but we will continue to have those conversations with the Egyptians and to spell out how unacceptable this kind of abusive behavior is.

Senator MURPHY. Mr. Chairman, the Saudis, as a consequence of killing Jamal Khashoggi, got a smiling photo op with Secretary Pompeo. Apparently, from what we are hearing today, the Emirates and the Egyptians have gotten stern private conversations. That is not a recipe to send a message to the rest of the region and the world to obey U.S. law and to treat U.S. citizens well and to act in accordance with our interests. I think this is part and parcel of the reason why America is getting very little from our allies. Our interests are not advancing in the region, because nobody believes they will be held accountable if they—if their policies run crosscurrent to the United States.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. I have got to say, I just heard the comments from my friend from Connecticut, and it is almost like we are living in parallel worlds. To say we are not getting anything significant in our ally—from our allies just rewrites history.

I had the great joy of being at the White House last week for an historic peace deal, where, for the first time in three decades, an

Arab country normalized relationships with Israel, the UAE did so, and, within a matter of weeks thereafter, Bahrain did so. Both of those were major diplomatic advances. They had not happened for decades. The Saudis, whom the Senator from Connecticut just cast aspersions at them, played a major role in brokering Middle East peace, including, for the first time, as allowing Israeli planes to overfly Saudi airspace. So, I understand that we are 41 days out from an election, and so everything has to be bad in foreign policy if your opponent is the incumbent, but I do think this committee deserves some acknowledgment and recognition of the historic events that are playing out right now, events that have made our allies safer, events that have made the Middle East safer, and events that have made America safe.

Mr. Abrams, you are a longtime expert on the region. What are your thoughts on the historic peace deal that was just brokered by the President?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am reminded, Senator, of the many people who said that this could not happen without an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, but the Administration thought that it would work in the other direction, that the first thing to try to do was to normalize relations between Israel and a number of Arab States, and then that might have an influence on Palestinian conduct and prove to be correct.

Senator CRUZ. Well, and I will tell you, it really proved right some conversations we had in 2017, in the first year of the Trump administration. As you know, there were vigorous debates within the Administration on a number of foreign policy questions. One question was whether or not to move our Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. The Department where you work today, the State Department, opposed moving the Embassy. The Defense Department opposed moving the Embassy. I engaged vigorously in those debates directly with the President. The argument that State and Defense made, and the argument that some in the White House made, is that moving the Embassy to Jerusalem would enrage the enemies of Israel, it would enrage the enemies of America, and it would make peace in the Middle East harder to achieve.

In my view, that was precisely backwards, that the reason peace has been so difficult to achieve, in part, has been the consistent ambiguity of U.S. policy, the wringing of hands, where the enemies of America and the enemies of Israel did not know where we stand. What I urged the President is, moving the Embassy will be heard crystal clear across the globe by America's friends and by America's enemies, that America stands resolutely and unshakeably alongside our friend, the State of Israel.

I was there in Jerusalem the day the Embassy opened, a time of celebration and dancing in the streets. I do not believe it was coincidental that, within a week of the Embassy opening, the Administration announced what I think is the single most important foreign policy decision of the last 4 years, which is withdrawing from the catastrophic Obama Iran nuclear deal. Both of those together, in my judgment, were the essential preconditions for the historic peace deal that rolled out within the last couple of weeks. That clarity—I can tell you, in the last couple of weeks, I have had conversations directly with the Ambassador from the UAE and the

Ambassador from Saudi Arabia. Both of them told me, said the reason we are cutting this deal is because we want to be friends with America, we want to be closer friends with you. We know you care that we make nice with Israel. So, we are willing to do that, because we want a closer friendship and alliance with the United States. I think that is an incredible victory for clarity in foreign policy, and it is something worth learning from, celebrating, and emulating, going forward.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cruz. Well said. There are obviously two different views on this, and it is unfortunate that the political conditions in the country today get us there. The situation with Iran is serious. We obviously have differences with our allies on it. They are very squishy on it. We have all talked to them, but it has got to be dealt with.

Senator Kaine, no doubt you have strong feelings on the matter.

Senator KAINE. I do, Mr. Chair, but I do not like the suggestion that strong feelings and differences of opinion are just because of the political situation. Can there not be an intellectually respectable ground for difference of opinion that does not just get cast aside as being politically motivated?

The CHAIRMAN. There can be, but there—

Senator KAINE. Well, let—

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead.

Senator KAINE. Let me jump in, because I want to pay a compliment. I am very willing to be critical when it is warranted. I have got some critical things to say, too. but I also feel like, to be fair-minded, I should pay a compliment. My top thing I wanted to say this morning was congratulations on the normalization of relations between Israel, UAE, Bahrain. I think this is a big, positive accomplishment. I tweeted out, immediately when I heard it, that it was a positive for Israel, that it was a positive for the U.S. I gave the Trump administration praise for their work in this. I think a lot of people should get praise. I think the Trump administration should. I hope you will take that back to the Secretary of State and the White House.

I think Israeli leadership should. I think the Ambassador to the UAE, Yousef Al Otaiba, wrote a very powerful editorial in an Israeli paper, which was quite unusual, basically saying, “We are on a path toward normalization. Please do not annex territories on the West Bank. If you do that, you will blow up the opportunity for normalization. If you will not do that, we can open up a path to normalization.” So, I give Yousef Al Otaiba and other leaders of these nations credit for being willing to put a bold proposal on the table, but also to ask something of Israel in exchange.

I also give members of the Senate credit in this. When the new Israeli Government was formed, Bibi Netanyahu and Benny Gantz put out a public statement saying that they were going to annex territories, beginning on July 2, “with American support.” They made that public. “We are going to do this with American support.” Many of us in this body looked at that language and said, “If you are going to say publicly you are doing annexation with American support, then we are going to publicly say, ‘Please do not do this.’” We had a letter, that about a quarter of the Senate signed, to

Israel, saying, “We would view this as catastrophic to peace prospects. We would view it as violation of U.S. policy. We would view it, potentially, as a violation of international law, destabilizing in the region.” I think the Israeli leadership looked at all of these things, “Here is a path to peace and normalization, here is a path that could lead to strained relationships in the region, and potentially strained relationships in the United States,” and they did a calculation that I think was the right calculation, for peace in the region and for their own security, which is to enter into this deal.

So, I have no trouble saying thank you, and congratulations, to this Administration and to the Israelis and to UAE and the other nations, and also say to my Senate colleagues, who firmly stood up for the need for a peace dialogue and against unilateral action by the Israelis and an annexation, these stars aligned and produced something positive. That is a good thing. That is a good thing. That is a good thing.

I do associate myself with comments by folks on this side of the aisle, and I do not think they are political. I believe them earnestly and sincerely, that the policy with respect to Iran has been a disaster, because there is not a single thing we could not have done not—this Administration could not have done, had they kept the Iran deal and pocket it and enforced the hell out of it, and then also utilize the fact that the JCPOA was only a narrow deal, dealing with the nuclear portfolio, that did not forbid the U.S. from engaging or imposing sanctions for ballistic missiles or sanctions for bellicose activity in the region, in Yemen or Bahrain or anywhere else.

We had a huge suite of tools we could use against Iran. There is not a single thing this Administration has done to put pressure on Iran that we could not have done while pocketing the gains of that deal and imposing pressure on Iran to comply with it. Had we done that, we would not have been at odds with our allies. Had we done that, it would have been easier to find a nuclear deal with North Korea. As soon as the U.S. decided to blow up a deal that everybody said was being complied with, North Korea looked at our desire to find a nuclear deal, and basically said, “Hold on a second. If we are going to do a deal, and the U.S. will just gladly walk out of it, even if it is being complied with”—it immediately made it much more difficult.

So, I will associate myself with a lot of what Senator Cruz said on the first part of this, that this—these normalizations were very, very significant accomplishments. I agree with that, but I have to completely disagree with respect to Iran.

I hope you will keep pressure on Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has people in jail or under trial who are Virginia residents. Jamal Khashoggi, was a Virginia resident. There has been no accountability, and the President is bragging that he, basically, got Congress to back off and allow impunity for MBS. There are Aziza al-Yousef and other Virginians who have been in prison for women’s rights activism in Saudi Arabia, are under trial for it. We have to keep the pressure on for them.

Secretary Hale, you know the situation. So—well, I have seen you more in the Middle East than I have seen you in the United States. I mean, you know this situation so well. We have to keep

the pressure on Saudi Arabia to advance human rights and not be one of the most egregious violators of human rights in the world. I have confidence that, to the extent you can, given the fact that the President wants to “save MBS’s ass,” as he said—I am using his words—to the extent that you can, I am confident that you will.

With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back to you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Kaine. You discharge yourself well when you compliment the Administration for their success. We appreciate that.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. I agree with you that we should have the ability to have a—

Your colleagues are not—are amused by the fact, I guess, that you have complimented the Administration on their success.

In any event, the—you are right that we should have a legitimate discussion about Iran. One would sit around listening to this, with the Republicans on one side and the Democrats on the other, as if it is somebody in this room’s fault. I think we all need to agree, all of this is the result of Iran’s malign conduct. I agree with you that the—it would be really nice to sit down and make an agreement. The problem is—and I—

One thing I disagree with you strongly on is that, “Well, we should have stayed in the agreement, and then enforced the heck out of it, and everything would be all right.” This is a country that is killing American men and women. You cannot do business like that and, on the one hand, with your left hand, be negotiating with them about doing good things, and, on the other hand, letting them get away with the most malign activity that is possible.

So, again, I appreciate your view on this, but we ought to all start from the proposition that the problem here is Iran. It is not the Republicans or the Democrats or either one’s policy towards Iran. It is Iran that is the problem. We are all Americans, and we are all of the frame of mind that these people have got to be contained from their malign activities.

So, it is unfortunate we do have this division over this, but—in any event.

Senator Kaine. Mr. Chair, if I could—I am not going to—

The CHAIRMAN. Please.

Senator Kaine. —take long, but—

The CHAIRMAN. Please.

Senator Kaine. We have had this discussion before.

The CHAIRMAN. You and I have had, personally.

Senator Kaine. We have had it personally. We had it in the committee. There is so much we can say about all that Iran has done bad, but you always have to look at the way they look at us. I have that conversation before. That does not mean that they are right, that does not mean that we have to take their side of it, but you know that I know some things that I am not at liberty to discuss right here, so you assert that as Iran—has Iran killed Americans? The answer to that is yes. There are some things that I would like to say to complete the picture, that I am not able to say at a hearing like this.

The only way to build out of historic distrust—and there is a deep historic distrust between the United States and Iran that goes

back to the U.S. and the U.K. deposing a democratically elected Government of Iran in the 1950s—and then the things that Iran has done to us—the Embassy, the—taking American hostages at the Embassy in 1979. This has been a back-and-forth for five or six decades. How do you get out of distrust? Because I think we would all agree it would be a good thing for the world if we could. Maybe it is impossible, but if we could get out of it, how do we get out of it? The answer is a tiny step at a time. Not overnight. No, no, not overnight. A tiny step at a time.

That is what I am looking for. I am looking for acknowledging all of the bad, that you point out, but trying to figure out the tiny steps at a time that can lead us into a better place. I happen to believe that that is possible. There are some who believe it is impossible. I happen to believe it is possible. Maybe that is just me, but I know we will continue to have this discussion.

The CHAIRMAN. I agree with that, Senator Kaine. I agree with you, I think it is baby steps at a time, but the fact that we were historical enemies—I mean, you look back at—look what happened with Germany and Japan, two of our closest allies right now, and the atrocities that they committed were just awful, but they stopped. That is a difference.

The—what I always come back to with Iran is the—one of the great hopes is the demographics of that country, the significant population of young people in that country who do not buy on to what—where the Administration has been taking—

So, this is a conversation we do need to continue, we have got to always remember, we are all on the same side of this. Now, how we get to where we want to go, we may have differences on, but we need to respect and—

Thank you so much, Senator Kaine.

We have Senator Merkley, who is online.

Senator Merkley, the floor is yours.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much.

I wanted to start with a question for David Hale. This goes—and I apologize if you have already addressed this in this gathering, because I was late to be able to tune in, due to another commitment, but the question is this. In a context of our relationship with Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia has shown interest in developing a nuclear cycle. The Wall Street Journal noted, in August of this year, that they had built a facility they had not disclosed to the world to extract yellowcake from uranium ore; essentially, the front end of a nuclear cycle. The conversations we have had with Saudi Arabia have not produced a commitment in the context of the future development of nuclear weapons.

Obviously, this is relevant to the conversation we are having about Iran, because you have the two major powers of the Sunni world and the Shi'ite world who watch each other very carefully and are very concerned about what the other power within that Muslim spectrum does. So, bring us up to date on how forcefully—how determined is the Administration to insist on the gold standard for nuclear power in Saudi Arabia? The gold standard being the standard that says a country agrees to forego uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing to, basically, not build the infrastructure as a foundation for the development of nuclear weapons.

Ambassador HALE. Well, thank you, Senator. We certainly share the concern that you have addressed.

Our nonproliferation goals are global and regional and universal in their nature. We agree that there has to be commitment to a gold standard that you have described.

I would say, though, that the most effective way in order to prevent those hypothetical scenarios from unfolding is to make sure that Saudi Arabia knows that we—together, our partners in defense of their security, and that we are addressing their legitimate security needs. This goes to issues that Elliot Abrams deals with on a daily basis. I think he has covered them pretty fully during the session this morning, but since you were absent, I might turn the microphone to him. It is all about Iran and making sure that Iran does not pose a nuclear threat, or other forms of threats, to—of an existential nature, to our Saudi partners.

Elliot, would you like to expand?

Mr. ABRAMS. Only to say that we do hope for the ability to negotiate what we would view as a comprehensive deal that would include a nuclear aspect, that would really prevent Iran from moving toward a nuclear weapon, something that we do not believe the JCPOA actually did.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, I must say that the agreement did require Iran to forego its planned plutonium reactor, and dismantle it. It did require them to forego enrichment. It did require them to forego R&D on advanced centrifuges. It did require them to—an existing stock of enriched uranium. It did require them to move things out of the country. So, there were a whole series of provisions, while not eternal and not perfect and subject to future negotiation, certainly were very substantial, real on-the-ground changes.

As Secretary Pompeo has said to me, “Well, we did not need the agreement, because Iran had no intention of building a nuclear weapon.” He noted that there—there was no foundation, in terms of our intelligence, that suggested that they had made that decision to build a nuclear weapon since—going back to 2003. Well, fine, but still, we do not like the idea of the nuclear cycle producing the capability to do so. That is what was dismantled in that agreement.

You said, Mr. Hale—and I think I am—can quote you—what you just said is, “We will insist on the gold standard.” That has not been the position of this Administration. Are you saying now this Administration’s position is, “We will insist, in our relationship with Saudi Arabia, on the gold standard”?

Ambassador HALE. Well, I do not want to contradict statements that have been made by others, so I will have to get back to you on that if you discern any difference of opinion.

As I said, we have a global policy. It is regional and it is universal. We do not want to see the—this kind of proliferation occurring. We are having serious—always have serious conversations anytime any country appears to be going in that direction.

Again, I think that the real focus has to be making sure that it is an environment in the Gulf in which the Saudis do not feel that this path is one that they have to go down in order to defend their country.

Senator MERKLEY. Well, it is so interesting you would say that, because the Saudis did not feel they had to, because we had an agreement that prevented Iran from doing that. Now we have dismantled that agreement, and now they are starting to build their nuclear cycle. I am asking you, are you confronting Saudi Arabia and telling them not to complete this facility for extracting yellowcake from uranium ore as the first stage or the front end of a nuclear cycle? Are you telling them that, for our relationship to be on solid ground, they cannot bypass that gold standard, and that, if they do, it completely undermines our credibility in getting Iran to bypass having that nuclear infrastructure?

Ambassador HALE. I would really prefer to have this conversation with you in a different setting, rather than this public one, but I can assure you that I will be available, or make the appropriate people at the State Department available, to you to continue this conversation, if I may.

The CHAIRMAN. I think that is—

Senator MERKLEY. I must say that I think it would be very valuable for the Administration to be very publicly committed to the—that vision of Saudi Arabia not pursuing this, and to use some of the leverage that this Administration has built up with Saudi Arabia, built up in ways that I might have strongly disagreed with, in terms of the response to the assassination of an American resident. If you have that leverage, it makes sense to use it, and use it in a very public way. Right now, whatever polite conversations you might have in passing, in private, are having no impact. So, perhaps worth rethinking the approach.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Merkley.

We will go to Senator Markey. I am told he is online.

Senator MARKEY. Hello. Yes. Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Markey, welcome.

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, so much.

May I ask our witnesses about Saudi Arabia and its efforts to develop its own indigenous nuclear materials program and to have a missile program, as well, which clearly would be an enormously destabilizing element into the Middle East?

So, if I may, could—would one or both of you answer the question about who—which of the countries, especially China, is providing materials to Saudi Arabia in order to develop an indigenous capacity within their country.

Ambassador HALE. Senator, with much respect, I am not prepared, in this public setting, to offer that kind of information, but I am absolutely committed to answering all of your questions in a classified setting.

Senator MARKEY. Why are you not prepared to answer the—this fundamental national security question in public? What would be the reason why you would not be willing to do that?

Ambassador HALE. Because I am concerned about the level of classification of the information.

Senator MARKEY. My question is, why is it classified? In other words, if China is helping Saudi Arabia right now, the American people have a right to know that, especially a month before a presidential election. So, why would that not be something that the

American people should know, that there is a potential nuclear weapons program inside of Saudi Arabia that is being built right now? I have—can you give me the reason—you are saying it is classified. I would ask you, why is it classified?

Ambassador HALE. Any information that I have seen about this topic has been classified. Therefore, I cannot really share it here in this room, but I am absolutely prepared to coming to you with the right people to answer any questions that you may have related to this set of issues.

Senator MARKEY. Right. All right. Well, tell me this, then. What limits would the Administration place upon a potential 123 Agreement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, particularly as press reports indicate they are progressing in other areas of their nuclear fuel cycle on ballistic missile technology?

Ambassador HALE. I do not have the capacity to answer the question. It is somewhat hypothetical, and it is not my field of expertise. I am not trying to sidestep it, I just do not have answers for you.

Senator MARKEY. Well, we are having a briefing on the Middle East, and I do not think there is anything more volatile than whether or not Saudi Arabia is trying to develop a nuclear weapons technology. Do you believe we should trust Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman when he stated, in 2018, that, “If Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible”? Should we trust bin Salman not to be developing it right now?

Ambassador HALE. Well, that goes to the point I have tried to make several times, which is, the most effective means to prevent this kind of proliferation and destabilizing activity would be to make sure that we are addressing the threats that Saudi Arabia faces, and providing it with the means of self-defense.

Senator MARKEY. Right. Well, ultimately, though, we wind up fueling it if we do not guarantee that Saudi Arabia understands that we are going to abide by a gold standard, which is why Senator Rubio and I introduced the Saudi Nuclear Nonproliferation Act that requires Congress to affirmatively approve any 123 Agreement with Saudi Arabia, and would hold them to the gold standard, requiring them to commit to forego any uranium enrichment or spent-fuel reprocessing. I think that we should take a very serious pause before handing the Saudis, or anyone else, the tools with which to make a nuclear weapon and potentially kick off a nuclear arms race in the region.

Is the goal of the Trump administration to negotiate a gold standard with Saudi Arabia? Is that your—is that the objective which the Trump administration has?

Ambassador HALE. Well, our focus—is on what I have said, which is dealing with the threat posed by Iran—Elliot Abrams has gone in great detail over how we are dealing with that—and making sure that Saudi Arabia has the means of self-defense.

I am not here today to talk about 123 Agreements or the nuclear program. I would be very happy to address this, as I have said, in a classified setting, at your convenience.

Senator MARKEY. Well, again, this just goes back to whether or not the Iran deal was being violated by Iran—the Iran nuclear deal. It was not. It was under safeguards. The IAEA was in there.

Right now, we know that there has been no breakout that actually brings Iran meaningfully closer to a nuclear weapons program. So, in that context, the Saudi breakout is on the Trump watch, and it is something that, because you will not testify to, you will not give us the information, in terms of what is going on with any relations with China or other countries, but that, in and of itself, is an indication that the Trump administration is actually leading to a fueling of the nuclear arms race in the Middle East, rather than trying to douse those flames.

So, from my perspective, I am looking forward to getting the briefing on what is going on in Saudi Arabia. I would like to do so as soon as is possible, but I believe something very significant, historically, is right now unfolding in the Middle East, in Saudi Arabia. The last thing we need is an all-out nuclear arms race in that region. I am afraid the Trump administration policies are pointing us in that direction.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator—

Senator MARKEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Do we have any other members online that have joined us?

If not, I want to thank—Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me briefly, first, say, I was chuckling when you said Senator Kaine acquitted himself well, because you said he only acquitted himself while he was praising the Administration. I think Senator Kaine was acquitting himself well in his totality of his presentation. So, that is why I was chuckling.

I would just note for the record that several members of this committee on both sides of the aisle, including myself, have a resolution recognizing the historic and important significance of the UAE–Bahrain agreement. So, it is not that we are not prone, because it is election time, not to recognize that which is, but as someone who is been working on Iran since I was with the House of Representatives when no one was paying attention to Iran, and I would say, “Well, why are you not paying attention to Iran?”—a country that has huge oil and natural gas reserves and is seeking nuclear power—for what? Not because it needs it for nuclear domestic energy, but for its a design for nuclear weapons. I have called it as I have see it, and including in the last Administration, when I had strong disagreements, but that is not going to stop me now from having, when I believe, strong disagreements with this Administration.

So, let me turn to a couple of questions I have in that regard.

Special Representative Abrams—and maybe you can just give me a couple of quick yes-or-noes on these—do you agree that, over the past 2 years, Iran has moved closer to developing a nuclear weapon?

Mr. ABRAMS. I would say they have moved a little bit closer—

Senator MENENDEZ. Okay.

Mr. Abrams:—in the sense that they have got more fissile material.

Senator MENENDEZ. Has—that is what I was going to get to—has Iran increased its stockpile of low-enriched uranium?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. Has it increased its enrichment capacity?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. Okay. So, is Iran's breakdown time—meaning the time Iran needs to produce enough weapon-grade uranium for a nuclear weapon—significantly shorter than it was in 2018?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not know if I would say it was significantly shorter.

Senator MENENDEZ. Is it shorter?

Mr. ABRAMS. In principle, it has to be shorter.

Senator MENENDEZ. Yes. So, those are all the critical elements of when we are considering how Iran is doing, vis-à-vis our policy, in terms of achieving the ultimate goal.

Let me turn to Secretary Hale. I know we have been calling you "Ambassador," which you will have for life, but right now, you are Under Secretary, so you deserve that title. I want to pick off on Senator Young's comments about Turkey, and your response.

When Turkey ultimately intercedes in the internationally recognized territorial waters of the Republic of Cyprus, a member of the European Union, is it promoting peace and stability in that region?

Ambassador HALE. We have called that out. We definitely have—are seeking to de-escalate the situation in the eastern Mediterranean, working with the French and others. Secretary of State was in Cyprus recently, so we are working—it is very problematic, and we are working to de-escalate.

Senator MENENDEZ. Yes. The only person who is—the only country who is interceding in their international waters is Turkey. I mean, I love how we call on both sides. Well, one side is not doing anything.

Same thing in Greece. Is Turkey promoting peace and stability when it intercedes in the territorial waters of—

Ambassador HALE. I—no, I did not mean to suggest we are calling on all sides. What Turkey is doing is problematic, and we are trying to bring about de-escalation.

Senator MENENDEZ. Same thing in Greece. Is that not true? As it relates to its—

Ambassador HALE. Yes, that is correct.

Senator MENENDEZ. —territorial—

When Turkey seeks to have Halkbank not be sanctioned under U.S. law, that is not promoting the national interests of the United States under U.S. law?

Ambassador HALE. No.

Senator MENENDEZ. When Turkey is supporting the side in Yemen of which we totally do not recognize, it is not creating peace and stability.

So, I appreciate our aspirations of what Turkey was, but it is not the—it is not the realities under Erdogan. I think, on that, it was—the Chairman and I would agree.

Let me ask you two final quick questions.

In the wake of the devastating explosion in Beirut, I was pleased that the Chairman and I introduced a bipartisan resolution in support of U.S. relief efforts and continued engagement with the Lebanese people and the international community to hold those responsible accountable. What more can the U.S. do to support those

voices and actors in Lebanon who have proven to be good interlocutors?

Ambassador HALE. Well, we meet with them, which is important, because it demonstrates that they have a legitimate voice in the country. We encourage them, we have trained many of their cadres on how to organize as NGOs. There is a lot going on at the grassroots level. We also engage the elite leadership of the country, many of whom are under—are feeling on the defensive, and finding out what they are planning to do to turn the situation around.

I am struck, frankly, during my visit there, by how much Hezbollah is also suffering as a consequence of this. They are caught up in the same pool of people, of the public level, demanding that Hezbollah, as well, disarm, that they stop their own corrupt practices that are at the center of this problem. We strongly endorse that view, as well.

We think that continued focus on reform is the right way. When I went out and met with some of the demonstrators and activists, they shouted to me, “No bailout. Do not bail out this government.” I said, “We agree.” We will provide humanitarian relief. We thank you for your support here in the Senate for that, but we have to be tough and make sure that our broader assistance is conditional on fundamental change.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I hope we can continue to make sure that our assistance goes to supporting and empowering people working on behalf of all the Lebanese people.

Then, finally, I know that you are familiar with the U.S.-Sudan claims agreement and the legislation that the State Department is asking Congress to pass to implement that international agreement. Let me be clear. Sudan is at a very fragile moment, and I have consistently indicated, for more than a year, that the Administration should do much more to support the fledgling democracy than it has done. I support a Sudan claims deal, but I also believe this deal falls short. I have some questions about how the Administration—whether or not it has a commitment to make it better. The legislation the State Department is seeking refers to “fairness” for U.S. victims, but is it fair that the State Department left 9/11 families completely out in the cold in the Sudan negotiations? Is it fair that you intentionally excluded their claims from the Sudan deal, you conveniently did not share that fact with Congress, and then you pushed Congress to pass legislation that would have completely terminated all 9/11 claims against Sudan?

So, I want to hear from you. That does not strike me as a “fair deal,” and it is a slap in the face to our fellow citizens who lost loved ones in 9/11. So, speak to me about this concept of fairness that you seem to have? Not you, personally, but the State Department.

Ambassador HALE. Well, the agreement addresses the existing claims from victims of the Cole bombing and the Embassy bombings that occurred in East Africa. Those claims are longstanding. They have been through the court system. We believe that this deal offers a fair basis, as do the victims, themselves, who have essentially accepted the deal.

Subsequent to all this, there was the introduction of the possibility of 9/11 claimants. During the last round of negotiations on

the continuing resolution, the Administration did send a letter up to the Hill, and we were prepared to offer compromises that would have, I—we think, provided a high level of protection for any future claims of 9/11 victims against Sudan that were—that achieved status in a U.S. court.

I would be happy to—I do not have the specifics in front of me. It is very legalistic language. I would be happy to get that to you right away this morning.

Senator MENENDEZ. It is very legalistic, and I am familiar with it.

Let me just say, I will oppose any Sudan legislation that fails to preserve and protect the 9/11 claims, to make sure that 9/11 families are not stomped upon by the Administration. I hope the State Department will reluctantly come along.

I have not seen the text—Congress has not seen the text of the U.S.-Sudan agreement. Can you commit to sharing the text of the agreement with Congress by the end of the week?

Ambassador HALE. Well, we sent a letter that described the nature of the agreement. I will go back to our legal advisor's office. I do not know that we have final—I have—in fact, I am confident we have not finalized the agreement, itself, so we do not have anything yet to share, but we did describe, in some detail, the essential elements of the agreement.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, you cannot ask Congress, Mr. Secretary, it is like playing games here—you cannot ask Congress to pass implementing legislation for an international agreement, basically asking us to sign on the dotted line, let you—yet you will not let us see the agreement. That is absurd. So, I am not going to sign on to something that I cannot even see. So, until we get to that point, count me out. I think we may bring others along with us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. Chairman, if I—

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you—

Mr. ABRAMS. —could just jump in for one second, I would just respond to something Senator Menendez said, in, of course, correctly, reminding us of your own comments about the Iranian nuclear program, decades ago. Those comments, those judgments, are still exactly correct, they are still behaving like a country that is looking for a nuclear weapon and has something to hide, even in 2020. The IAEA asked for access to two sites in January. It took 7 months to get access to one site. The IAEA has reported, this year, that it visited three sites that were clearly sanitized. We have the archive discovered by the Israelis that shows that they kept intact everything they had done on the development of a nuclear weapon, and the team that had done it under the same leadership. So, the—that same problem does exist, now decades later.

Senator MENENDEZ. We do not disagree.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Let me also confirm that the Ranking Member's view on Turkey, and my view, are absolutely congruent.

So, with that, Senator Kaine, we promised a hard stop at 11 o'clock. We have got a couple of minutes. We—

Senator KAINE. I will honor that.

The Chairman has one of the best, like, look-over-his-glasses eye rolls when you try to do a second round, but thank goodness I am sitting so far away from you, and social distancing, that I could not read that queue. I am going to be quick.

Secretary Hale, you are really an expert on Lebanon. There have been questions about the current situation in Lebanon. I have appreciated your answers—Senator Romney, Senator Menendez, Senator Shaheen, but I am sort of looking down the road. I really, really worry about Lebanon. I think it is an incredibly country. I think the U.S.-Lebanese relationship, especially military affairs, has been a positive one, but I think it is on the verge of failed-state status. Many Lebanese-Americans believe that. Many people that I talk to in Lebanon believe that. I sometimes worry a little bit that we are—in our alliance with Israel, we are so worried about Iran that we do not talk enough about Lebanon, although there is obviously a connection, because of Iranian support for Hezbollah, but you want to see reform. You mention that, “We have to see reform. We have to—to promote the reform, but as somebody who is a real expert on Lebanon because of positions both in Beirut and at—in the State Department, what is a reasonably optimistic—not an unreasonably optimistic—but, what is a reasonably optimistic, sort of, path forward in Lebanon that you think could occur? What can the United States do to facilitate a reasonably optimistic path forward for that country?”

Ambassador HALE. The country is basically out of gas. I mean, prior to the explosion, they had a deep financial and economic crisis already. They have a burden of—a quarter of their population are refugees today, and COVID-19 has struck them heavily. Then they have a completely dysfunctional form of government that, Hezbollah, at the center of, exploits fully to their own advantage. This is the set of problems that we have.

Now, one of the strategies that I think is important to bear in mind is that Hezbollah is in that position largely because of their monopoly of arms—so, that is why we are supporting the army—but also because they can call upon non-Shia allies in government to at least get a parliamentary majority. Given the mood of anger that I detected anyway, I think that, if elections were held soon, there could be, potentially, very different results that would shift toward more reform-minded and moderate forces in Lebanon. So, I think that is an important goal.

The French President is very active in trying to bring together agreement on a government. I think that the standard that we will apply to that government is, is it able to begin this reform process? We are not unrealistic. We realize that they cannot take on everything, but there are a few simple things that they can do. For example, in rebuilding the port, are they going to make sure that it is transparent and that Hezbollah and other factions do not have unfettered access to do whatever they want in that port? Is Customs going to stop being a source of illicit revenue for whoever can get their hands on it? That is a very simple and straightforward thing. With all eyes focused on the port, they ought to be able to do that. Then they need to be looking at the Central Bank, making sure that it is meeting the gold standard there at the Central

Bank, and looking at banking reforms, which is the cornerstone of the Lebanese economy.

None of this gets to the core problem, which is Hezbollah's distortion of Lebanon. We have got to do more there. The maximum pressure campaign on Iran is very much part of that, and we have deprived Hezbollah a lot—of a lot of resources, but we want to boost our allies so that they can be a counterforce against Hezbollah. That is our strategy in Lebanon.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, thank you, Senator Kaine. Very valid questions in a very worrisome situation, and thanks for bringing that up.

With that, I want to thank both of our witnesses. You have been very generous with us today.

For the information of the members of the committee, the record will remain open until the close of business on Friday. Would ask the witnesses to promptly respond to any questions.

With that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:02 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

#### ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

##### RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

*Question.* Recent press reports have indicated that the UAE has in fact delivered a Letter of Request for the purchase of F-35s and armed Reaper drones. Please confirm whether or not this is the case along with the details of the Letter of Request, including:

- Date of delivery of the Letter of Request.
- Number F-35's were requested for purchase.
- Number of Reaper drones requested for purchase.
- Whether and what kind of F-35 variant was requested for purchase.
- Total purchase price if one has either been proposed or agreed upon.
- Whether and what kinds of threats were listed in the Letter of Request to justify the sale.

*Answer.* As a matter of policy, we treat security cooperation conversations with our partners as private until we notify any approved arms sales to Congress.

*Question.* Does the Administration commit to full formal and informal Congressional notification and approval processes for this sale?

*Answer.* If a case along the lines suggested in your previous question is approved by the Department, the Administration commits to meeting all statutory requirements regarding the notification of such a case.

*Question.* Was this sale an Emirati condition for signing the Abraham Accords?

*Answer.* As a matter of policy, we treat security cooperation conversations with our partners as private until we notify any approved arms sales to Congress.

*Question.* What specific threats to the UAE do the F-35s address that can't be met by existing weapons systems or alternative sales?

*Answer.* We are committed to helping the United Arab Emirates and all American partners in the region meet their security requirements. As a matter of policy, we treat security cooperation conversations with our partners as private until we notify any approved arms sales to Congress. As is the case for all sales, a detailed justification of the reasons necessitating the sale of such articles or services will be delineated via the Congressional Notification per AECA section 36(b).

*Question.* Has a determination been made that the sale of this aircraft to the UAE will not jeopardize Israel's Qualitative Military Edge?

*Answer.* We are required by law to consider Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) for potential arms sales to the region, and we are committed to helping

Israel maintain its QME. If a case along these lines is approved by the Department, the Administration commits to meeting all statutory requirements regarding the notification of such a case and will provide the relevant determination to the committees of jurisdiction.

*Question.* Has the U.S. interagency reviewed and determined what variant of the aircraft would be best to sell, in terms of protecting U.S. national security in the aircraft's technology, and in terms of protecting Israel's Qualitative Military Edge? If not, when will that review commence and how long might it take?

*Answer.* We are required by law to consider Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) for potential arms sales to the region, and we are committed to helping Israel maintain its QME. If a case along these lines is approved by the Department, the Administration commits to meeting all statutory requirements regarding the notification of such a case and will provide the relevant determination to the committees of jurisdiction.

#### UAE F-35S

*Question.* How less capable will the F-35 aircraft be compared to Israeli aircraft?

*Answer.* We are required by law to consider Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) for potential arms sales to the region, and we are committed to helping Israel maintain its QME. If a case along these lines is approved by the Department, the Administration will meet all statutory requirements regarding the notification of such a case and will provide the relevant determination to the committees of jurisdiction.

*Question.* What steps is the Administration considering to safe-guard these aircraft and their technology in the event of sale and delivery to the UAE, including security measures such as on-base continuous U.S. presence to monitor the security of the aircraft?

*Answer.* If a case along these lines is approved by the Department, security agreements, which can include direct American oversight of materiel, may be taken into consideration. We will continue to assess the UAE's requirements and capacity to best determine the specific safeguard requirements necessary for any such potential sale.

*Question.* How will the Administration compensate for the inevitable reduction in Israel's Qualitative Military Edge? Will the Administration shift from a Qualitative Military Edge to a Quantitative one, selling or providing more aircraft and munitions meant to overwhelm the heightened military threat to Israel?

*Answer.* We are required by law to consider Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) for potential arms sales to the region, and we are committed to helping Israel maintain its QME. If a case along these lines is approved by the Department, the Administration commits to meeting all statutory requirements regarding the notification of such a case and will provide the relevant determination to the committees of jurisdiction.

*Question.* The UAE is supporting General Khalifa Haftar, who is fighting against the internationally recognized and U.S.-backed Government of National Accord and has provided direct air support to Haftar's forces with airstrikes from Mirage warplanes and Chinese armed drones and has worked against stated U.S. goals and interests in Libya. The U.A.E. has also transferred U.S. origin MRAPs to a designated terrorist organization:

What steps will the U.S. and UAE take to prevent the UAE from using these incredibly capable aircraft in conflicts against our national security interests, as it is doing in Libya?

*Answer.* The Department continues to monitor any allegations regarding unauthorized transfers of American-origin materiel, including by the UAE, to any third parties. We are working closely with the UAE to ensure that it has a clear understanding of, and is committed to abiding by, all end use obligations and security requirements for all American materiel.

*Question.* Are there sectors and avenues—like natural gas—where we can better support Lebanon's integration with other regional partners?

*Answer.* America is working to broker an Israel-Lebanon Framework Agreement on Maritime Boundary Discussions. A final boundary demarcation agreement is the most significant opportunity for Lebanon to expand exploitation of national resources and trade with its land and maritime neighbors. Our goal is a framework to begin discussions, not an actual agreement delimiting boundaries or allocating

potential resources. The purpose of these discussions is for the parties themselves to determine how they wish to proceed with the goal of delimitation of their maritime boundary and exploitation of potential resources in disputed areas.

*Question.* How can we assure that continued assistance—which I believe is important—goes to supporting and empowering people who are working on behalf of all Lebanese and in pursuit of regional peace and stability?

*Answer.* Throughout the planning, design, and implementation process, the American Government undertakes measures to assure that assistance resources are helping the Lebanese people and advancing our goals for regional peace and stability. American economic aid is not provided directly to the Lebanese government, but is implemented through vetted NGOs and proven international organizations. American security assistance is designed to benefit legitimate state institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces. To ensure that recipient organizations are in good standing, all new assistance programs are approved by an interagency working group at the American Embassy in Beirut, whose employees regularly meet with local NGOs and civil society.

*Question.* What is this Administration's definition of deterrence regarding Iran and its proxies if these attacks have not stopped?

*Answer.* The strike on IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani demonstrated that if Iran threatens American personnel, facilities, or interests, the President's response will be decisive. Following the lethal March 11 rocket attack on American and coalition soldiers at Camp Taji, we again took decisive action, launching a series of precision strikes against Kata'ib Hizballah, Iran's most trusted partner in Iraq and the group responsible for the attack. Our actions have sent a clear and consistent message to the Iranian leadership that targeting Americans will not be tolerated and will result in grave consequences.

*Question.* What steps has the Administration taken, either on its own or in cooperation with the Iraqi Government to stop these attacks?

*Answer.* Our message has been consistent: if the Iraqi Government does not halt these attacks, it will not only affect our ability to implement assistance programs, but the private sector will consider Iraq too risky for investment.

President Barham Salih, PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi, COR Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi, and Supreme Judicial Council Chief Judge Faiq Zaidan have condemned attacks on diplomatic missions, civilians, and military centers. PM Kadhimi has taken steps to investigate the attacks, including making arrests in June, increasing security measures within the International Zone, and placing Iran-backed militias under deeper scrutiny.

*Question.* What steps is the State Department taking to properly administer economic and security assistance with this reduced footprint?

*Answer.* The Department of State and USAID are committed to properly administering American foreign assistance in Iraq. We use a variety of interventions, from in-country management of resources to third-party monitoring of projects and remote support of our projects from multiple locations around the world. Last year, USAID received authorization to increase its expatriate staff in Iraq from 8 to 13. The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs Office of Assistance Coordination manage programs entirely from Washington, engaging a third-party in-country monitoring team. The Department of State and USAID also maintain a network of staff based in regional offices outside of Iraq, who provide support to the Iraq mission. We remain committed to the prudent oversight and management of projects in a difficult security environment, further complicated by the global COVID-19 crisis.

*Question.* How will the energy deals brokered with U.S. firms in southern Iraq be implemented with no permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in that part of the country?

*Answer.* Energy is a critical pillar of the U.S.-Iraq Strategic Dialogue. Even as we work with the Iraqi Government to ensure the safety of our diplomatic facilities, we continue to support Iraq's efforts to eliminate its dependence upon imported energy from Iran by increasing domestic gas and electricity production, reducing wasteful gas flaring, and implementing energy market reforms. American companies are a critical partner in this effort, and the Departments of State, Energy, and Commerce are working to ensure the five energy deals signed with the Government of Iraq in August on the sidelines of our Strategic Dialogue move rapidly towards implementation.

*Question.* How can we do this critical work with limited diplomatic presence? How are you working to ensure that all organizations we work with on the ground are properly vetted, and have transparent financial accountability mechanisms?

*Answer.* The Department of State and USAID have faced security challenges that affect the Administration of assistance for many years. We have incorporated a number of measures to overcome these challenges, including vetting, third-party monitoring, and support from Washington-based and regionally-based staff to supplement our mission in Iraq.

*Question.* What further tools does Prime Minister al-Kadhimi need to marginalize these militias given their strength?

*Answer.* We are working with PM Kadhimi's office to enhance his team's capacity for public messaging and public awareness campaigns, in order to take advantage of popular opinion turning against these militias. However, PM Kadhimi needs the support of religious authorities and political parties to make sustained progress against these militias. He needs police, investigators, and judges who are not afraid to follow the rule of law and implement justice. And he needs professional security forces that he and the public can trust. Kadhimi recently replaced the head of security for the International Zone with the aim of preventing attacks on the American Embassy and other diplomatic missions.

#### TROOP REDEPLOYMENT

Last October, President Trump withdrew our troops from much of northeast Syria in an ill-thought out concession to President Erdogan. Now, less than a year later, we are sending troops, including Bradley fighting vehicles, back to Syria because Russian expansion has made our remaining forces less safe, just as many on both sides of Congress warned at the time. Yet on the same day that he ordered more troops in, President Trump declared that, other than protecting the oil fields there, the U.S. is "out of Syria."

*Question.* Please articulate the U.S. mission in Syria.

*Answer.* Our mission in Syria is to achieve the enduring defeat of ISIS and al-Qa'ida, a political solution to the Syrian conflict in line with UNSCR 2254, and the removal of all Iranian-commanded forces from Syria. We are committed to the internationally-agreed roadmap, as outlined in UNSCR 2254, for a political transition through the drafting of a new constitution and free and fair elections that are administered by the United Nations and include the Syrian diaspora.

*Question.* Are these new deployments meant to fight ISIS or to protect pre-existing troops from Russian and/or pro-regime forces?

*Answer.* The Department of Defense is best positioned to respond to questions regarding American troop movements.

*Question.* Is the redeployment of troops back to northeast Syria an admission by this Administration that last year's withdrawal endangered both U.S. interests and our remaining troops?

*Answer.* The Department of Defense is best positioned to respond to specific questions regarding American troop movements.

*Question.* What is the U.S. strategy to address this accountability gap? Beyond funding projects that catalog the crimes, and how are we advancing efforts to hold perpetrators of gross violations of international law accountable?

*Answer.* We promote accountability for human rights abusers and corrupt officials by applying sanctions and visa restrictions, such as sanctions under the Global Magnitsky program and visa restrictions pursuant to Section 7031(c) of the State Appropriations Act. We strongly support U.N. accountability mechanisms, including the recently created Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya; the efforts of the U.N. Investigative Team Against Da'esh (ISIS) (UNITAD) in Iraq; and the International, Impartial, Independent Mechanism (IIIM) in Syria, which collects and preserves evidence of atrocities that may amount to war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. This evidence allows domestic law enforcement entities, including our own, to prepare cases for prosecution. The Department advances accountability through programming, such as supporting civil society to identify and investigate cases for prosecution, and to build dossiers on alleged perpetrators for use by the American Government, other foreign governments, and the U.N. for prosecutions, vetting, visa restrictions, sanctions, and public reporting.

*Question.* Humanitarian actors providing life-saving assistance are increasingly being blocked by authorities, especially in Syria and Yemen. As you know, in the

case of Syria, Russia and China recently blocked U.N. Security Council resolutions which would have allowed for cross-border access for the U.N. and NGOs into Syria. Now these crucial pipelines for aid into the country are blocked. At a time when Syria's COVID-19 cases are exploding, the closure of two vital crossings into northern Syria has meant that critically needed medicine and supplies are not being delivered through the most direct and efficient routes:

Is the Administration working to secure United Nations Security Council re-authorization for the use of the additional crossings into northern Syria? How is the Administration working with U.N. humanitarian agencies and other partners to continue to provide aid to Syrian civilians?

Answer. The Department's position, advanced in U.N. deliberations in July, reinforced the need for at least three crossings including in northeast Syria. We regularly communicate with like-minded countries on the Security Council to provide the rationale and evidence needed to support a forward-leaning and well-justified renewal resolution that looks to authorize additional crossings. We maintain regular contact with humanitarian organizations, both in capital and in New York, regarding developments on the ground. The Department and USAID are in constant contact with those providing cross-border humanitarian assistance to Syrians, including the U.N. and non-governmental organizations.

*Question.* Driven by increasingly desperate economic circumstances and security concerns in the wake of the Beirut port explosion, a growing number of Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees are boarding smuggler's boats in Northern Lebanon for Cyprus via a perilous sea:

What is the U.S. strategy for working with the United Nations, the European Union, and the governments in the region to address the drivers of this crisis so fewer people will be driven to make that dangerous crossing?

Answer. Since 2010, America has provided more than \$2.4 billion in bilateral foreign assistance to Lebanon to address both economic and security needs, in addition to \$2.6 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the Syria crisis. This support includes life-saving assistance to help protect the physical health, psychological well-being, and human rights of displaced Syrians and their host communities, as well as economic development programs that seek to help address the principal drivers of the current crisis in Lebanon. We are committed to ensuring international support for the 1.3 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon and are working with the international community to address the broader crisis in Lebanon.

#### CONFRONTING ATROCITIES AND PROTECTING FORCED MIGRANTS

In June, I released a comprehensive report titled "Global Forced Migration: The Political Crisis of Our Time" that evaluated drivers and trends of forced migration across the globe. The report underscores that gross violations of human rights, and the absence of accountability for them resulted in millions of people being forced to flee their homes. Conflicts raging in the Middle East from Syria, Yemen, and Libya, are responsible for some of the worst atrocities and most severe humanitarian emergencies of a generation, forcing millions of innocent men, women and children to leave their countries. Recent efforts to resolve conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and elsewhere in the region have largely failed. In the last 2 weeks alone U.N.-established panels reported on widespread atrocities in both Yemen and Syria, suggesting that all parties to these conflicts have committed abuses that amount to war crimes. We are living in an age of impunity and witnessing a rampant accountability gap:

*Question.* In Libya, thousands of refugees and migrants are arbitrarily detained in official facilities where they face torture, abuse, forced labor, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and death. More are held in unofficial facilities where they face similar risk and abuse. The United Nations has repeatedly called for an end to arbitrary detention for refugees and migrants in Libya. Without diplomatic support and effort from the United States and other allies, these calls will continue unheeded:

What is the United States doing to close detention centers and provide safe, voluntary passage and protection to vulnerable refugees and migrants? What specific diplomatic steps is the United States taking with Government of National Accord (GNA) authorities to protect the human rights of refugees and migrants and to provide safe alternatives to detention?

Answer. We advocate for the humane treatment and protection of IDPs, refugees, and other migrants in Libya in our engagement with Libyan authorities. We support efforts by U.N. agencies and Libyan authorities to facilitate the swift and orderly closure of migrant detention facilities. In FY 2020, we provided more than \$23 million to UNHCR and other partners to provide cash support, medical assistance, and protection assessment services for refugees, asylum-seekers, and vulnerable mi-

grants in Libya. Our support also funds efforts to extend assistance and services to help previously detained persons reintegrate safely into urban settings in Libya. From 2018 to present, America has resettled nearly 150 Unaccompanied Refugee Minors who had been evacuated out of Libya to America via the Refugee Admissions Program. We urge the Libyan Government to enhance protections for migrants and refugees in its territory, provide humanitarian organizations with access to populations of concern, and hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable for their actions.

*Question.* I am also deeply alarmed by the inhumane treatment of migrants and refugees across the region. Just last week, troubling reports emerged from Saudi Arabia that hundreds of emaciated and abused Ethiopian migrants are being held in heinous detention centers. In Yemen, thousands of stranded migrants are facing exclusion and violence:

What is the U.S. strategy to and improve their living conditions? Specifically, what is the U.S. doing diplomatically to ensure that migrants are not detained and held in inhumane conditions?

*Answer.* The State Department is advocating with regional authorities to ensure these foreign nationals, regardless of status, are being treated humanely, and that the basic needs of those in detention are addressed. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported on a recent agreement to allow approximately 17,000 Ethiopians to travel from Yemen to Saudi Arabia, from where they would be able to return to Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Government is working through the logistics to repatriate its citizens. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration provided \$5,780,000 to IOM in Fiscal Year 2020 to address the needs of migrants in Yemen.

*Question.* Yemen continues to experience the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, with nearly 80 percent of the population reliant on some form of aid. U.N. agencies are playing a central role in the response. Unfortunately, these efforts are critically underfunded; the U.N.'s Yemen response plan for 2020 has only received 37 percent of the funds it requested. Of course, this is happening at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change have exacerbated food security challenges around the world. Millions are at risk of famine across the country. While the U.S. is the largest contributor to U.N. humanitarian relief operations in the world, more must be done. Unlike previous years, Gulf states have not contributed to the U.N.'s humanitarian response in Yemen, leaving a critical gap:

How is the Administration working to address these funding challenges and ensure that lifesaving aid reaches the Yemeni people in a principled fashion?

*Answer.* We share your concern about the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen and the constraints to the humanitarian operating environment. Deliberate Houthi obstruction of assistance causes needless suffering and undermines the international community's efforts. We are closely engaged with other donors and the United Nations in advocacy with the Houthis on compliance with international norms that are essential to ensure that American taxpayer-funded assistance reaches the vulnerable families for whom it is intended. Since the Administration's partial suspension of assistance went into effect in March, America has still provided significantly more humanitarian funding than any other donor in Yemen this year. We recently committed nearly \$195 million in additional humanitarian aid for Yemen, bringing our total support so far this year to nearly \$607 million, including support to the World Food Program for crucial food assistance and malnutrition prevention countrywide.

Through ongoing bilateral and coordinated advocacy with other donors, the Saudis have begun to disburse some of their long-outstanding pledges to U.N. Agencies operating in Yemen, and the Administration welcomed the UK, Sweden, Kuwait, and the EU's announced contributions to the Yemen appeal during the U.N. General Assembly. We continue to encourage additional funding contributions and full delivery on pledges already made.

*Question.* What leverage do you believe the United States has in supporting the U.N.-led political process?

*Answer.* The U.S. Government's goal is a sovereign, stable, secure, and unified Libya, free from foreign interference and capable of combatting terrorism. We are working with Libyans and the U.N. to align international efforts to support this objective. We engages stakeholders on all sides of the conflict—both Libyan and international—at the highest levels to encourage the removal of all foreign forces, and to advance an inclusive, negotiated political solution, and respect for the U.N. arms embargo. America co-chairs the Berlin Process International Follow-up Committee on Libya (IFCL) Economic Working Group with Egypt and the EU through which

we can demonstrate considerable leverage to help Libyans address economic issues that are core drivers of the Libyan conflict in support of the U.N.-facilitated process.

*Question.* Why did the United States join Russia in vetoing a British-led initiative last April calling for a ceasefire in Libya? If the answer is “because it wasn’t going to work”—then what diplomatic steps could we have taken to increase leverage on all the players?

*Answer.* We fully shared the United Kingdom’s concerns last April about the urgent need to stabilize the situation in Tripoli, reach a lasting ceasefire, and help all Libyan parties return to the U.N. political process. The approach and timeline for a U.N. Security Council product on Libya, which was never submitted for a vote, would have proven counterproductive. We maintained that the key focus should be on direct engagement with external actors involved in the conflict in order to stabilize the situation in Tripoli and encourage all sides to urgently return to political dialogue. We have worked through the Berlin Process to engage external actors in Libya at the highest levels and align the international community in support of helping the Libyans agree to a lasting ceasefire and return to a U.N.-facilitated political process. We also worked with the United Kingdom to adopt U.N. Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2510 (2020) in support of the Berlin Conclusions and UNSCR 2542 (2020) to renew the U.N. Support Mission in Libya’s (UNSMIL) mandate for 12 months and create a new U.N. Special Envoy position.

*Question.* Does the U.N. and UNSMIL have the capacity to promote a meaningful dialogue and solution?

*Answer.* We welcome the U.N. Support Mission in Libya’s (UNSMIL) resumption of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) by the end of October as testimony of the consensus among Libyans that an inclusive, negotiated political solution is the only means to end the conflict. We also commend Acting U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Williams’s efforts to foster dialogue through several rounds of talks, culminating in Montreux, Switzerland, in September, and to create a political opening to put Libyans on a path towards national elections.

On September 15, the U.N. Security Council voted in favor of renewing the mandate of UNSMIL for an additional year, until September 15, 2021. The updated mandate, which was a priority for America, provides for the creation of a U.N. Special Envoy for Libya and an UNSMIL Coordinator.

This new structure will make for a stronger, more effective UNSMIL. A U.N. Special Envoy to lead UNSMIL will be better positioned to focus on mediation with Libyan and international actors to end the conflict and help Libyans reach a lasting political solution. Under the authority of the U.N. Special Envoy, the UNSMIL Coordinator will have responsibility for the day-to-day management and operations of the mission, whether overseeing the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 crisis or human rights monitoring. Between these roles, there is a clear division of labor, as well as interdependence, close coordination, and a single reporting chain to the U.N. Secretary-General.

*Question.* Is it U.S. policy to continue to promote a civilian-led government in Libya?

*Answer.* Yes, our policy promotes a civilian-led government in Libya. Supporting an inclusive, negotiated, political solution to the Libyan conflict remains a priority for the American Government. The U.N.’s plan to resume the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in October, which aims to establish a new transitional government and chart the path to national elections, is a testament to the current progress Libyans have made towards national political reconciliation. Our goal is a sovereign, stable, secure, and unified Libya, free from foreign interference and capable of combatting terrorism. We are working to align international efforts to support this objective.

*Question.* What is your assessment of Sarraj’s announcement to retire in October? Who is positioned to take his place?

*Answer.* Prime Minister Sarraj’s announcement of his intent to hand over power signals a willingness to set aside personal interests for the benefit of the Libyan people. It is for the Libyan people to decide who leads their government, and we will not interfere. The U.N.’s plan to resume the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) in October, which aims to establish a new transitional government and chart the path to national elections, is a testament to the current progress Libyans have made towards reconciliation. Prime Minister Sarraj’s intent to transfer his responsibilities to the new interim authority demonstrates the seriousness and viability of the LPDF and the U.N. political process.

THE COMMITTEE RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM MR. ELLIOTT ABRAMS FOR THE  
FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BY SENATOR ROBERT MENEDEZ

IRAN SANCTIONS

*Question.* What leverage does the United States have to prevent Russia and China from selling conventional arms to Iran if many of their companies do not interact with the U.S. financial system or they are already sanctioned?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Do you consider snapback sanctions to have been re-imposed when none of the remaining participants in the JCPOA believe that the U.S. has any legal basis to impose snapback?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Do you consider the Iran arms embargo to be re-imposed when it was vetoed in the Security Council by Russia and China and not a single other member of the Security Council voted to extend it?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Have any of our allies expressed public support for the snapback of sanctions? If so, which countries?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* How effective will U.S. sanctions be if there is no buy-in from our allies?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* How does the Administration plan to enforce these sanctions or the arms embargo without support from even our closest allies?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Will the U.S. sanction British, German and French companies that it deems to be in violation?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* What specific examples do you have of Iran changing or moderating its nefarious behavior, either in its nuclear program or throughout the region, as a result of the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* What other steps, besides sanctions, is the Administration considering to bring Iran back to the negotiating table?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Earlier this week the President announced a new executive order, indicating it was somehow connected to the renewal of sanctions at the U.N.

What new tools does this E.O. provide that the President previously didn't have?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* What are the combined assets or financial impact of these sanctions on the new designees?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Is there any activity that could be sanctioned by this E.O. that was not previously sanctionable?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* What is the delta that this E.O. covers that was not already covered under U.S. sanctions. Please be specific.

[No Response Received]

IRANIAN AGGRESSION AND "DETERRENCE"

*Question.* This Administration has repeatedly insisted that killing Qasem Soleimani had restored deterrence in the region generally and in Iraq in particular. Yet rocket attacks on the international zone near our embassy continued throughout the summer. General McKenzie, the commander of CENTCOM said recently that the level of attacks on U.S. troops in Iraq from Iran-backed militias "have been higher" and that the reason U.S. troops haven't been killed is simply because "they're not hitting us."

What is this Administration's definition of deterrence regarding Iran and its proxies if these attacks have not stopped?

[No Response Received]

U.N./IRAN/HUMAN RIGHTS

*Question.* U.N. human rights mechanisms have been vocal in calling out abuses committed by the Iranian Government in recent months. In one recent report, the U.N. special rapporteur on Iran—a position originally created by the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2011 with strong U.S. backing—noted increasing restrictions on the right to freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and the right to freedom of association and assembly. The special rapporteur also found that Christian converts risk arbitrary arrests, detention, and interrogation about their faith and have faced specious charges. The special rapporteur has also been vocal in calling on Iran to release human rights defenders from prison due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Does the Administration support these statements?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Given that the Administration has decided to withhold assessed contributions from the U.N. Human Rights Office, how do you plan to support the work on Iran being carried out by the special rapporteur?

[No Response Received]

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RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

*Question.* Despite growing concerns over food security and the impact of COVID-19, the U.N.'s Yemen response plan for 2020 has only received 37 percent of the funds it requested from member states. How is the Administration working with other donor countries—specifically the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—to address these funding challenges?

*Answer.* We share your concern for the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. Deliberate Houthi obstruction of assistance is causing needless suffering among their fellow Yemenis, despite our continued calls on the Houthis to respect humanitarian principles. As long as the Houthis continue to obstruct assistance, America and other donors cannot guarantee that aid is reaching and benefiting the people for whom it is intended, and donors are unlikely to fully fund the U.N.'s Yemen Response Plan.

Houthi obstruction forced USAID to partially suspend some assistance awards in Houthi-controlled areas in March 2020. America has still provided more funding than any other donor in Yemen this year. We recently committed nearly \$195 million in additional humanitarian aid for Yemen, bringing our total support so far this year to nearly \$607 million, and we encourage other donors, including Gulf governments, to contribute additional funding and to fulfill pledges they have already made. Through ongoing bilateral and coordinated advocacy, the Saudis have begun to fulfill some of their long-standing pledges to U.N. agencies in Yemen, and the Administration was pleased that the UK, Sweden, Kuwait, and the EU announced contributions to the Yemen appeal during the U.N. General Assembly.

*Question.* What challenges do implementing partners face in the provision of emergency food assistance to the civilian population of Yemen, where two-thirds of the population are hungry, 11.6 percent of the population is malnourished, and more than 1.6 percent of all children are suffering from severe acute malnutrition?

*Answer.* Houthi interference—including blocking aid projects, seeking to profit from humanitarian funding, harassing aid workers, and most recently shutting down Sana'a airport—has prevented critical, life-saving aid from reaching millions of Yemenis. America, in cooperation with other donors and the U.N., identified seven conditions the Houthis must meet to ensure effective aid implementation in northern Yemen and agreed on benchmarks to gauge Houthi progress in addressing them. Meeting these minimum benchmarks is essential to ensure that Houthi leaders do not divert assistance away from vulnerable families and reward combatants and their own supporters. The Houthis have failed to follow through on their commitments to allow the World Food Program (WFP) to implement necessary procedures to ensure food is reaching the most vulnerable Yemenis, resulting in the WFP's difficult decision to recalibrate its assistance in northern Yemen. State and USAID remain closely engaged with other donors in joint advocacy with the Houthis on these issues. Donors plan to hold another high-level meeting in November to discuss next steps. We are also advocating for the Republic of Yemen Government to address access issues in the south.

*Question.* In 2014, the U.N. Security Council authorized cross-border assistance into Syria from neighboring states. However, since January, Russia—with support from China—has essentially forced the U.N. Security Council to close three border crossings into Syria, leaving only the Bab al-Hawa border crossing authorized for just the next 12 months. What has been the impact of these closures on the humanitarian crisis in northeast and northwest Syria?

*Answer.* The transshipment of humanitarian assistance to Syria has continued, but costs and risks to partners have increased due to the required programmatic adaptations. U.N. convoys now face additional obstacles in the northwest: multiple lines of control, negotiating access with armed opposition groups, longer distances and deteriorating roads, and additional shipping delays and road closures due to ongoing hostilities. There is no other option if the Idlib ceasefire fails and the crossing at Bab al-Hawa is closed or congested. America, our European partners, and U.N. Secretary-General Guterres have all criticized the Russian push to close humanitarian corridors.

*Question.* What steps is the Administration taking at the U.N. Security Council to reopen now-closed border crossings?

*Answer.* The Department continues to highlight our concerns regarding cross-border access during monthly meetings in the U.N. Security Council. To maintain pressure on China, Russia, and others, we plan to facilitate a roundtable discussion hosted by the United Nations in the coming months to allow survivors of abuses in Syria to discuss and document conditions, including interference with humanitarian aid and attacks on humanitarian workers. We will conduct two sets of bilateral consultations (technical and policy) with the new U.N. Security Council members for the 2021–2022 term (India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, and Norway), before the end of 2020, during which we will emphasize the need to extend and expand the humanitarian mechanism in Syria.

*Question.* What are the implications of the limitations on cross-border assistance in Syria?

*Answer.* U.N. agencies and other international organizations provide life-saving services in northern Syria, including the monthly cross-border delivery of: food assistance for 1.5 million people; water, sanitation and hygiene assistance for nearly 1 million people; and shelter and relief items for 247,000 people. The removal of Bab al-Salaam limits U.N. access to an estimated 1.3 million people, including at least 800,000 IDPs. U.N. agencies could more effectively provide assistance if additional cross-border access points were available. Due to the non-re-authorization of the al-Yaroubia crossing in northeast Syria, for example, there is a significant gap in health assistance and capacity, which is especially hindering the region's COVID-19 response.

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THE COMMITTEE RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM MR. ELLIOTT ABRAMS FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BY SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

IRANIAN HOSTAGE DIPLOMACY

*Question.* U.S. citizen Siamak Namazi was taken hostage by the Iranian regime nearly 5 years ago, and his ailing father Baquer Namazi was similarly arrested and detained just months after Siamak. Although Baquer is now out of prison, he suffers from numerous serious health problems, but Iran refuses to let him leave the country to receive desperately needed medical treatment. Siamak has been denied furlough repeatedly despite meeting the legal requirements and being exposed to COVID-19 multiple times. Both are being unjustly held in Iran as part of its campaign to take foreign and dual nationals hostage to advance its foreign policy goals.

What steps are you taking to bring home U.S. hostages in Iran?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* What broader steps are being taken in collaboration with other world powers to end Iran's use of hostage diplomacy overall?

[No Response Received]

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RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR EDWARD J. MARKEY

*Question.* What actions has the United States taken diplomatically to prevent the proliferation of missile equipment and technology, covered under the Missile Tech-

nology Control Regime (MTCR) to countries in the Middle-East since 2017? Additionally, since 2017, has the President determined that a foreign person has knowingly exported, transferred or otherwise engaged in the trade of any MTCR equipment or technology to a country that is a non-MTCR adherent? If so, who were those foreign persons?

*Answer.* The proliferation of missiles capable of delivering weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and related technologies poses a significant threat to international security. We continually work to prevent the proliferation of such technology to countries in the Middle East, given its potential to exacerbate regional instability and tension. We use a variety of nonproliferation tools, including collaboration with governments to interdict missile-related transfers to the region. We use bilateral export control/nonproliferation dialogues and participation in multilateral fora such as the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and the Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC) to raise awareness of missile development programs of concern in the Middle East and press countries to take steps to impede these programs' acquisition of missile technology.

We use our sanctions authorities, as warranted, to address missile proliferation activities. On January 31, 2018, we imposed sanctions under the missile sanctions laws (Sections 73(a)(2)(B) and (C) of the Arms Export Control Act, 22 U.S.C. 2797b(a)(2)(B) and (C), and Sections 11B(b)(1)(B)(ii) and (iii) of the Export Administration Act of 1979, 50 U.S.C. app. 2410b(b)(1)(B)(ii) and (iii)) on two North Korean entities, Chilsong Trading Corporation and Korea Kuryonggang Trading Corporation, because they engaged in the transfer of equipment and technology controlled under the MTCR Annex (control list) to entities in a non-MTCR country. These sanctions were published in the Federal Register on January 31, 2018. Most recently, on September 23, 2020, we imposed sanctions under the Iran Syria Nonproliferation Act (INKSNA) against four entities for transferring missile technology to Iran.

*Question.* Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation, Christopher Ford, remarked on September 16, 2020 that: "we are also leading the global effort to solidify IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements and the AP, together, as the global standard for safeguards . . ." In that spirit, what actions has the United States taken diplomatically since 2017 to press the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to ratify the Additional Protocol to its bilateral IAEA Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement?

*Answer.* The Administration remains committed to leading global efforts to establish the combination of a Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement and an Additional Protocol (AP) as the de facto standard for international safeguards, and to encourage all responsible suppliers to make the AP a condition for nuclear exports. The Administration has repeatedly urged Saudi Arabia to bring an AP into force, including throughout ongoing discussions regarding its planned civil nuclear power program. In this context, American experts have sought to clarify with Saudi counterparts the importance of the AP for nuclear nonproliferation efforts and to address Saudi questions and potential concerns about how the AP is implemented.

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THE COMMITTEE RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM MR. ELLIOTT ABRAMS FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BY SENATOR EDWARD J. MARKEY

*Question.* Has Iran's breakout time—the time necessary to acquire enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon—increased or decreased since the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in May 2018? What is Iran's approximate breakout time as of September 25, 2020, relying on publicly available information?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Between January 16, 2016 and May 7, 2018, how many attacks did Iran-linked forces carry out on facilities hosting U.S. service members and on U.S. convoys in Iraq? How many U.S. or coalition personnel were injured and killed in these attacks?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Between May 8, 2018 and January 3, 2020, how many attacks did Iran-linked forces carry out on facilities hosting U.S. service members and on U.S. convoys in Iraq? How many U.S. or coalition personnel were injured and killed in these attacks?

[No Response Received]

*Question.* Between January 4, 2020 and September 25, 2020, how many attacks did Iran-linked forces carry out on facilities hosting U.S. service members and on U.S. convoys in Iraq? How many U.S. or coalition personnel were injured and killed in these attacks?

[No Response Received]

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RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE TO QUESTIONS  
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CORY A. BOOKER

*Question.* I want every country in the world to recognize Israel, but this last minute, brazenly political ultimatum is whipping up serious domestic challenges for an already fragile government that is facing significant challenges to its survivability. Has the Department added this requirement to the list of actions Sudan must take before it is delisted?

*Answer.* We have engaged with the Sudanese Civilian-led Transitional Government on the potential normalization of relations with Israel and the benefits it would bring to Sudan's development and the broader region. We recognize that Sudan is undergoing a fragile transition and is engaging in internal deliberation on this sensitive, but important issue.

Separately, we are discussing with Sudan the policy and statutory requirements for rescission of Sudan's State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) designation. We have made significant progress on resolving outstanding terrorism claims.

*Question.* What risks does the transitional government face and what U.S. assistance is being provided to help mitigate those risks?

*Answer.* The transitional government's most significant challenges emanate from elements of the former regime and their political Islamist allies, who continue to seek ways to exploit the fragility of the transition to regain power. Between the dire economic situation facing the country, COVID-19, and the humanitarian crises caused by recent floods, the Sudanese transition remains exceptionally fragile. Should public support for the transitional government or the delicate civilian/military alliance behind it collapse, we would anticipate the outbreak of a Libya-like civil conflict, as different Sudanese power centers backed by foreign powers sought to assert control over the country. To avoid this, we are working closely with the civilian-led transitional government to implement comprehensive political and economic reforms.

In addition to the anticipated rescission of Sudan's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation, which will facilitate Sudan's reintegration in to the global economy, U.S. assistance includes increased humanitarian support to the people of Sudan; support for peace agreement implementation in Darfur and the Two Areas; technical support to the civilian-led transitional government in the strengthening of democratic institutions; and engagement with international partners to increase International Financial Institution support to Sudan and pave the way for accelerated debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries program.

*Question.* Given documented violations of the arms embargo by Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and other actors, what concrete steps are you taking to act on these violations?

*Answer.* We support Security Council Resolution 2292 (2016), which provides authorities for member states to limit the destabilizing flows of arms to and from Libya. The U.N. Security Council renewed these authorities most recently in June and reiterated this commitment in September through adoption of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2542 (2020). America supports a robust U.N. arms embargo and sanctions regime. EU Operation Irini and its predecessor, Operation Sophia, have interdicted vessels suspected of violating the embargo and shared information on alleged violations with the U.N. Security Council Libya Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts. We have made clear to all actors, publicly and privately, the need to respect the arms embargo.

*Question.* Will you impose sanctions on companies and countries that violate the arms embargo?

*Answer.* We have consistently promoted accountability for violations of the U.N. arms embargo on Libya. Individuals and entities that have participated in efforts to send arms to Libya have faced U.N. sanctions and criminal prosecution. Sanctions discourage violations, and we consider their targeted use when appropriate. We continue to press our partners to do the same and to respect the U.N. arms em-

bargo they committed to uphold in Berlin. We also support international efforts for more effective compliance with the U.N. arms embargo, including efforts by the EU.

*Question.* Will you halt weapons transfers to the UAE? What concrete steps are you taking with Emirati officials to hold them accountable for civilian deaths?

*Answer.* As a matter of policy, we treat security cooperation conversations with our partners as private until we notify any approved arms sales to Congress.

Consistent with the President's Conventional Arms Transfer Policy (CAT), all arms transfers to foreign partners are subject to case-by-case comprehensive consideration of American interests—including risks related to human rights abuses, terrorism, mass atrocities, or transnational organized crime. The Department will continue to conduct its reviews of foreign military sales and direct commercial sales consistent with this policy and all applicable statutory requirements.

*Question.* Why is this situation so different? Why have the State Department and USAID decided to put millions of innocent Yemenis at risk of COVID-19, cholera, dengue fever, and starvation?

*Answer.* Houthi obstruction in Yemen has included blocking aid projects, seeking to profit from humanitarian funding, and harassing and detaining aid workers. Under the partial suspension in effect since March, we continue to support the most critical life-saving activities in northern Yemen, including support to international NGO partners for programs to treat malnutrition, provide clean water, and help prevent cholera, COVID-19, and other communicable diseases. USAID and State also continue to support U.N. partners countrywide. America is the single largest donor to Yemen, providing nearly \$607 million in FY 2020 in humanitarian aid to all parts of Yemen. In FY 2020, State and USAID have provided nearly \$19 million in funding to support COVID-19 response efforts throughout Yemen.

*Question.* What plans does the Department have in place to resume aid to those in need other than waiting for the Houthi rebels to agree to stop diverting our assistance?

*Answer.* The Administration stands ready to resume full programming in Yemen, but only when programs can be implemented properly to ensure aid reaches those for whom it is intended. America, in cooperation with other donors and the U.N., identified seven conditions and benchmarks that need to be met for effective aid implementation in northern Yemen. Meeting these minimum conditions is essential to ensure Houthi leaders do not divert assistance away from the most vulnerable families and reward combatants and their own supporters. We have seen partial, but insufficient, progress on this front, and progress on accountability benchmarks has stalled. The Administration will remain closely engaged with other donors in joint advocacy with the Houthis on these issues.

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THE COMMITTEE RECEIVED NO RESPONSE FROM MR. ELLIOTT ABRAMS FOR THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS BY SENATOR CORY A. BOOKER

U.S.'S DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION ON IRAN

*Question.* President Macron has called "maximum pressure" a failure. Not only is the United States more isolated on the world stage, but Iran today is closer to a nuclear weapon than it was when the United States was party to the JCPOA. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) recently confirmed that Iran has ten times the amount of enriched uranium it did when President Trump assumed office.

How can the United States lead the world if our closest allies won't stand by us on one of our most important national security interests?

[No Response Received]

LACK OF MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY

*Question.* The 2018 National Defense Strategy argued for a shift to focusing on great power competition, namely with China, and for a more limited approach to the Middle East. And yet, the U.S. pulled out of the JCPOA without the backing of our allies, abandoned the Kurds, our stalwart allies in Iraq, ordered the assassination of Qasem Soleimani with conflicting justifications—though no one here mourns his death—putting the lives of our service members deployed across the Middle East in jeopardy.

Can you explain why this Administration at turn after turn, takes reckless actions that risk plunging this country into dangerous confrontations, if not war, while not fulfilling its own national security mandate to invest in effective competition with China?

[No Response Received]

