

ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST AT A CROSS-
ROADS: HOW TEHRAN'S TERROR CAMPAIGN
THREATENS THE U.S. AND OUR ALLIES

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH
AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA

OF THE

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ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST AT A CROSS-ROADS: HOW TEHRAN'S TERROR CAMPAIGN THREATENS THE U.S. AND OUR ALLIES

Thursday, September 19, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA
AND CENTRAL ASIA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Joe Wilson (chairman of the subcommittee)

Mr. BURCHETT [presiding]. The Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia will come to order. Obviously, I am not Joe Wilson. He had a health issue. He is back with us, I saw him at prayer group this morning, and it is probably out of order, but if it would be all right if I could just offer a prayer for Joe and his continued healing? If we bow our heads?

Dear Lord, we thank you for this committee. I thank you for my co-chair Representative Phillips, and I appreciate you, I thank you for our brother Joe, and we ask you Lord for his continued healing. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

All right, the purpose of this hearing is to examine the unprecedented development of open, direct conflict between Iran and Israel, and other regional changes as we approach the first anniversary of Hamas' October 7th brutal attack on Israel. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE TIM BURCHETT

I would like to remind my friends in the audience that disruption of the committee proceedings is against the law. Holding up signs or making verbal outbursts during the proceedings is disruptive and it will not be tolerated. Any disruptions will result in a suspension of the proceedings until the Capitol Police can restore order.

All right, and now here is my opening statement. Again, I am not as polished as Joe is, but I will limp through it. First I want to wish, as I stated earlier, a speedy recovery to our dear friend Chairman Joe Wilson. And we all know he had a health episode last week. I think we say health episode because we don't want to discuss what it was, but by saying that everybody says, what the heck happened to Joe?

And then we talk more about it, so—but I saw him this morning, he is on the mend. We all wish him well and hope that he can be back here soon since he is a leader on many important issues, including the need to deter Iran and its proxies in the Middle East. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today, as we examine the Middle East 1 year after Hamas' devastating October 7th attack, and assess the damage and instability caused by Iran and its terrorist proxies.

On October 7th, Iran-backed Hamas terrorists murdered 1,200 innocent people, and took 250 hostages, including American citizens. We cannot discuss the Middle East today without acknowledging this unprovoked, evil massacre by Hamas. We need to remember the absolute cruelty which Hamas terrorists crossed the border into Israel, attacked innocent families, sexually assaulted people, burned them alive, and took young children hostage.

Acknowledging this kind of evil is key to understanding why Israel had to undertake an operation in Gaza to rescue the hostage and eliminate the threat posed by Hamas. For decades Iran has been arming and enabling terrorist proxies throughout the Middle East. It has provided them with the weapons, training, and financing to attack the United States, Israel, and our partners.

Since October 7th we have seen these proxies unleashed. Hezbollah is launching nearly daily attacks on Israel. The Houthis are regularly launching missiles and drone attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea, and even at Israel. Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria have launched over 170 attacks on American servicemembers who are stationed in the Middle East to ensure the defeat of ISIS.

And, for the first time, Iran launched a direct massive missile and drone attack on Israel, and is threatening to attack Israel again. Iran is not deterred, Hezbollah is not deterred, the Houthis are not deterred, Hamas is not deterred, the militias in Iraq and Syria are not deterred.

The Biden-Harris administration has not punished any of these terrorists for their violence. The administration's policy to attempt de-escalation puts America on the defensive. We are focused on blocking and tackling, when we should be on the offensive, squeezing our adversaries where it hurts. The result is weakness and vulnerability for the United States and our allies. We urgently need to change course.

Just last week, after waiting 5 months, the President finally took a necessary step toward implementing the 21st Century Peace through Strength Act that Congress enacted in April. This law contains a wide range of sanctions, authorities to counter international financing of Hamas, to counter Iran's missile and drone program, to counter China's purchase of Iranian oil, and to hold the Iranian regime accountable for its brutal human rights abuses against its own people. The administration needs to comply with the law and fully implement these sanctions.

Today our witnesses will provide us stark assessments of the entire Iran threat, including the nuclear program, missiles, and drones, terrorism, human rights abuses, and assassination plots. Our witnesses will also tell us how we should change the administration's ineffective strategy to actually deal with these threats.

Strongly worded statements are not cutting it, they are still lobbing drones, missiles, and rockets at our friends, we need a new plan, and we need it now.

I now turn to the ranking member, my dear friend Dean Phillips, for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER DEAN PHILLIPS

Mr. PHILLIPS. I never thought I would get to say Chairman Burchett. Thank you.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, well, it probably won't ever happen again, I can tell you that. And I wanted to say something, I am not cutting in on your time, but I guess I am, but as chairman, I hold the gavel, I can do that—apparently I had the wrong meeting room. So, I went down and greeted the witnesses in another thing, and I am sure they are all sitting there going hey, you are not my chairman, Tim Burchett just came by and said he was my chairman.

So, anyway, and I didn't get to say hey to you all, so, hey, so here I am. Anyway, Dean, sorry, brother.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will ask for another minute at the end of my remarks.

Mr. BURCHETT. You got it.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Greetings, especially to our witnesses, to my colleagues, to the wonderful staff that populate both sides of this committee aisle, and to those of you in attendance, staff members, and people passionate about peace who might see this issue slightly differently, but I know that ultimately we are all aligned. And I also want to wish Joe Wilson, my friend, my colleague, a remarkable man, a speedy recovery.

I can assure you that even after a health episode, the man can run circles around most of us, and we are thinking of him. As we approach the horrid anniversary of October 7th, the massacre in Israel in which Hamas murdered 1,200 people, including young teenagers at a music festival, took 250 hostages, 101 we believe still remain in Gaza today, and that includes American citizens.

And I would ask that all of us be considerate of the fact that American citizens are being held by this terror organization in the tunnels of Gaza. It feels like the ground has shifted under our very feet, and the realities with which we were grappling with a year ago have morphed and expanded as the region now sits at the precipice. Well before October 7th Iran has threatened U.S. national security interests and regional stability, in fact, since 1979.

It has continued to advance its nuclear program despite a June censure from the IAEA Board of Governors, and Secretary Blinken has also stated that Iran's nuclear breakout time is between one and 2 weeks. I will say that again: between one and 2 weeks. While the election of President Pezeshkian provides an interesting opportunity to explore a diplomatic path forward with Iran, they are a nuclear threshold State, and allowing that is unacceptable.

Iran has also increased cooperation with Russia on issues ranging from avoiding economic sanctions, obstructing accountability at the United Nations, and advancing military technology and weapons. Just last week Secretary Blinken confirmed that Iran has indeed transferred ballistic missiles to Russia for use in its illegal and unjust war in Ukraine. This is an axis of evil.

The burgeoning relationship is deeply concerning, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how the administration and Congress can best work together in a bipartisan fashion to ensure that our approach to Iran is coordinated to advance our strategic goals. The threat of Iran's so called shadow war has come out into the open since its unprecedented direct attack on Israel on April 14 of this year.

Even as it continues to establish and enable proxies to attack U.S. personnel and Israel by air, land, and sea. Over the past year we have witnessed the Houthis, the Iranian backed terrorist organization in Yemen, attack military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea almost 200 times, threatening international trade, and freedom of navigation. Hezbollah too has chosen to join the fray with an estimated 120-to 200,000 missiles and rockets in its arsenal to attack Israel and Israeli civilians.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border have been displaced, and cannot return home, cannot attend school, cannot live because of the continued violence. The United States is working diligently to de-escalate tension, reinforce Lebanon's sovereignty, and maintain strong support for the LAF, the Lebanese Armed Forces, which are a critical component to full implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701.

As these fronts continue to develop, another is emerging. Militants in the West Bank are linking up with Iran for weapons and funding in ways that we have not seen before. This is worrisome, and threatens stability and security in the entire region. But these militants are not the only threats to stability and security. Leaders within the current Israeli coalition are withholding tax dollars due to the Palestinian authority, delegitimizing its leadership, and emboldening extremist Israeli settlers attacking Palestinian civilians, equally unacceptable.

I am pleased that the Biden administration issued an executive order which authorizes sanction against any foreign person responsible for actions that threaten the peace, security, or stability in the West Bank. It is my hope and expectation that current sanctions are only the beginning of more serious measures to be taken against those, any of those who seek to escalate fear and violence against human beings in the area.

President Biden, along with our Egyptian and Qatari partners have been working diligently to bridge the remaining gaps, and bring an immediate cease-fire in Gaza that would see the release of all the remaining hostages, and a surge of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians. The third stage of the proposed plan is to begin major Gaza reconstruction.

President Biden has rightfully stated that Hamas cannot and will not be able to govern Gaza following a cease-fire. That creates more questions, what would a governing authority look like, who would be responsible for security? The answers to those questions require leaders across the region, including Israel, in particular Prime Minister Netanyahu, to set aside personal gain, and act in the best interest of Israelis, Palestinians, and human beings around the world.

Put plainly, without a cease-fire, without tangible steps toward a two-State solution, Israel loses, and Iran wins. Today I have laid

out the serious threat that Iran and its proxies pose to the United States and Israel. But I also believe that the best way to counter Iran's malign behavior, to fundamentally undermine its destructive mission, is for Israel to deepen its cooperation with like-minded countries in the region.

To normalize with Saudi Arabia, and to live side by side in peace and security with its Palestinian brothers and sisters. When I started my remarks, I said the Middle East was on the precipice, but the precipice of what? The Biden administration has successfully avoided a regional escalation since Hamas' attack on October 7, but time is running out. The region could easily devolve into chaos with Israel and the U.S. facing down adversaries on multiple fronts.

Or its leaders could choose a different path, a path that would leave Israel and the wider region in peace, and security, and stability. I hope, and I indeed pray for the sake of Israel, and for the region, and for Palestinians that we choose partnership, that we choose hope, and that we choose peace.

Last, I want to note that we have uncovered Iran's intention and success in manipulating and influencing our elections. It is appalling, it is reprehensible, and we must, and I know we will work in a bipartisan fashion to counter these threats to democracy both here and around the world.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time that I no longer have.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you to Ranking Member Phillips, my co-chair, I guess would be all right.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Well, you just gave me a promotion.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, I did, I don't care, you don't get any more pay. We are also pleased to have our distinguished witnesses with us today, Hon. Elliott Abrams, thank you, brother, former deputy assistant to the President, and national security advisor. We also have Ms. Kirsten Fontenrose. Did I get that right, ma'am? All right, you know you have got a doppelganger back in Knoxville, Tennessee, there is a lady I know, I went to school with her.

And if you ever get in trouble, you say it wasn't me, it was Tim Burchett's friend back in Knoxville, Tennessee that did it, you look very much like her, and I looked up, and I thought dadgum what is she doing here? But obviously it is not her. And then you are the former senior director for the Gulf at the National Security Council, did I get that right? All right.

And now I am going massacre this poor lady's name, we welcome Ms. Carrie Filipetti. Did I get it? Wow, well I am Burchett, and nobody has ever gotten it right. She is—hang on, let Jesse rob this train, hang on. Executive director of the Vandenberg Coalition. Finally we have Mr. Jonathan Lord, I got that one right. Senior fellow and director for Middle East Security with the Center for a New American Security.

I want to thank you all for being here today, your full statements will be made part of the record, and I will ask you to keep your spoken remarks to 5 minutes, which my friend Dean Phillips did not follow obviously, in order to allow time for members' questions.

And I now recognize Hon. Elliott Abrams for his opening statement. Thank you, brother, for being here.

STATEMENT OF HON. ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thanks for the invitation to testify today. The United States, Israel, and our allies face an increasingly complex terror network that allows Iran and its proxies to share expertise, coordinate activities, and collaborate on joint attacks. It has rightly been called Iran's proliferation of chaos. Iran's ability to disrupt peace, and to help the countries most hostile to the U.S. does not end at the borders of the Middle East.

As has been noted, just this month the U.S. Government informed of Iran's shipment of hundreds of short range ballistic missiles to Russia for use in attacking Ukraine. Those shipments are most significant for the Ukrainians they will kill. But there should be a clear message to us about the nature of the Iranian regime. And all these activities are being conducted by an Iranian regime without nuclear weapons.

What would they be doing if they had a nuclear umbrella, and felt they could be even bolder? But the Iranian nuclear program continues to expand, and quickly. Mr. Chairman, like you, I do not believe the U.S. and our allies have responded adequately to Iran's actions. Consider the Houthis, the Houthis' impact on international trade and commerce: the Houthis attacks have reduced ships going through, cargo going through the Suez Canal by about 75 or 80 percent.

A recent article by former Navy Commander Tom Sharpe was entitled the Houthis have defeated the U.S. Navy. The Houthis have defeated the U.S. Navy. They have not been deterred, as also has been noted by the defensive actions the U.S. and allies have taken, which have failed. And the Houthis, now emboldened, have ramped up their attacks. Drones and cruise missiles are now accompanied by hijackings, and ballistic missiles.

The Houthis are not producing advanced ballistic and cruise missiles. Those are Iranian missiles given to the Houthis. So, that interference with international shipping is a product of Iranian foreign policy. But Iran has paid no price for it. As to the sale of ballistic missiles to Russia, significant consequences were promised, that was the phrase.

Where are they? Will Iran pay a price? Iran has paid no significant price for its April attack on Israel. Iran has paid no significant price thus far for its defiance of the International Atomic Energy Agency and its buildup of a stockpile, as noted, that would allow it to build several nuclear weapons in just a few weeks. Oil sanctions are on the books, but they are not really being enforced, and Iran is selling more and more oil.

I don't think, Mr. Chairman, that that should lead us to just wring our hands, I think it should lead us to act. We can prevent these activities, because Iran's leaders are evil, but they are rational. They respond to actions that threaten their interests, and they respect American power. So, what should be done? First, I think both candidates for the presidency should repeat what President Biden and his predecessors have said: That the United States will not permit Iran to get a nuclear weapon. Second, both CENTCOM and the U.S. Navy believe our ships are sitting ducks for the Houthis, and are dissatisfied with the way the U.S. has allowed Iran to close international waterways. CENTCOM commander Eric

Kurilla wrote in a classified letter that was reported in the press, U.S. service members will die if we continue going this way.

And he argued for a more forceful response. We need that more forceful response. We need to make it clear to Iran that if an American ship is hit, the U.S. retaliation will be against Iran, not its expendable Houthis. Again, Iran's leaders are evil, but they are rational. I would like to close with one point. It is important to remember that Iranians have not chosen that regime, the regime that rules them.

The Iranian people loathe that regime, and they repeatedly risk their lives to rise up against it. The ultimate solution to the problem of Iran is democracy. When the Iranian people are free to govern themselves, Iran will have a different government, and a different foreign policy. So, we should do all we reasonably can to help them bring that day nearer. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee.

[The prepared statement of The Honorable Elliott Abrams follows:]

Iran's Proliferation of Chaos

Prepared statement by

Elliott Abrams

Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies

Council on Foreign Relations

Before the

Committee on Foreign Affairs - Subcommittee on the Middle East, North
Africa, and Central Asia

United States House of Representatives

2nd Session, 118th Congress

Hearing on Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for your invitation to testify today on "Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies."

A recent Brookings paper about the threat from Iran stated that:

"the Houthis are an independent part of an increasingly complex network that allows them to work directly with over a dozen other groups to share expertise, coordinate activities, and even collaborate on joint attacks. This web enables a proliferation of chaos far beyond what Iran could orchestrate by itself..."

The web being referred to includes Iran, Shia militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, Palestine Islamic Jihad and Hamas, and other groups, and that expression "proliferation of chaos" is apt.

Iran is indeed seeking to expand the chaos, most recently into Jordan. A July article by former Israeli deputy national security adviser Eran Lerman noted that "the Iranian regime has intensified its efforts to subvert the Hashemite monarchy" and Israel's foreign minister Israel Katz said in August that Tehran is seeking to

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set up a proxy terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank akin to those in the Gaza Strip, Yemen, and Iraq. To that end, he added that Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operatives have been smuggling weapons into the West Bank through Syria and Jordan. The IRGC is “attempting to destabilize the (Hashemite) regime and turn the Israel-Jordan border from a peaceful one into a volatile front,” Katz said.

Think of Iran’s role this way: what would the Middle East look like if Iran were not engaged in terrorism and aggression? Iraq would be achieving a peaceful and reasonably stable democracy. In Lebanon, Hezbollah would be a representative of many—not all—of Shia Lebanese, and the Lebanese people could reclaim the right to govern their own country. The possibilities of peace between Israelis and Palestinians would be far higher and the Gaza war would never have happened. Peace negotiations in Yemen would have a chance of success, and the Houthis would not be able to disrupt trade through the Bab el-Mandab, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal.

Iran’s ability to disrupt peace and to help the countries most hostile to the United States does not end at the borders of the Middle East. Just this month the United States government informed allies of Iran’s shipment of hundreds of ballistic missiles to Russia for use in attacking Ukraine. A Wall Street Journal article on September 6 said this:

“Iran has sent short-range ballistic missiles to Russia, according to U.S. and European officials, a move that gives Moscow another potent military tool in its war against Ukraine and follows stern Western warnings not to provide those arms to Moscow....

A U.S. official confirmed the missiles “have finally been delivered.”

“We have been warning of the deepening security partnership between Russia and Iran since the outset of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and are alarmed by these reports,” said National Security Council Spokesman Sean Savett. “We and our partners have made clear both at the G-7 and at the NATO summits this summer that together we are prepared to deliver significant consequences. Any transfer of Iranian ballistic missiles to Russia would represent a dramatic escalation in Iran’s support for Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.”

In March, Group of Seven leaders warned they would impose coordinated sanctions on Iran if it carries out the missile transfer.

The shipment involves a couple of hundred short-range ballistic missiles, according to Western officials.

These missile shipments are most significant for the Ukrainians they will kill, but they should be a clear message to us about the nature of the Iranian regime. Recently Iran elected a new president, Masoud Pezeshkian. Pezeshkian was called a “reformist” in stories in the Washington Post, CNBC, BBC, CNN, NPR, AP, Al Jazeera, and NBC—and I could go on. It is under this new “reformist” that these hundreds of ballistic missiles are being delivered. Either he is not at all a “reformist” or he is powerless when it comes to military and security matters—or both. So we can expect no reduction in Iran’s aggression, subversion, and support of terror.

And all these activities are being conducted by an Iran without nuclear weapons. What would they be doing if they had a nuclear umbrella and felt they could be even bolder?

Meanwhile, the Iranian nuclear weapons program continues to expand, and quickly. On September 9, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi reported to the IAEA Board that:

“Iran’s stockpile of uranium enriched up to 20% and up to 60% continues to increase, and that Iran has expanded the number of cascades it is using to enrich UF₆. It has been more than three and a half years since Iran stopped implementing its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, including provisionally applying its Additional Protocol and therefore it is also over three and a half years since the Agency was able to conduct complementary access in Iran. Consequently, the Agency has lost continuity of knowledge in relation to the production and inventory of centrifuges, rotors and bellows, heavy water and uranium ore concentrate.

“You also have before you my report on the NPT Safeguards Agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran. There has been no progress in resolving the outstanding safeguards issues. Iran says it has declared all nuclear material,

activities and locations required under its NPT Safeguards Agreement. However, this statement is inconsistent with the Agency’s findings....”

Mr. Chairman, I do not believe the United States and our allies have responded adequately to Iran’s actions.

To take one example, consider the Houthis’ impact on international trade and commerce. The U.S. Navy web site entitled “Who We Are” tells us this: “Since 1775, America’s Navy has maintained freedom of the seas. Not only for our nation, but for our allies and strategic partners.” The Navy’s “Mission Statement” says “The United States is a maritime nation, and the U.S. Navy protects America at sea. Alongside our allies and partners, we defend freedom, preserve economic prosperity, and keep the seas open and free.”

But we are not doing that. The Houthi attacks have led to a 79.6 percent drop in dry bulk carriers going through the Suez Canal in June 2024 versus June 2023. The Danish shipping company A.P Moller-Maersk announced on September 5 that traffic through the Suez Canal has decreased 66 percent since companies began diverting ships away from the Red Sea to avoid attacks launched by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

The U.S. response has been purely defensive, and it has failed. A recent article in the Telegraph newspaper in London by former Royal Navy Commander Tom Sharpe was entitled “The Houthis Have Defeated the U.S. Navy.” Sharpe wrote that “The Houthis were not deterred” by the defensive U.S. and allied naval actions, which failed. He continued:

Emboldened by these failures, the Houthis have ramped up their attacks:

Since January, not only have the attacks steadily increased in number, they have diversified too. Drones and cruise missiles were accompanied by hijackings and ballistic missiles.

Now, the Houthis are not producing advanced ballistic and cruise missiles. Those are Iranian missiles given to the Houthis. So this interference with

international shipping is a product of Iranian foreign policy—yet Iran has paid no price for it.

As to the sale of ballistic missiles to Russia, “significant consequences” were promised. Where are they? Most recently news stories have said Iran Air’s routes in Europe would be suspended, but is that all that will be done? No significant economic or financial sanctions? Iran Air does not fly to the United States, so we can’t suspend it; what will we do?

Will Iran pay a price? That is the question that must be asked about all of Iran’s malign activities in the region and beyond it: Will Iran pay a price?

Iran has paid no significant price for its April attack on Israel, when it launched 300 projectiles and its proxies launched about 200 more.

Iran has paid no significant price thus far for its defiance of the International Atomic Energy Agency and its build-up of a stockpile of enriched uranium that would allow it to build several nuclear weapons in just a matter of weeks. While U.S. oil sanctions remain on the books, they are not being enforced and Iran is selling more and more. In May Iran reached a 5-year export high of 1.7 million barrels per day. During the last three and a half years, Iran’s oil revenue is estimated at \$100 billion, about \$40 billion more than it would have received had the sanctions been in effect as they were in 2019 and 2020. In addition to that revenue, the United States has allowed Iran to access \$16 billion in what had previously been frozen funds. All of which gives Iran the money it needs to continue these policies of aggression, subversion, and support for terror.

Mr. Chairman, I do not think all of this should lead us to wring our hands. It should lead us to act.

If the United States allows Iran to continue building its nuclear weapons program, building its proxy terror network, and blocking the sea lines of communication, and Iran pays no penalty for these activities, we can see what will happen. There will be more of the same. Jordan will face more subversion, Israel will face more violence in the West Bank, Hezbollah’s threat to Israel will increase, the Houthis will attack U.S. naval vessels and international trade more often and more successfully. And eventually—in a few months or a couple of years, Iran will have a nuclear weapon. That’s a formula for violence and war, and for a Middle East largely under Iran’s thumb.

But we can prevent this. Iran’s leaders are evil but they are rational. They respond to actions that threaten their interests, and they respect American power. So what needs to be done?

First, both candidates for president should repeat what President Biden and his immediate predecessors have pledged: that Iran will not be permitted to get a nuclear weapon. In the Jerusalem U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Joint Declaration of July 14, 2022, President Biden pledged this:

“Consistent with the longstanding security relationship between the United States and Israel and the unshakeable U.S. commitment to Israel’s security, and especially to the maintenance of its qualitative military edge, the United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to preserve and strengthen Israel’s capability to deter its enemies and to defend itself by itself against any threat or combination of threats....

“The United States stresses that integral to this pledge is the commitment never to allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and that it is prepared to use all elements of its national power to ensure that outcome.”

Both candidates should endorse that language as soon as possible, as should the next Congress.

Second, it has been reported widely that both CENTCOM and the US Navy believe our ships are sitting ducks for the Houthis and are dissatisfied with the way the United States has allowed Iran to close international waterways and threaten us. The Wall Street Journal reported that CENTCOM commander Eric Kurilla wrote in a classified letter that “US service members will die if we continue going this way”, and he argued for a more forceful response to Houthi attacks.

We need that more forceful response. We need to make it clear to Iran that if an American ship is hit, the U.S. retaliation will hit Iran, not its expendable proxies.

Third, that same message should be sent with respect to Iranian Shia militia proxy attacks on American troops in Iraq and Syria. Iran respects American power, and we have seen this repeatedly when that power is used—from President Reagan’s sinking of half the Iranian Navy in 1988, to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, to the killing of Suleimani in January 2020. We saw it in the Fall of 2020 when the United States made it clear to Iran that if American troops were killed by Shia militias our response would target Iran, and those attacks declined by about 90 percent at the end of the Trump administration.

Iran fears American power. Its leaders are, as I said, evil but rational. They fear escalation and they fear confrontation with the United States. But we have too often been guided by fear of Iran, and have restrained the ability of both our own CENTCOM forces and of our ally Israel in responding to Iranian attacks. Its past time to put those fears behind us and reassert America’s ability and willingness to ensure that Iran cannot build a nuclear weapon, cannot close international waterways, cannot attack our troops in the Middle East, and cannot assault and subvert our allies. We have the power; the question is whether we have the will and the commitment.

Finally, it’s important to remember that Iranians have not chosen the regime that rules them and creates chaos in the Middle East. The Iranian people loathe the regime and repeatedly risk their lives to rise up against it. The ultimate solution to the problem of Iran is democracy, because when the Iranian people are free to govern themselves Iran will have a very different foreign policy. Consequently, we should do what we reasonably can to help them express their views and bring this evil regime to an end. This means, among other things, taking a close look at our public diplomacy, our broadcasting, and other ways in which we can assist the Iranian people in their struggle for freedom.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Abrams.
I now recognize Ms. Kirsten Fontenrose for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF KIRSTEN FONTENROSE

Ms. FONTENROSE. Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, and esteemed members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about the accelerating threat to long term U.S. interests posed by Iran and its armed underlings. For over a decade CENTCOM has consistently described Iran as the primary destabilizing force in the Middle East.

Ten years ago, when Secretary Austin was CENTCOM commander, he cited Iran's proxy networks and its support for terrorism as major challenges. Since then Iran has throttled up these programs with the explicit goal of eradicating U.S. influence in and access to the Middle East. Despite the headlines, the peril from Iran is not rooted in Gaza. If the conflict ends tomorrow, Iran's foreign policy will continue to demand policymaker attention.

We will still be confronted by the IRGC and their cohorts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, by a nuclear program holding us in a State of paralysis, by missiles that are approaching hypersonic, and drones that are as fast as cruise missiles, by arm sales that directly threaten Ukraine, a crippling of global democracy—I am sorry, commerce, cyber warfare threatening the democratic process, and information warfare targeting the social cohesion of our communities.

The only domain in which we are not in a low simmer war with Iran right now is space, and that is likely temporary. Iran launched four satellites this year, cozy relations with China and Russia could bring access to troubling space tools. Because of growth in their missile and drone programs, accelerated by the lax of U.N. sanctions and provisions in U.N. SCR 2231 in 2020 and 2023, Iran is now able to deliver lethal effects to every country in the Middle East.

They have amped up their capabilities in terms of small arms, long range missiles, attack drones. Next year will unleash their nuclear program, and its collaborative work with our adversaries if we do not trigger snap back. Should Iran cross the threshold of nuclear weaponization, the risk of deadly escalation in any exchange of missile fire between Iran and Israel will spike because of payload uncertainty.

Baring intelligence to the contrary, any nuclear capable missile fired from Iran would be assumed to carry a nuclear payload. To use an old school cold war term, the scenario is mutually assured destruction. In my written testimony I offer thoughts on potential actions to address these accelerating risks, so let me briefly touch on two. First, Congress can direct to draft an effort.

An effort to draft a unified long term strategy that will guide interagency planning beyond a single administration, and inspire partners to get on board. In the absence of a strategy in the Gulf, of a strategy that will endure, let's say for more than 3 years, partners like the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, and perhaps soon Bahrain,

are backed into positions of vulnerability, walking-back policies that economically and informationally isolated Iran and its vassals in the region. Ask CENTCOM how much harder the lack of such a strategy has made their work on integrated air and missile defense. The region and Europe are clamoring for this. The U.S. cannot operate around the world without building coalitions, and we cannot build coalitions without a plan.

Coalition members can be incentivized by including countries on programs just out of the gate, like the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement with Bahrain, and the mil-to-mil, and intel sharing benefits proposed in the LINK and AI Accords Acts. Second, protecting freedom of navigation and global shipping lanes is a primary U.S. national security objective as stated in our national security strategy and national defense strategy.

It is quite literally the reason we have the Navy, and yet we are not authorizing our Navy to do it. The Houthis in Yemen are intransigent in political negotiations, they have learned from Iran that keeping the U.S. in political talks on the one hand allows you to conduct acts of terrorism with full impunity on the other. To quote a senior Yemeni official in a conversation I had yesterday, there is an entire generation being mobilized and trained for holy wars.

All six types of anti-ship ballistic missiles, and four of the six types of cruise missiles used by the Houthis in attacking ships in the Red Sea are provided by Iran, or fitted with Iranian guidance kits. What will DoD and Congress tell the American people when an Arleigh Burke Class destroyer with over 300 sailors onboard bursts into flames, hit by one of their missiles, because we only allowed DoD to catch fly balls and not go to bat. In support of U.N. SCR 2624, which labels the Houthis as terrorists, and reinforces the arms embargo, and acknowledging the defense of people and interests permitted by Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, it is time to mobilize partners to do more to interdict weapons, support local forces in Yemen to do more to challenge the Houthi position that enables their strikes, and here is where tables get flipped.

Pass an AUMF for limited scope geographically and time bound operations that de-fang the Iranian proxy most directly threatening U.S. interests. What is at risk if we do not professionalize our approach to the regime in Iran? It is access to energy that will drive our economy for at least several decades, access to resources and alliances while we compete for economic and perhaps military primacy against multiple bully states increasingly aligned in the singular goal to unseat us.

And access to shape the widening world views of countries that were so closed for so long. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Kirsten Fontenrose follows:]

Testimony of Kirsten Fontenrose

Submitted to the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs

17 September 2024

**Testimony on Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads:
How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies**

Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I served as the Senior Director for Gulf Affairs at the National Security Council for 2018, after nearly twenty years of service focused on the Middle East and Africa at the Department of Defense, Department of State and other branches of government. In each role I witnessed the advancement of a positive American agenda for catalyzing strong security partners, welcoming markets, and stable governments across the Middle East stymied by a determination in Tehran to undermine U.S. partnerships and extirpate U.S. influence from Marrakesh to Bangladesh.

This influence underpins American economic power in the region, opening doors for American businesses, increasing access to critical natural and technical resources, and ensuring strong currencies are tightly intertwined with the dollar. It underpins the U.S.' ability to sustain strategic reach without a large footprint, creating demand to equip and train militaries with whom the U.S. can plug-and-play when necessary. It underpins the willingness of regional partners to engage with the U.S. on ways to expand civil liberties and personal freedoms anathema to Iran's oppressive theocracy.

I closely track the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) development of weaponry. Because of growth in their missile and drone programs, accelerated by the lapse of U.N. sanctions and provisions in UNSCR 2231 in 2020 and 2023, Iran is now able to deliver lethal effects to every country in the Middle East.

Iran has learned to exploit swings in U.S. policy, divisions between the U.S. and partners in Europe and the Middle East, the openness of American society, commercially available dual-use technology, and criminal gangs in their multi-pronged, terrorism-based effort to ensure the regime's survival and weaken U.S. resolve. In the last three administrations the U.S. strove to alter Iran's foreign policy using carrots, then sticks, then carrots again. What has not been tried is a long-term, multi-domain, bipartisan strategy for addressing Iran's goal to unseat the U.S. as the partner of choice for many important Arab states.

Tehran Believes it is Winning

Iran does not want a full-scale war in the Middle East at this moment. Leaders in Tehran do not seek to invite American military operations against their homeland. In their estimation, making

the region inhospitable to U.S. forces is the more prudent way to actualize the Supreme Leader's vision of a "great estate" in which the theocracy dictates the foreign policy of western Asia.

With this goal in mind, Tehran believes it is winning, at low cost. Iran's lesson learned from the Gaza conflict is that the return on their investment in Hamas, the Houthis, Hezbollah and lesser militias has paid off handsomely: U.S. society is divided; Israeli society is divided; the U.S.-Israel relationship is strained; the U.S. reputation internationally is tarnished; 60,000 Israelis are displaced from the northern border; the Abraham Accords are paused; militias in Syria and Iraq are sustaining pressure on U.S. troops; and maintaining a heightened defense posture at home and at its embassies globally while Tehran deliberates retaliation for the deaths of Ismail Haniyeh and Fuad Shukr is straining Israel's manpower and budget.

This upheaval is equally useful to Tehran in distracting attention in western capitals from IRGC operations that should be the focus of a coordinated coalition counter effort. These operations are poorly addressed and merit smarter action in cooperation with partners:

- Houthi attacks on global shipping from Yemen. All 6 types of anti-ship ballistic missiles and 4 of the 6 types of cruise missiles used by the Houthis in attacking ships in the Red Sea are provided by Iran or fitted with Iranian guidance kits. Protecting the freedom of navigation in global shipping lanes is a top U.S. objective per both the U.S. National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, yet the U.S. currently outsources implementation of this objective to European navies with a fraction of the U.S. capability to address it.
- Ties to terrorist groups with American blood on their hands. In the astute words of a 30-year veteran of the U.S. intelligence community with deep knowledge of Iran's covert activities, "Iran is the only country in the world that has maintained a relationship with Al Qaeda - to include allowing an active Al Qaeda facilitation cell on its territory - without paying a price."
- Ties to criminal networks in the U.S. and Europe in the service of assassination and kidnapping plots. Operations to silence journalists and dissidents abroad have been a pillar of Iran's foreign policy for 40 years. These have evolved in an alarming way, as reported by the Washington Post on September 12th of this year. Western intelligence services accustomed to tracking IRGC Quds Force operatives see a new reliance on western criminal networks who traverse borders with ease. The Financial Times has reported on attempts by Iran and Hezbollah to acquire weapons from drug cartels.
- Disinformation campaigns to divide America from within. Microsoft and Open AI discovered 5 Iran-backed websites aimed at English speakers globally that promulgate false narratives about the U.S. The Foundation for Defense of Democracies identified 14 more. Examples include "Afro Majority" which targets African Americans, and "Not Our War" targeting American veterans. Specific to the war in Gaza, Iran removed the data in a Palestinian polling group's survey results and replaced them with false numbers that implied an inaccurately high rate of Palestinian support for Hamas as future leaders of Gaza. In the summer of 2024 U.S. ODNI revealed that Tehran sponsored anti-Israel protests on U.S. college campuses and attempted hacks on the Presidential campaigns of both major U.S. political parties. Iran's alignment with China in the

pursuit of sowing division among American communities gives the regime unfettered access to American youth via Chinese-owned social media platforms. To apply a military term, Iran and China are engaged in Phase 0 (pre conflict) shaping of the environment in the U.S., continuously exposing Americans to disinformation. Without hyperbole, the risk in not addressing this activity is that future generations of American decision makers will be fed an unhealthy dose of what our adversaries want them to consume.

- *Sales of ballistic missiles and drones to aid Russia's invasion of Ukraine*. The U.S. and European partners were aghast when Iran sold Shahed series attack drones to Russia yet actions did nothing to deter further sales. Russia now produces those drones domestically, geometrically increasing their use on the battlefield. Iran followed with the sale of Fatteh-136 short range ballistic missiles. The only effective defense against these missiles are Patriot interceptors, which are expensive and in low stock. Looking forward, it is logical to expect the Iran-Russia weapons program propinquity to expand to co-development and production of new weaponry.

Calculus in Tehran

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations (U.N.) denied this missile transfer. The framing of this denial is important because it illustrates the duplicity inherent in the regime's foreign policy, and it is as ironic in the context of Gaza as it is in Ukraine: "Iran's position vis-à-vis the Ukraine conflict remains unchanged. Iran considers the provision of military assistance to the parties engaged in the conflict – which leads to increased human casualties, destruction of infrastructure, and a distancing from ceasefire negotiations – to be inhumane. Thus, not only does Iran abstain from engaging in such actions itself, but it also calls upon other countries to cease the supply of weapons to the sides involved in the conflict."

Iran recently elected a President marketed as a "moderate" in a vote with the lowest turnout in the regime's history. While President Pezashkian may truly harbor dreams of reform, he is in no position to enact them. His engineered election is proof of a shrewd calculation by the regime inner circle. They expect that offering new nuclear negotiations may entice a Harris administration or create obstacles for a Trump administration in ways that protect the regime's interests.

Being at the table for nuclear talks has proven to be a sweet spot for this regime. The talks are the goal. They have no intention of signing a deal. Tehran expects that if a Harris administration takes the helm they can freeze nuclear enrichment while engaging in talks and this will result in lackadaisical sanctions enforcement. This allows the continuation of roughly 1.5 million barrels per day of oil and up to 300,000 barrels per day of condensate exports. Combined with production for domestic use, Iran's production is just half a million barrels less than they could produce sustainably in a wholly unsanctioned environment according to industry analysts.

Iran's President Pezashkian said Iran needs more than \$100 billion in foreign investment, and the lack of sanctions enforcement is also hoped to entice foreign investment from the UAE and Saudi Arabia. All without closing a centrifuge or disposing of enriched material.

If a Trump administration takes office, Tehran reasons that the window dressing provided by a few moderate officials and their current hints at willingness to restart nuclear talks will convince the international community to reject U.S. requests to reapply maximum economic pressure.

However, a close look at the new Cabinet formed by President Pezashkian confirms that the regime remains committed to hardline policies. At least three are members of the IRGC, including those who control the Ministries of Intelligence, Justice, and Interior.

The Regime's Technology Toolbox

Cyber. In addition to the nuclear program and terrorist proxy sponsorship, Iran invests in deadly military hardware and software, projects it defends as critical foreign policy tools.

The Economist's Byte by Byte podcast calculated the increase in Iranian cyber attack activity since October 7th of last year at 300%. While Iran's cyber capability does not yet match that of Israel, it is improving consistently. In the Arab world, Iran's capability is comparable to that of the United Arab Emirates, but at a larger scale. Vulnerabilities that previously took Iranian cyber actors weeks to exploit now take days. Iran has transferred cyber expertise to Hezbollah and could choose to offer the same to additional armed groups. Of concern to Israel is the possibility that advanced cyber techniques or tools could be passed by Russia to Iran as part of their expanding security interdependency.

Missiles and Drones. Despite a flurry of U.S. effort to prevent it, the U.N. arms embargo on Iran expired in October of 2020. As I warned would happen in an article the previous June titled "The Gulf is Watching Washington's Moves on the UN Embargo on Iran", Iran has made lethal strides in its missile and drone programs. The IRGC has added new ballistic missiles to their arsenal and extended the range and accuracy of pre-existing models. The new missiles display improved precision in tests, thanks to the acquisition of better guidance systems and better targeting technology. Iran has advanced its utilization of solid fuel technology, making IRGC missiles easier to transport and faster to launch - therefore harder to detect and preemptively strike. Iran's cruise missiles and drones also boast extended ranges, better guidance systems, longer flight durations. Drone payload capacity has also been improved, both in size and quality, with the import of advanced surveillance technologies, for example.

Iran extends this largesse to its affiliates across the region. With specific regard to the crippling of Red Sea shipping, note that the International Institute for Strategic Studies wrote in October of 2023 "With Iranian assistance, the Houthis have managed to build up an array of precision-guided rockets, ballistic missiles, land attack cruise missiles and anti-shipping capabilities in a remarkably short period of time." In February of this year the IRGC Navy fired two ballistic missiles from a ship for the first time. This capability equates to an extension of its missile arsenal range.

In October of 2023 restrictions on Iran's missile program under UNSCR 2231 ended. These restrictions prevented Iran from importing or exporting missiles, drones, or components of either. At the time of its expiration 48 states signed a statement calling Iran's missile program "one of

the greatest challenges to international non-proliferation efforts” and stressing that Iran’s foreign policy of arming militias abroad “endangers international stability and escalates regional tension.” According to the U.N., Iran’s sale of ballistic missiles to Russia is legal.

UNSCR 2231 also prohibited Iran from converting missiles into nuclear delivery vehicles. Iran did not abide by this prohibition while it was active, but the expiration of these restrictions means IRGC work in this area is unencumbered.

A Note on Nukes. Perhaps the greatest danger posed by Iran’s missile program is its potential to deliver a nuclear warhead. The series most likely to serve this purpose in the IRGC arsenal today are, in order of capability, the Khorramshar 1/2, the Shahab-3, the Emad. Should Iran cross the threshold of nuclear weaponization, the risk of deadly escalation in any exchange of fire between Iran and Israel will spike, due to payload uncertainty. Barring intelligence to the contrary, any missile of a nuclear-capable variant fired from Iran would be assumed to carry a nuclear payload. In a wargame the scenario becomes mutually assured destruction.

The conflict in Gaza, the war in Ukraine, the war in Yemen, and the nonsensical Houthi campaign against global shipping are all laboratories in which Iranian engineers study and tweak IRGC weaponry. Allowing Iran’s partners to continue deploying Iranian munitions in these theaters effectively furthers Iranian R&D.

What the U.S. Can Do About It

Congressional Action. While altering Iranian behavior is a complex task, altering our own should not be.

1. Iran’s missile sales to Russia provide ample justification for **passing legislation** that truncates the process for transferring to Ukraine weapons seized in intercepted Iranian shipments to proxies. When Iranian weapons are used against Russia, it could be in Russia’s interest to pressure Iran to halt those shipments.
2. Iranian meddling in the election campaigns of America’s two largest political parties must be fully understood to be mitigated. Congress could **urge** the appointment of a Special Counsel and **establish** a bipartisan task force to draft policy recommendations based on the Special Counsel’s findings.
3. The dangerous spectrum of Iranian actions designed to abrogate U.S. influence from the Middle East justifies the framing of a **unified strategy**, perhaps by a Select Committee, that reflects the U.S. mission to see an Iran that does not possess a nuclear weapon, does not sponsor terrorism, does not suppress the will of its people, and does not interfere with U.S. elections or the American social fabric.

Diplomacy. The sanctions, military deterrence, and diplomacy drawn on in successive attempts to change these Iranian behaviors remain valid tools but require tweaking. Diplomatic efforts

should be in the service of forming and **mobilizing a coalition** to refine and adopt the American-led strategy instead of in the service of exchanging messages with intransigent Iranian nuclear negotiators or Hamas representatives.

I recommend the coalition adopt a position that **rejects** the entry of missiles and drones into sovereign airspace and waters without approval and assigns repercussions for violations. Further, that the coalition be mobilized to **disrupt** operations that enable the Iranian programs that have violated and continue to violate this position. Finally, that the coalition discuss with Iran and, barring improvement, **announce** that should Iran continue to destabilize and suppress economic growth in either or all of Lebanon, Yemen, the Palestinian territories, Syria and Iraq, the bill for resultant reconstruction projects will be Iran's and not born by any members of the Coalition. This announcement could lead to populations of these countries reassessing Iran's role in their midst.

This coalition should agree on and publish actions that will be taken against Iran when a citizen of a coalition member country is **kidnapped** by the IRGC anywhere in the world. Stronger action should be triggered when a citizen is assassinated, or an assassination is attempted. Heeding human rights lawyers, the U.S. should push for universal jurisdiction tools to be applied to Iran by the coalition. Many countries currently refrain from doing so due to fear of retributive kidnappings. The coalition should agree to open structural investigations into human rights abuses at the hands of Iranian officials where victims who can provide evidence have moved into jurisdictions that can host criminal trials or file for civil litigation.

Note that this discussion of a coalition is entirely removed from discussions of military posture or action. Separating these asks makes it easier for partner nations to participate at the level supported by their populace.

Military Deterrence. Diplomacy has not - and arguably cannot - reduce Iran's intent to conduct acts of terror. Deterrence is established when an enemy believes they have more to lose than gain from a hostile action. Iran's Supreme Leader, as the head of a nation with near absolute power, has quite a bit to lose. This logic underpins Iran's proxy-based foreign policy. Potential losses are offloaded to external entities, increasing Iran's risk tolerance. This is also why Iran has refused to negotiate on its support of proxies like it has on its nuclear program. The value of proxies far outweighs the cost of arming them and treating them as negotiable would fray their loyalty.

How to counter this logic? The U.S. has shied away from kinetic action inside Iran over several administrations with good reason. Tehran understands that primary among these were U.S. concerns about civilian loss of life and the risk of fomenting popular support for the regime. Advances in precision weaponry drastically reduce these risks. Following Iran's April 13th multi-front drone and missile attack on Israel, Israel's 3-missile strike on a Russian-made S300 air defense system near one of the IRGC's nuclear sites elicited nary a blink from average Iranians. **The U.S. should make it clear to the leadership of Iran's proxy, drone and missile programs that new capabilities now permit the U.S. and partners to dismantle their facilities and chains of command with low to no risk of negative secondary effects.** Though "AUMF" is a four letter word in Congress, an Authorized Use of Military Force could convey this quickly and clearly.

The barrage of munitions fired from Iranian and proxy stockpiles on April 13th in what the IRGC termed Operation True Promise was a test of both Israel's air defenses and the US-led network of countries pledged to peace with Israel. Since then, Iran has worked to undermine and to court America's partners in the region. Years of CENTCOM engagement are one reason this work has so far failed. But integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) is not yet fully realized and neither our partner nations nor our citizens are well-protected from Iranian weaponry. The Diplomatic Security Service can be asked to provide details on the threat level from missiles and drones to **our embassies abroad**, especially in countries where Iran has influence and affiliates.

Sanctions. Acknowledging debate about the effectiveness of current sanctions on Iran, there is reason for optimism. In 2023 Treasury was mainstreaming AI in sanctions research, per their 2021 modernization agenda. As these specialized **AI tools** continue to learn and be applied, the depth of research and speed the U.S. applies to uncovering IRGC front companies and compiling cases for targeted sanctions will accelerate. These tools will also enable a more thorough application of secondary sanctions against brokers and facilitators anywhere in the world who play middleman in the Chinese-Iranian oil trade or Iran's drone sales in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America.

UNSCR 2231 sanctions on Iran's authority to enrich uranium will expire in October 2025 unless snapback is triggered. Iran has threatened to immediately weaponize if this occurs and pre-2015 sanctions are automatically reimposed. While U.S. issuance of and adherence to redlines has been abysmal, consecutive administrations have been clear that Iranian possession of a nuclear weapon will not be countenanced. The current US military posture in the region presents a credible deterrent. Iran will certainly weigh these two data points. The U.S. should **create conditions** for Iran to walk back their threat without loss of face.

Go for a Grand Bargain. The regime in Iran has learned from a dozen years of experimentation that its interests are best served by focusing the attention of the U.S. Government on a single issue while operating with no impediments elsewhere. That single issue, the nuclear file, has reached a point where Iran has very little room to continue slowly ramping up the program to keep the U.S. riveted. IRGC intent is no doubt to mature the missile, drone and proxy programs to the point that any one of them can be peeled off to serve as the next single issue of focus. To prevent another dozen years of IRGC terrorist capability advances, the U.S. should consider crafting a **grand bargain** comprised of carrots and sticks that establishes deterrence while allowing the partial fulfillment of an Iranian objective where it also overlaps with U.S. interests.

While designing a multifaceted deal will be complex, the last 12 years prove that addressing the range of Iran's hostile behaviors individually is even less likely to yield results.

Elements could include an end to Iranian arms transfers and financial support to designated terrorist groups in other sovereign countries; a roll back of Iranian stockpiles of enriched uranium; the proportional removal of U.S. sanctions related to the nuclear program and sponsorship of terrorism; a U.S. greenlight for foreign direct investment into Iran from Saudi Arabia and the UAE in agreed-upon sectors; the continuation of U.S. and Arab state plans for IAMD and burgeoning

initiatives like the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA), as the military activities in each are purely defensive; the continuation of Iran and Arab state cooperation ensuring mutual non-aggression and developing trade; U.S. and European cooperation with the region to establish a non-binding regional security conflict resolution mechanism for the Middle East with membership extended to both Iran and Israel; a gradual draw down of U.S. forces present in the region without the request of the host government and potential further reductions in U.S. troop presence pending Arab partners assurances to the U.S. that Iran does not demonstrate hostile intent and/or that strengthened U.S.-Arab security arrangements are sufficient. Note that such strengthened security agreements do not have to include a quartered troop commitment, rather they can be a U.S. commitment to respond if the partner is attacked.

The U.S. should not expect any deal reached to be more than a set of transactional arrangements. The U.S. and Iran did find ground to cooperate after 9/11 against the Taliban and later against ISIS in Iraq, when neither country wished to see a Sunni terrorist group establish a stronghold in the region. The U.S. also provided humanitarian assistance to Iran after the Bam earthquake in 2003. Most other instances of cooperation have emerged not due to shared objectives but because Iran conducted an aggressive act the U.S. was then compelled to mitigate, like when exchanging Iranian prisoners for kidnapped Americans, negotiating the JCPOA to limit Iran's nuclear program, or signing the Algiers Accord in 1981 after Iran held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days.

Time spent negotiating a grand bargain is also time available in parallel lanes to develop new tools for future use in dismantling the nuclear or missile and drone programs as required. If no deal is reached, the U.S. should have contingency plans on the shelf for applying additional sanctions, conducting strikes, or implementing other options inside or outside of Iran.

Conclusion

Without U.S. leadership, October 2025 will mark the end of any mechanism for reimposing U.N. sanctions on Iran's nuclear, missile or drone programs. Tehran will be free to pursue further tools of terror and coercive expansionism. The interests of all actors, including Iranians, are better served by curtailing this.

We are currently in a rare period of widespread transitions among actors in this space. The time is opportune to reset norms, establish red lines, and devise an updated approach for managing Iran's hegemonic aspirations, incorporating lessons from the past 12 years of US strategy and four years of unencumbered Iranian weapons advancements.

There is tragic irony in the fact that the U.S. and Iran share the same goal of someday seeing a smaller U.S. footprint in the Middle East. The U.S. keeps 40,000 troops in the region in large part because of requests from Arab partners for defense against an Iran they see as hostile. Were Iran to reduce its harassment of these neighbors, the U.S. would see less reason to be present and would pull troops home. Tehran would be smarter to discuss with Arab states its discontent with the continued U.S. presence, rather than directing attacks on U.S. troops. The latter only underscores the threat perception that keeps the U.S. there.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, ma'am. I think you did that all without taking a breath, pretty dadgum good.

Ms. FONTENROSE. High school debater, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. Say that again? High school debate, OK, right on. I now recognize Ms. Carrie Filipetti for her opening statement. Ma'am?

STATEMENT OF CARRIE FILIPETTI

Ms. FILIPETTI. Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, distinguished members of this committee, I want to begin first by joining you in wishing for the continued recovery of Chairman Wilson, whose leadership of this committee has been instrumental in protecting American interests. It is my honor to testify today on the threat Iran poses to United States interests.

While both the chairman and the ranking member have mentioned a key anniversary, that is the 1-year anniversary of the Iranian backed October 7 terrorist attack in Israel, there are two other anniversaries that should frame our discussion today. The first is the 2-year anniversary of the Iranian regime's murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, as well as the 30-year anniversary of the Iranian-backed terrorist attack on a Jewish community center in Argentina that killed 85 people. Collectively, these three anniversaries demonstrate the reach of the Iranian threat: That of the regime itself against its own people, that of its proxies in the Middle East, and that of its proxies around the world.

While my co-panelists have thus far done an exceptional job highlighting the regime's threat in the Middle East, I want to focus a little bit on a threat closer to home. That is in Latin America and the Caribbean. Here, Iran is attempting to exploit both the growing presence in the region, as well as an unprecedented border crisis to pose a direct threat to American security.

The Iranian regime has long recognized the importance of gaining a foothold in our hemisphere from which to counter American influence and threaten American lives. Over the years Iran has used this influence to radicalize populations, fund terrorist activities, and transfer weapons into the hands of authoritarian regimes or terrorist leaders. Iran pursues radicalization using a network of so-called cultural centers, embassies, and propaganda outlets.

One key example is Al-Mustafa University, an Iranian backed export agency for Islamist propaganda that is now in over 50 countries, and which was sanctioned in 2020 for its active role in recruiting for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps. Outside of these formal programs, Iranian terrorists disguised as diplomats are deployed around the region to recruit for terrorist activities.

Including Mohsen Rabbani, the supposed Iranian cultural attache to Argentina, who recruited for Hezbollah's 1994 Jewish community center attack I mentioned before. Finally, Iran uses HispanTV, its regime run Spanish language media arm, to spread anti-American propaganda across the 17 countries in which it now operates. Iran also seeks to undermine the United States through weapons transfers with authoritarian regimes.

Regular flights between Tehran and Caracas have been suspected of carrying either terrorists or arms shipments between the two nations. For example, earlier this year the United States com-

pleted the forfeiture of a plane formerly owned by U.S. sanctioned Mahan Air, and piloted by an ex commander of the IRGC. There is public speculation that the plane may have been bringing weapons to conducting terror attacks in the region on the anniversary of that Jewish community center bombing.

As the Department of Justice noted in a recent House Homeland Security Committee hearing, it is clear the Iranians are determined to carry out attacks in the United States, and it is further clear that Iran sees Latin America and the Caribbean as key in that effort. Fortunately, Congress has recognized this threat. It is thanks to Congress that Iran's threat in the Western Hemisphere specifically was made public through the passage of the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012.

It is thanks to Congress in imposing comprehensive sanctions in 2012 that Iran was forced to the negotiating table around its nuclear program. And it is thanks to Congress that we have new authorities in countering Iran's malign influence throughout the world through this year's passage of the MAHSA Act, the Fight CRIME Act, and the SHIP Act.

But as important as Congress has been in countering Iran in the past, it will be equally significant going forward. So, rather than just admire the problem, as my co-panelists have done as well, I am going to offer a few recommendations. First, as Mr. Abrams noted, we must respond when American citizens or our allies are attacked. American assets have been targeted over 175 times since October 7, 2023, which doesn't even include the 43 American citizens who were slaughtered by Hamas on that day alone. By contrast, we have only responded 11 times, despite historical evidence laid out in my written testimony that strength is the best deterrent against Iranian aggression. Second, we must encourage our European partners to trigger U.N. Resolution 2231 snap back provisions before their expiration in October of next year, or risk losing key capabilities in the fight against Iranian terrorism and nuclear weapons development. Third, we must demand executive branch compliance with existing Iran related legislation. And fourth, we should make sure that we combine this maximum pressure campaign with maximum support for the Iranian people. More recommendations are laid out in my written testimony.

I am deeply grateful for the bipartisan commitment to protecting American lives from the Iranian threat shown by this Congress. Thank you for the opportunity to share both the severity of the threat, and some proposed solutions. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Carrie Filipetti follows:]

Prepared Statement of:

Carrie Filipetti

Executive Director, The Vandenberg Coalition

Hearing before the:

House Foreign Affairs Committee

Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia

**“Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies”
September 19, 2024**

Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, distinguished Members of the subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to speak about the growing threat the Islamic Republic of Iran poses to American interests. I join you all in wishing for the good health and quick recovery of Chairman Joe Wilson.

The Iranian threat is often conceptualized as a Middle Eastern problem; while it poses an outsized risk to our interests in the region, to view it exclusively in geographic terms is mistaken. As my testimony will show, the growing alliance between Russia, China, and Iran, alongside the Iranian nuclear program's rapid development, has enabled Iran to project power far outside the Middle East. As a result, Iranian influence has been growing in the Western hemisphere, posing a direct threat to Americans here at home. While rolling back the regime's influence will be a challenge, history provides key lessons that can help inform a coordinated, united response that preserves American and allied security, prosperity, and freedom.

Iran's Global Reach: The Axis of Aggression and the Nuclear Program

The Iranian threat reaches well beyond the borders of the Middle East. Iran's ability to project power outside the Middle East is largely due to two factors: its relationship with global powers Russia and China, and its nuclear weapons program.

The Axis of Aggression

The relationship between Russia, China, and Iran, often described as the Axis of Aggression, undermines American interests by de-stabilizing the Middle East, bolstering the Russian war machine in Ukraine, sowing confusion and disinformation within friendly democracies, and providing the resources and technical cooperation to shield each other from the effect of U.S. sanctions. While there is no formal treaty relationship between these three nations, their mutual interest in countering American power has led to increased informational and military coordination.

The informational relationship between Russia, China, and Iran is rooted in their shared antagonism toward the West. As the spokesman of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian parliament Mahmoud Abbaszadeh-Meshkini explained in 2022, “in the new world order, a triangle consisting of three powers – Iran, Russia, and China – has formed in Asia. This new arrangement heralds the end of the inequitable hegemony of the United States

and the West.”ⁱ In concrete terms, this has resulted both in significant efforts by all three nations to influence policy and the U.S. election in 2024 as well as in the perpetuation of anti-American sentiment on social media and university campuses. Chinese state-media has actively promoted Iranian anti-Israel and antisemitic propaganda on TikTok,ⁱⁱ while both Chinese and Iranian sources have provided fundingⁱⁱⁱ and organization to anti-Israel protests in the United States.^{iv} One such example is the People’s Forum, recently revealed to be bankrolled by a pro-CCP propagandist, which not only organized anti-Israel walkouts in New York City public schools but also encouraged students to engage in antisemitic chants calling for the elimination of the Jewish state.^v Why China would care about perpetuating anti-Israel disinformation within our borders is clear - to undermine America’s confidence in our leaders and institutions and imperil the resilience of our democracy.

Unlike informational cooperation, which appears more informal, military coordination between Russia and Iran is official policy and has reached unprecedented levels. This is particularly relevant given recent news that Iran has been supplying Russia with an unspecified number of short-range Project 360 ballistic missiles^{vi} in addition to unmanned aerial vehicles and drones. Iran has been described as a “key enabler” of Putin’s war campaign in Russia, providing over 4,000 Shahed drones and scores of artillery shells, anti-tank rockets, and mortar bombs.^{vii} In exchange, Russia is providing jamming systems, training aircraft, and Western equipment captured from the battlefield for Iran to reverse engineer.^{viii} This is on top of the significant role Russia has been playing in both developing and benefiting from Iran’s nuclear weapons program, which was highlighted in a previous hearing held jointly by this subcommittee and the Subcommittee on Europe.^{ix} Ultimately, the scale of this Iranian-Russian cooperation has led U.S. officials to suggest it is now “a full-scale defense partnership.”^x The military coordination between Iran and China is not at the same level; however, there have been regular joint military drills in the Sea of Oman since 2018^{xi} intended to “expand multilateral cooperation among the participating countries.”^{xii}

Notwithstanding recent international outcry, this trilateral partnership is not likely to end. Just last week, on the margins of the BRICS Security Summit in Moscow, Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian met with key figures in global authoritarian regimes including Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Russia Sergei Shoigu; Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi; Secretary General of the National Defense Council of Venezuela Jose Adelino Ornelas Ferreira; and Russian President Vladimir Putin.^{xiii}

It would be an overstatement to describe this trilateral relationship as either permanent or formal. All three nations have potential spoilers in their relationship— from serving as competitors in the oil market to disputes in the South Caucasus. What unites America’s adversaries, however, is much more powerful to them than what divides them; namely, their commitment to undermine and replace the American-led international system.^{xiv} **Failing to recognize the connection between the three may lead to a policy that is overly myopic and fails to protect key American interests in peace, stability, and security around the world.**

The Nuclear Program

Just as Iran’s relationship with Russia and China allows it to project its power beyond its region, so too has Iran’s nuclear program. Over the last few years, the International Atomic Energy

Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly reported on Iran's non-compliance with its safeguards agreement under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, declaring in June 2024 that they had "lost continuity of knowledge in relation to the production centrifuges, rotors and bellows, heavy water, and uranium."^{xv} This non-compliance diminishes the ability for the international community to ascertain whether the regime is advancing nuclear weaponization efforts.

Recent IAEA reports further note the feverish pace of Iranian activity surrounding its nuclear sites, including enriching uranium at 83.7% purity - just south of the 90% purity generally considered to be weapons-grade enrichment.^{xvi} As of late August 2024, Iran's stockpile of 60% enriched uranium was reportedly equivalent to the amount necessary to produce three bombs (142.1 kg), and its stockpile of 20% enriched uranium was enough to produce five bombs (751.3 kg).^{xvii} This suggests Iran could reach break out within days.^{xviii} Furthermore, new satellite imagery shows the construction of a nuclear site buried as far as 150 meters underground.^{xix}

These findings have changed the analysis of our intelligence community as well as the urgency of our European partners. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which has been responsible for annually assessing Iran's nuclear weapons capability since 2019, for the first time dropped its affirmative conclusion that Iran is not actively undertaking nuclear weapons activity.^{xx} Instead, the ODNI assessment warns that the Iranian regime has "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so."^{xxi} **In an increasingly dangerous world, a nuclear weapon in the hands of a state sponsor of terrorism like Iran would be a devastating and irreversible blow to American national security.**

The Iranian Threat in the Western Hemisphere

Iranian power projection has long been extant in Latin America and the Caribbean, a fact recognized by Congress in the passage of the *Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act* of 2012 and the ongoing oversight work done by this committee. Given it is home to the largest Lebanese and Palestinian diasporas outside of the Middle East, its proximity to the United States, and its permissive environment for money laundering, Latin America and the Caribbean has been a key target of Iranian regime influence to spread anti-Americanism and recruit for terrorist networks.

Spreading Anti-Americanism and Challenging American Objectives in the region

Iran's efforts to challenge American objectives in the region are empowered by a combination of friendly authoritarian leaders and Iranian state-run Spanish language media. From 2005-2007, former Iranian leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez visited each other's country a total of three times,^{xxii} signaling the start of what would be a key relationship for Iran going forward. The friendship was rooted in anti-Americanism; in 2009, Chavez welcomed Ahmadinejad as a "gladiator of anti-imperialist struggles,"^{xxiii} a worldview that has since endured. The partnership is not merely rhetorical; there are regular flights between Tehran and Caracas, often suspected of carrying either terrorists or arms shipments between the two nations.^{xxiv} The Iranian regime has also publicly offered Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials to protect Maduro's dictatorship.^{xxv} As recently as February 2024, the Department of Justice completed enforcement for the forfeiture of a cargo plane registered to

Venezuelan airline Emtrasur Cargo, formerly owned by Mahan Air and piloted by an ex-commander for the IRGC Gholamreza Ghasemi.^{xxxvi}

Another key aspect of Iran's influence in the region is through the creation of Iranian-regime controlled Spanish language outlets. In 2011, the Iranian regime began broadcasting on a new propaganda outlet, HispanTV, which as of 2021 was operating in over 17 countries in the region. Run entirely by the sanctioned Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting cooperation, HispanTV and other outlets including Al-Manar en Espanol are used to promote pro-Hezbollah and pro-Iranian propaganda to audiences in the hemisphere and are often republished by Spanish or Latin American media.^{xxxvii} Recently, HispanTV commentators compared Netanyahu to Hitler, described the terrorist attacks of October 7 as a "legitimate right to self-defense," and claimed the horrifying images of violence against Israel were generated by AI.^{xxxviii} Through these media campaigns, Iran seeks to sow anti-Western propaganda to undermine the United States and its relationships in the region.

Recruiting for Terrorism

Iran's desire to make inroads with authoritarians and the people of Latin America is also centered on raising funds for, and committing, acts of terrorism.

Here, Iran relies on a network of cultural centers whose objective is to export the Islamic Revolution and radicalize local communities. In 2020, the United States Treasury sanctioned one such entity, Al Mustafa University (AMU), for serving as an "international recruitment network" for the IRGC.^{xxxix} Operating in 50 countries, including in Latin America, the network is one of many Iranian-controlled efforts to indoctrinate and radicalize Latin American populations. Sadly, we have seen this radicalization bear fruit. This year, we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the AMIA bombing, a devastating antisemitic attack on a Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires that was the largest mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust prior to October 7th. A Hezbollah operative detonated a car bomb just outside the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) Jewish community center, killing 85 and injuring over 300. This attack was preceded by the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, in which 29 civilians were killed and 242 were injured by the same Hezbollah terrorist responsible for the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut.

The perpetuation of this radicalization and violence is even more horrifying when one considers that Iran has publicly threatened the lives of over two dozen former U.S. officials, including President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisors John Bolton and Robert O'Brien, Deputy National Security Advisors Matt Pottinger and Victoria Coates, Senior NSC Director Robert Greenway, Special Envoy for Iran Brian Hook, CIA Director Gina Haspel, and others.^{xxx} This is no empty threat – Iran has conducted targeted assassinations of over 20 officials from around the world as of August 2022,^{xxxi} and Latin America is a fertile ground from which to conduct the planning. The FBI has warned that at least one senior Iranian spy, Majid Dastjani Farahani, frequently travels between Venezuela and Iran and sought to recruit allies in the assassination effort against American officials.^{xxxii} Likewise, the four Iranian spies who sought to assassinate journalist Masih Alinejad on American soil plotted to transport her from the U.S. to Caracas by speedboat.^{xxxiii}

It is vital that this Committee continue highlighting and seeking ways to curtail the Iranian threat in Latin America and the Caribbean. The combination of unprecedented illegal immigration, attempted Iranian weapons transfers to the region, decades-long efforts at radicalization in the region, and direct threats against American officials poses a uniquely significant security risk to all Americans.

Effective Deterrents to Iran

In light of these growing threats, the key question is what the United States can do to contain and ultimately reverse the Iranian regime's behavior. **Here, history teaches us that Iran is less likely to maintain either the will or resources for continued aggressive action when faced with decisive military or economic overmatch.**

Perhaps the most illustrative military example is from the Iran-Iraq War. At the time, Iran and Iraq engaged in a series of anti-shipping campaigns beginning in 1981 as part of what later became known as the Tanker War. By 1987, the situation had grown so dire to global shipping, and specifically to Iraq's neighbors like Kuwait, that the United States intervened by sending naval forces, reflagging Kuwaiti oil and gas tankers, and escorting neutral vessels through the Persian Gulf.

While there were many engagements during this campaign, perhaps the most notable was Operation Praying Mantis. In retaliation for an Iranian attack on the U.S. frigate *Samuel B. Roberts*, the United States engaged in direct combat that ultimately sunk or disabled multiple Iranian vessels in a single day, including two Iranian oil platforms and three Iranian warships.^{xxxiv} Further, just under two weeks later, Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci announced a critical policy change – the United States would no longer “stand by and watch innocent people be killed or maimed by malicious, lawless actions when we have the means to assist, and perhaps prevent them.”^{xxxv} Facing this combination of a credible future threat and the recent devastation of overwhelming American firepower, the Iranian regime not only ended its anti-shipping operations, but in combination with other losses to Iraq, ended the war just a few months later. Through decisive military action, the United States reversed the threat on global shipping, re-established American dominance in the region, and helped bring an end to an otherwise seemingly endless war. More recently, research from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies studied 26 cases of Iranian maritime aggression from January 2021 through July 2023, similarly revealing that Iranian forces were more likely to back down when fearing retaliation from U.S. Navy and partner ships.^{xxxvi}

Strength, however, does not exclusively refer to military power. While sanctions alone are not likely to result in Iranian deterrence, comprehensive sanctions as part of a multi-faceted pressure campaign can constrain the resources Iran would otherwise use to pursue its nuclear program or arm its proxies. For example, prior to the negotiation that led to the *Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action* (JCPOA), the Senate sanctioned the Central Bank of Iran and other key sectors of the Iranian economy as part of the FY 2012 National Defense Authorization Act. Despite objections by the Obama administration, the Senate passed the amendment by 100 – 0,^{xxxvii} uniting Democrats and Republicans in favor of a maximum pressure campaign to force the Iranian regime to negotiate over its nuclear weapons development. In 2012 and 2013, Congress further

passed the *Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act* (TRA) and the *Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act* (IFCA), both of which expanded primary and secondary sanctions on a variety of Iranian sectors. This was critical but not isolated action; the European Union, too, joined in sanctions on Iranian oil,^{xxxviii} Iran's nuclear program was hit by a cyber attack,^{xxxix} and Israel announced its famous "redline" at the UN General Assembly,^{xl} reinforcing the credible threat of military action. Collectively, these actions achieved their intended purpose – to support the diplomatic effort and force the regime to come to the table. While the final negotiated deal was woefully insufficient, the initial willingness of the regime to engage at all can reasonably be connected to the pressure campaign that Congress initiated and our partners reinforced.^{xli}

We must be careful to avoid needlessly provocative actions; however, the last few decades have shown that developing a credible threat, constraining Iran's financial resources, and establishing a clear track record of response to Iranian aggression is the most effective way to deny the Iranian regime both the resources it would otherwise spend on its acts of aggression and its will to risk greater escalation.

Congressional Action

The U.S. government has many options for a strategic and coordinated response. As we approach the one year anniversary of the Iranian-enabled October 7th terrorist attack in Israel, we must focus on actively containing and reversing the Iranian regime's influence on the global stage.

In today's political environment, this is not a popular thing to say. It is, however, true. American elections lately are won on the promise to do less abroad, as the ghost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – and in particular, of the catastrophic and heartbreakingly mismanaged evacuation from Afghanistan – looms large in American collective memory. And yet, taking limited action now is the only way to prevent the necessity of pursuing more kinetic and escalatory options later. Our leaders abjure their responsibilities by seeking to make us feel safe rather than actually be safe.

In July 2024, a coalition of ten national security organizations published a call to action, highlighting a four-pronged approach to the Iranian threat that would degrade and reverse Iran's convention and nuclear weapons expansion, deter Iran from aggression and terrorism, empower internal dissidents within Iran, and ensure appropriate American defenses against Iranian efforts.^{xlii} While some of these recommendations fall under the purview of the executive branch, Congressional authorities will play a critical role in shaping the landscape to maintain advanced deterrence and protect American security.

- **Respond when American citizens, entities, or allies are attacked.** As noted previously, the Iranian regime responds to shows of strength. While it is desperate to get the United States embroiled in conflict with proxies around the world, the regime is equally hopeful to avoid direct confrontation with us. America, however, has failed to signal this commitment to countering Iran. Iranian-backed militias in the region have now hit American assets over 280 times^{xliii} since the start of the Biden administration – 175 times since October 2023. The U.S. has only responded 11 times.^{xliv} Three U.S. servicemembers were killed by an Iranian drone in Jordan in January 2024,^{xlv} and recent indictments^{xlvi} against Hamas operations including the late Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar hold Iranian-proxy terrorist organization Hamas responsible for the slaughter of

43 American citizens on October 7th – not including Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who was one of eight Americans still^{xdvii} in Hamas captivity until his murder and discovery on August 31, 2024. We continue to put our citizens and assets at risk if we fail to respond forcefully to attacks against Americans.

- **Encourage our European allies to trigger UN Security Council Resolution 2231 snapback provisions.** Over the last few years, we’ve seen significant United Nations sanctions on Iran’s conventional and ballistic missiles programs expire. In October 2025, the resolution as a whole expires, along with the legal right and obligation to conduct inspections or interdictions on any suspected shipments of missiles and other arms to and from Iran. Given the recent provision of ballistic missiles to enable Russia’s war in Ukraine, it is vital we retain and expand these powers by implementing snapback.
- **Encourage partners to penalize key Iranian proxies and entities involved in weapons transfers to deny their proliferation and squeeze regime resources that would otherwise be used for malign activity.** The United States should prioritize encouraging our allies and partners to designate key Iranian proxies as terrorist organizations and implement related sanctions. This should include the IRGC, Hamas, and Hezbollah. The same multilateral effort should be undertaken as it relates to Iranian aircraft and Iranian banks involved in weapons proliferation. The recent announcement that multiple partners have established sanctions on Iran Air in light of the discovery of its provision of ballistic missiles to aid in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is an important step.^{xdviii} European partners should join the United States in designating Mahan Air, which the Justice Department notes is “known to ferry weapons and fighters for the IRGC and Hezbollah.”^{xdix}
- **Engage in a “maximum support” campaign for the people of Iran.** In 2023, the National Union for Democracy in Iran (NUFDI) published a strategy highlighting the importance of strengthening the people of Iran relative to their regime abusers.ⁱ The last few years have seen extreme courage on the part of the people of Iran. This hearing is taking place just a few days after the two-year anniversary of the killing of Masah Amini, and yet, there have been no human rights related sanctions placed on the Supreme Leader of Iran or the Iranian President. Establishing consequences for the regime’s oppression of its people through such human rights sanctions is a critical step for American policy toward the region, and a key Congressional priority in light of the passage of the *Mahsa Amini Human rights and Security Accountability Act* (MAHSA Act) in April 2024. At the same time, the United States must find tangible ways of supporting the people of Iran, including providing the Iranian people access to the internet via Virtual Private Networks (VPNs), resourcing the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) to provide for medium wave broadcasting ability, and creating a strike fund to support Iranian workers who are willing to stand up to the regime. The more we support the people of Iran, the more pressure we are inherently putting on their regime.
- **Demand executive branch compliance with key Iran-related legislation.** Congress passed three critical Iran-related acts in April 2024 – the previously mentioned *MAHSA Act*, the *Stop Harboring Iranian Petroleum Act* (SHIP Act), and the *Fight and Combat Rampant Iranian Missile Exports Act* (Fight CRIME Act). Collectively, these bills provide authorities to sanction various entities that enable either the financing of Iranian malign activity or weapons transfers.ⁱⁱ Each of these bills requires the administration to submit a report – 90 days from passage under the MAHSA and Fight Crime Acts and 120 days after passage under the SHIP Act. We are now nearing 150 days from the passage of

these acts and have not seen full compliance from the administration. The House Foreign Affairs Committee and Congress should insist State provide the reports immediately.

- **Remain united behind the idea that all elements of American national power will be deployed to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon.** The passage of a sense of Congress, for example, would signal to Iran the seriousness with which the United States is taking the Iranian nuclear program and the unity of the government in committing to a response.

By enacting these policies and exercising appropriate oversight on existing congressionally mandated activities, the United States can deny the Iranian regime both the will and the resources to project power outside the confines of its own borders. This, in turn, would be an enormous victory for the security of Americans everywhere.

Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, thank you again for calling attention to such an important issue, and for the critical work you perform in defending America's security and vital national interests.

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Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, ma'am.
Mr. Lord, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF JONATHAN LORD

Mr. LORD. Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. This is the second opportunity I have had to come before this August body as an expert witness, and it is my honor to do so, especially alongside such esteemed colleagues. First, allow me to express my best wishes to Chairman Wilson.

My thoughts are with him and his family, and I pray he has a full and speedy recovery. Today's subject is challenging, both as a problem for policy, and as an issue that carries great emotional weight. With respect to the complexity, nuances, and breadth of today's subject, I would ask that my written testimony be made part of the record. As a policy CNAS does not take institutional positions.

So, my testimony today will reflect my personal positions and perspectives based on my professional experience. My testimony today will be guided by the spirit of comity and bipartisanship that has long undergirded the critical work of this subcommittee. I firmly believe there has and continues to be a bipartisan throughline in American foreign policy in the Middle East.

The continue provision of unwavering support to our close partner nation Israel. The continued integration of Israel into the broader region, resolution of the Israel Palestinian conflict that delivers peace, security, dignity, justice, and self-determination for all. And the deterrence, containment, and if necessary, confrontation of an Iranian regime that continues to meddle with and undermine the stability of its neighbors.

Supports violent proxies, partner forces, and terrorist groups, proliferates weapons to enemies of peace and adversaries of democracy, and the rules based order, threatens harm, and plots against Americans, and advances the development of a nuclear program toward the creation of an Iran nuclear weapon. A weapon which Democrats and Republicans agree that Iran must never be allowed to obtain.

In the Middle East, the events of the last 11 months have been wrenching. Beginning with Hamas' savage attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Israel is consumed by a conflict against Hamas in Gaza that it did not choose, yielding devastating consequences on millions of civilians. The steady escalation of violence throughout the region by Iran's proxies and partners continues to displace tens of thousands in Northern Israel, hold the maritime domain under threat in the Red Sea, and has risked the lives of U.S. service members.

Iran continues to methodically advance toward a nuclear weapon through the stockpiling of highly enriched uranium. It has solidified its axis of upheaval with Russia, China, and North Korea, combining their nation's respective resources and competitive strengths to produce, and proliferate deadly drones and missiles, evade western sanctions, and bolster their resilience.

All in an effort to dominate their respective regions, and undermine the rules based order which has allowed the United States and free nations around the world to succeed and prosper since the end of the Second World War. The last 11 months have been a cavalcade of misery which mercilessly continues, and shows few signs of abating.

My written testimony includes recommendations for U.S. policy, and encourages lawmakers to come together with the executive branch in a good faith effort to reach consensus on a bipartisan approach to advancing U.S. national security objectives. The Middle East is experiencing a geopolitical moment of sustained tension and consequence which requires unflinching, thoughtful, and unified American leadership.

Reaching bipartisan consensus on U.S. policy in the region is attainable, and very much worth pursuing. My written testimony includes two thematic areas as points of departure to consider for the creation of a bipartisan Middle East strategy to meet the moment, a modified approach to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and a new bipartisan strategy on Iran.

In conclusion, let me share that it is customary in Judaism that when someone dies, we mourn them. Typically Jews mourn for 7 days, commonly known as sitting shiva. There are mourning rituals that extend 30 days, shloshim. However, when Jews lose a close loved one like a parent, they mourn for a year, shnat ha-evel, the year of mourning. For those who lost their love ones on October 7, 2023, the end of the year of mourning is approaching.

While 1,200 people lost their lives in Hamas' unspeakable crime that day, the past year has only brought continued misery and death for Israelis, Palestinians, and others throughout the region. But soon the first of the mourners will end their ritual, and attempt to move forward. This act serves to remind me that following even the most unimaginable tragedies, there is opportunity for renewal, growth, and a better future.

Similarly in the wake of October 7, the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, and the regional insecurity enabled by Iran, America's policy and legislative leaders too must look forward and seek renewal. Together you can advance a strategy to secure America's national security in the Middle East, and those of our partners and allies. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Jonathan Lord follows:]



SEPTEMBER 19, 2024

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hearing on Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How Tehran's Terror Campaign
Threatens the U.S. and our Allies

The Year of Mourning: Considerations for U.S. Middle East Policy Twelve Months After October 7th

BY

Jonathan Lord

*Senior Fellow and Director, Middle East Security Program
Center for a New American Security*

I. Introductory Remarks

Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Phillips, distinguished members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. This is the second opportunity I have had to come before this august body as an expert witness, and it is my honor to do so, especially alongside such esteemed colleagues. First, allow me to express my best wishes to Chairman Wilson. My thoughts are with him and his family, and I pray he has a full and speedy recovery.

The last time I appeared before this subcommittee, we discussed the deeply sobering subject of Bashar al-Assad's horrific crimes against the Syrian people, and what more might be done to hold him accountable and assist Syrians in need. Today's subject is similarly challenging—both as a problem for policy and as an issue that carries great emotional weight. I pledge to you that I will attempt to speak to the difficult issues before us with nuance, respect for complexity, and with compassion and sensitivity, while sharing my unvarnished views and offering my best advice for policy and legislative recourse.

It is in the same spirit of patriotic service to our nation, irrespective of political affiliation, that compelled you to represent and serve your fellow Americans here in Washington, that drives me in my research as the Senior Fellow and Director of the Middle East Security program at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), to pursue bipartisan solutions to our national security challenges. As a policy, CNAS does not take institutional positions, so my testimony today will reflect my personal positions and perspectives, based on my professional experience.

While I have been proud to work at CNAS for over two years, I am even prouder of the work I did in this building for three and a half as a Professional Staff Member of the House Armed Services Committee. In that capacity, I worked closely with the members and staff of this committee in a bipartisan fashion to pass three National Defense Authorization Acts, in which we, together, oversaw Israel's transition from EUCOM to the Central Command area of responsibility, reauthorized support for Iron Dome, created new authorities to advance and accelerate U.S.-Israel cooperative defense innovation, and build on the Abraham Accords to support Israel's military integration into a Middle East regional security architecture with the DEFEND Act.

I am immensely proud of the work we accomplished in those bills, and even prouder of the way we achieved it working together, in a bipartisan way, in faithful service to the American people. I'll always be grateful for the opportunity to have done so.

My testimony today will be guided by the spirit of comity and bipartisanship that has long undergirded the critical work of this subcommittee. I firmly believe there has, and continues to be, a bipartisan through-line in American foreign policy in the Middle East:

- the continued provision of unwavering support to our close partner-nation, Israel;
- the continued integration of Israel into the broader region;
- resolution of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict, that delivers peace, security, dignity, justice, and self-determination for all;
- and the deterrence, containment, and, if necessary, confrontation of an Iranian regime that continues to meddle with and undermine the stability of its neighbors; supports violent proxies, partner-forces, and terrorist groups; proliferates weapons to enemies of peace and adversaries of democracy and the rules-based order; threatens harm and plots against Americans; and advances the development of a nuclear program toward the creation of an Iranian nuclear weapon—a weapon which Democrats and Republicans agree that Iran must never be allowed to obtain.

In the Middle East, the events of the last eleven months have been wrenching, beginning with Hamas's savage attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. The brutal and destructive war between Israel and Hamas that has followed continues to generate growing instability and deadly violence in the West Bank. The steady escalation of violence throughout the region by Iran's proxies and partners continues to displace tens of thousands in northern Israel, hold the maritime domain under threat in the Red Sea, and has risked the lives of U.S. servicemembers. The last eleven months have been a cavalcade of misery, which mercilessly continues and shows few signs of abating. This testimony summarizes U.S., Israeli, and Iranian policies and events prior to and after October 7. It includes recommendations for U.S. policy and encourages lawmakers to come together with the executive branch in a good-faith effort to reach consensus on a bipartisan approach to advancing U.S. national security objectives, and those of our partners and allies in the Middle East and beyond.

II. October 6

Iran's Security Policy

Iran's effort to generate an "Axis of Resistance" began in 1979 as the Islamic Republic sought to project power, reduce the U.S. military presence in the region, and influence diaspora Shia communities.¹ The network of Iran-backed proxies and partners Tehran has since fostered in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain have projected Iranian power and destabilized large swaths of the Middle East.² The *2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community* describes this web of proxies as "a loose consortium of like-minded terrorist and militant actors" Tehran uses to shield itself from direct military confrontation with and encourage attacks against its adversaries.³

In addition to playing a significant role in Iranian political and economic affairs, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) coordinates Tehran's support for these proxy groups, including Hamas and Hezbollah, and works to ensure overall regime security. The IRGC Quds Force (IRGC-QF) is responsible for organizing external kidnapping, assassination, and surveillance operations in addition to facilitating illicit oil sales and weapons transfers to Iranian proxies and state actors like Russia and North Korea.

⁴ This interconnected web of nonstate actors and allies also allows Tehran to skirt international sanctions by employing a flotilla of covert oil tankers, funneling money through shell companies, and coordinating with proxy groups to conduct business with other sanctioned entities.⁵

Since their formations in 1987 and 1982, respectively, Hamas and Hezbollah have both received a steady and significant flow of Iranian funds and weapons to fuel their terrorist activities in the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Syria, and abroad. Experts assess that Hamas today receives \$70m-\$100m per year and Hezbollah an estimated \$700 million annually from Tehran.⁶ While the support that these proxies receive from Iran is significant, it is also important to note that Tehran's relationship with each of these groups is particular and nuanced. While Tehran encourages Hamas, Hezbollah, and Ansar Allah (literal translation: "Supporters of God," commonly known as the Houthis) to engage in terrorist and governance projects by supplying them with thousands of rockets, fostering their domestic weapons manufacturing capabilities, and providing training to key leaders, these proxies should not be viewed as extensions of the regime established solely to carry out Tehran's bidding.⁷ For example, while Hezbollah also receives a significant amount of support from Iran, it acts largely as an independent, self-sufficient entity which coordinates directly with Tehran on occasion—for example, to engage in international arms, oil, and drug smuggling operations or to carry out complex external operations like the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires—but also invests significant resources in a shadow governance project in Lebanon.⁸ The Houthis have a much looser, unstructured relationship with Tehran.⁹

Aside from its long history of supporting both Sunni and Shia nonstate actors across the region, Iran also regularly engages with a variety of other allies to further sow discord with the West and pursue its own strategic objectives. China purchased more than 90 percent of Iranian crude oil exports in 2023, transported by a "dark fleet" of tankers responsible for moving billions of dollars in illicit oil every year.¹⁰ Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine prompted closer strategic cooperation between Moscow and Tehran; Iran began supplying Russian troops with thousands of battlefield drones in return for delivery of advanced Russian fighter jets and air defense technology.¹¹ U.S. Navy vessels have intercepted several shipments of Iranian weapons bound for the Houthis in Yemen, often containing both Iranian and Russian-spec missiles.¹²

Growing trade and cooperation between Iran and North Korea, including a recent visit by a North Korean delegation to Tehran, has also raised fears that the two states could share advanced missile and even nuclear technology.¹³ Since the United States's 2018 withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Iranian nuclear program has continued apace as Tehran continues to resist monitoring measures, significantly decreasing the country's estimated breakout time down to just a few weeks.¹⁴ Following a failed attempt at reviving the nuclear deal in 2021 and 2022, intelligence officials noted that Iran has not officially resumed its weaponization program, but the country's development of nuclear technology is accelerating at "a worrisome pace," according to CIA Director William Burns.¹⁵

Israel's Security Policy Prior To October 7

Prior to the events of October 7, Israel has for the past decade engaged in a shadow war with Iran and its proxies. During this *miarechet beyn ha'milchamot* (or *MAHAM* for short), or "campaign between the wars," Israel escalated strikes on the Iranian threat network surrounding it from occasional to periodic to regular intervals.¹⁶ The targets of Israel's strikes were often shipments of advanced weapons that originated in Iran, transiting Syria, on their way to Hezbollah in Lebanon. As the IRGC-QF sought to export the

capability to produce advanced rockets and precision missiles to its proxies, by building production facilities in Syria and Lebanon, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) prioritized these targets and the Iranian personnel managing them. While the IDF struck often, Iran has persisted in its effort, and is effective in both supplying and divesting to its partners the capability to produce its own rockets, precision missiles, and one-way attack drones. Hezbollah is now estimated to have an arsenal of 150,000 projectiles, ranging from mortars to precision-guided missiles.¹⁷

Beginning with the breakdown of Israel-Palestinian peace talks at Camp David in 2000, and the onset of the Second Intifada, Israel has operated under a loose, ill-defined national security paradigm that nominally sought to manage the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by imposing a unilaterally defined peace on the Palestinian Territories. This paradigm, informed by an ideologically extreme and strategically-detached vision of a one-state solution, collapsed on October 7, 2023. After the collapse of the peace process, and the wave of terror and violence that followed, the overriding narrative in Israel was that Israel lacked a partner for peace. This notion had a formative role in the cohering of the last Israeli national security paradigm, which embraced conflict management over conflict resolution.

The policies that flowed from this paradigm sought to unilaterally impose a peace on Palestinians using the asymmetric power of the Israeli state.¹⁸ Israel began construction of a separation barrier in 2002, which was meant to stop the infiltration of suicide bombers from the West Bank into Israel, but also imposed a physical border which included Israel's settlement blocs, separated Palestinian communities from each other, and made travel within the West Bank onerous for its Palestinian inhabitants.¹⁹ While Israel withdrew its military and settlements from Gaza in 2005, settlement expansion in the West Bank grew precipitously during Israel's last national security paradigm period, as did settler violence against Palestinians, reaching record levels in the last four years.²⁰

For the last decade, beginning in a previous government led by current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel adopted a policy meant to contain and pacify Hamas, which took control of Gaza in a violent coup against the Palestinian Authority in 2007. In this policy of "buying quiet," Israel coordinated with Qatar to enable the flow of billions of dollars into Gaza in an effort to keep Hamas contented and otherwise occupied with its management of the Gaza Strip.²¹ Israel's policy toward Hamas in Gaza was in part rooted in a latticework of intelligence assessments and assumptions, known in Israel as *conceptzia*. This *conceptzia* held that Hamas was deterred from launching a major conflict with Israel and was satisfied with the status quo. While Israel's government has not yet begun a commission of inquiry to assess its failures leading up to October 7, evidence strongly suggests that Israel's political, military, and intelligence leaders continued to hold fast to its *conceptzia* on Hamas, even in the face of mounting intelligence and warning that it was wrong or no longer accurate.²²

Israel's most recent national security paradigm is not the first in Israel's history that asserted a conflict management approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The "Ben-Gurion Doctrine," which characterized Israel's approach to national security for roughly Israel's first three decades, also took a conflict management approach, assessing that peace with Israel's neighbors was desirable, but not likely for the foreseeable future.²³ However, Israel's recently collapsed national security paradigm differed from Ben-Gurion's in critical ways. While Israel's original security paradigm held peace with its Arab neighbors as its elusive goal, the more recent one generated security policies that seemed designed to forestall an Israeli-Palestinian peace process resulting in a two-state solution. In 2004, a senior Israeli official described Israel's disengagement from Gaza as a means to freeze the peace process and prevent the formation of a Palestinian state.²⁴ The IDF's military activities in the West Bank, meant to target terrorists, have also targeted and weakened the Palestinian Authority's (PA) institutions of governance and security, reducing the influence and capacity of the PA to serve as the recognized representative of the Palestinian people.²⁵ Similarly, the Israeli government's policy of "buying quiet" from Hamas, assisted in preserving Hamas's control of Gaza, creating a de-facto counter-weight to the PA, and a division in Palestinian leadership that further complicated efforts to negotiate a two-state solution.²⁶

U.S. Middle East Policy Prior To October 7

Prior to Hamas's terrorist attack on October 7, 2023, the Biden administration's policy in the Middle East was primarily focused on achieving Israel's continued integration into the region by building on the success of the Abraham Accords signed in 2020. In July 2022, President Biden and then-Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid adopted the Joint Declaration on the U.S.-Israel Partnership, known as the Jerusalem Declaration. The Jerusalem Declaration affirmed continued U.S. security assistance for Israel, the pursuit of normalization of Israel's relations with its neighbors, the intention to hold conversations on improving Israeli-Palestinian relations, and pledged that Iran will never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon.²⁷ While State Department-led diplomatic efforts centered on building regional cooperation through the Negev Forum, the White House was reportedly focused on the negotiation of a landmark trilateral agreement that would normalize Israel-Saudi relations in exchange for a host of U.S. security concessions for Saudi Arabia.

The agreement had the potential to advance to some degree the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict through a two-state solution.

Following the breakdown of U.S.-Iran negotiations in August 2022 to return Iran to compliance with the JCPOA, U.S. attention turned toward the expansion of sanctions on Iranian entities in response to the regime's violent crackdown on internal protests following the brutal beating and death of Mahsa Amini, a 22 year-old Iranian Kurdish woman, by regime forces, for refusing to wear a hijab. Additional sanctions would follow as Iran began to provide Russia loitering munitions for use in its illegal war of aggression in Ukraine. In 2023, the Biden administration reportedly attempted to indirectly negotiate a reduction of tensions with Iran, using Oman as an intermediary, to reduce the risk of regional escalation and to press Iran into "pausing" its enrichment of uranium.²⁸ In September 2023, the United States successfully negotiated the release of five Americans wrongfully detained in Iran in exchange for Iranian prisoners and the return of previously frozen Iranian funds, though the funds remain frozen in Qatar.²⁹

III. On and After October 7

Operation Al Aqsa Flood

October 7, 2023, was the bloodiest day in Israel's history and the worst attack on Jews worldwide since the Holocaust.³⁰ Hamas in Gaza launched an attack into Israel, for which it had begun planning as early as 2021.³¹ On that day, approximately 3,000 Hamas fighters, drawn largely from Hamas's Qassam Brigades and elite Nukba Forces, broke through the barrier separating Israel from Gaza in over a dozen places. Targeting the cameras and remote-weapons systems on the barrier first, they entered Israel with minimal detection. Others entered Israel very conspicuously on gliders, but also met no resistance from the IDF. Under the cover of a massive rocket barrage emanating from the Gaza Strip, these forces entered Israel and perpetrated a murderous rampage, killing men, women, and children, soldiers and civilians alike. Acts of sexual violence by Hamas during its assault have been documented as well.³² By the time the IDF had succeeded in subduing the attackers, they had killed 1,200 people and had taken 250 hostages back to Gaza.³³

Iran's Destructive Role

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei did not directly order Hamas's October 7 attack, though he did provide the group with at least \$222 million between 2014 and 2020, shoring up Hamas with the financial resources it needed to launch its attack on southern Israel.³⁴ Tehran's long-standing support for other proxies—chief among them Lebanese Hezbollah and, to a lesser extent, Yemen's Houthis—have resulted in a conflict which has expanded well beyond the borders of the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah and the IDF have exchanged near-daily rocket, drone, and missile fire across the Israel-Lebanon border, killing at least 100 Lebanese and 26 Israeli civilians, respectively, and several dozen Israeli soldiers and at least 438 Hezbollah fighters.³⁵ Additionally, fighting has displaced some 60,000 Israeli and 90,000 Lebanese civilians who have been unable to return to their homes near the border since war began nearly 12 months ago.³⁶ To protest the Israeli military's presence in Gaza, the Houthis began targeting commercial vessels in the Red Sea in November 2023, reducing marine traffic through the Suez Canal by more than 50%.³⁷ The Islamic Resistance in Iraq started targeting American forces in Iraq and Syria in October 2023, their campaign culminating in the death of three U.S. troops when a hostile drone struck Tower 22, a Jordanian military outpost, in the middle of the night.³⁸

While the war between Israel and Hamas began as a conflict geographically constrained by the borders of the Gaza Strip, Tehran has worked continuously to embolden Israel's enemies to take advantage of the chaos spreading throughout the region. According to an April 2024 *New York Times* report, Iran has been facilitating a covert weapons smuggling route spanning several Middle Eastern countries for about two years, employing intelligence operatives, Bedouin smugglers, and criminal gangs to "flood the West Bank" with arms and ammunition in an attempt to destabilize Israel.³⁹ One of Hamas's ultimate goals on October 7 was to extend its incursion to the West Bank and link up with local Palestinian militias there.⁴⁰ The group nearly succeeded; in fact, one group of Hamas militants made it as far as Ofakim, a small Israeli town equidistant from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁴¹

Amidst the general chaos of overlapping conflicts in the Middle East, Tehran has not forgotten about the West. Since the killing of former IRGC-QF commander Qasem Soleimani in January 2020, Iran has orchestrated dozens of assassination, kidnapping, and surveillance plots against Iranian dissidents, political figures, journalists, Israelis, and Jews located in Western countries, with at least 10 taking place on American soil in the past four years.⁴² The April 2024 Worldwide Threat Assessment released by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency warned that Iran is likely to continue targeting current and former U.S. officials to retaliate for Soleimani's killing.

indicating that this is likely to be a persistent security threat.⁴³ On September 10, 2024, a grand jury indicted Pakistani national Asif Merchant with attempting to commit an act of “terrorism transcending national boundaries” and “murder-for-hire as part of a scheme to assassinate a politician or U.S. government official on U.S. soil.”⁴⁴ According to Merchant’s criminal complaint, in the weeks after travelling to the United States from Iran, he offered to pay a confidential source \$100,000 to serve as the hitman in a number of assassination plots.⁴⁵ Several U.S. sources later revealed that the targets of the plot included President Joe Biden, former President Donald Trump, and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley.⁴⁶ According to a criminal complaint filed in April 2024 by dissident Amir Abbas Fakhrahar against the Islamic Republic Iran, FBI agents arrested an IRGC operative in the United States in early 2024 who had “planned to surveil Mr. Fakhrahar and his family, locate them, execute Mr. Fakhrahar’s wife and child—while forcing Mr. Fakhrahar to watch their executions—and then murder Mr. Fakhrahar.”⁴⁷ Naji Ibrahim Zindashti, described as an “Iranian narcotics trafficker,” was indicted in January 2024 for his role in a 2020-2021 plot to assassinate two Maryland residents, one of whom was a recent refugee from Iran.⁴⁸

Over the past twelve months, Tehran has also continued to deepen its ties with Russia, China, and North Korea. U.S. intelligence officials concluded that Russia acquired and used North Korean ballistic missiles in Ukraine in late December 2023 and was seeking to purchase similar close-range ballistic missiles (CBMs) from Iran.⁴⁹ Moscow acquired those CBMs in September 2024, prompting a new round of U.S. economic sanctions targeting Russian-Iranian weapons proliferation and smuggling mechanisms.⁵⁰ In May 2024, open-source analysts revealed the location of a Russian arms factory producing Iranian Shahed-136 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) using components from a sanctioned Chinese company for use in Russia’s war in Ukraine.⁵¹ The Ukrainian foreign ministry reported on September 13, 2024, that since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion two and a half years ago, the Ukrainian army has downed more than 8,000 Shahed drones launched by Moscow, highlighting the scale of the industrialized military cooperation between the two countries.⁵²

Israel at War, Strategically Adrift

Since October 7, Israel has been in a state of war against Hamas in Gaza, which has succeeded in destroying Hamas’s organized military structure but has come at an excruciating cost to Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. While it is not clear how many civilians have perished in the war, civilian harm has been immense, with many dead and injured, most Palestinians displaced from their homes, with insufficient access to food, water, and essential services.⁵³ Though Israel has borne the brunt of international criticism at this civilian harm, it is critically important to note that Hamas purposely positions itself and its military infrastructure in close proximity to, and oftentimes within Palestinian civilian infrastructure, such that any Israeli military action would come at a cost to civilians, which Hamas weaponizes in the information space to attempt to constrain and isolate Israel.⁵⁴

Israel has achieved significant tactical success against Hamas, but strategic victory appears elusive at best. After almost one year of fighting, the IDF has destroyed Hamas’s organized military battalions, which were positioned throughout the Gaza Strip. The IDF holds key terrain in Gaza’s south and center and continues to execute clearance operations in areas previously cleared of Hamas in and around Gaza’s three major population centers of Gaza City, Khan Younis, and Rafah.⁵⁵ While the IDF has succeeded in killing the majority of Hamas’s military leadership—including Mohamed Deif, Hamas’s most senior political leader in Gaza—Hamas’s current political leader and the chief architect of the October 7 attack, Yahya Sinwar, remains at large.⁵⁶ Through a negotiated pause in fighting last year and IDF rescue and recovery missions, 154 hostages have come home from Gaza, both living and dead, though 101 hostages remain in Gaza, 35 of which are known to be dead.⁵⁷

In the past year, violence and insecurity has spread throughout the West Bank, abetted by extremists in Netanyahu’s cabinet, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir. Both are ideologically extreme, Jewish ultra-nationalists who hold outsized influence on security and settlement policy in the West Bank and have used it to essentially export the chaos and insecurity in Gaza to the West Bank. They are overt in their political goal of expanding Israeli settlement throughout the West Bank and returning Israeli settlements to Gaza, annexing both territories to Israel and permanently ending the possibility of a two-state solution. In the past year, Finance Minister Smotrich has repeatedly withheld customs revenue owed to the PA, and has only relented under significant U.S. pressure. He has resourced and supported settlement expansion, while Minister Ben Gvir has taken action to arm and empower settlers and to protect them with ideologically supportive police and military units—even as they have committed acts of violence and incitement against Palestinian communities.⁵⁸ Since last October, to quell the violence, the IDF has had to commit more and more of its forces to security operations in the West Bank, while it has fought a war in Gaza and attempted to deter and prevent Hezbollah from engaging in greater aggression in Israel’s north.⁵⁹ The missions on multiple fronts have overwhelmed the IDF’s force structure and created a manpower crisis within Israel’s military. To address the shortfall in troops, Israel’s Ministry of Defense recalled

Israelis to service who had previously completed and been released from military service.⁶⁰ The Ministry of Defense has also controversially turned to African asylum-seekers in Israel, who have fled conflict and persecution in their own nations, offering them assistance in obtaining permanent residency in Israel, in exchange for military service in Gaza.⁶¹

Israelis within and outside government have recognized the absence of Israel's strategic direction in this war. Prime Minister Netanyahu has been unwilling to articulate a "day-after" strategy or vision, even after public criticism and pressure to do so from his own Minister of Defense, Yoav Gallant.⁶² Instead, Netanyahu continues to insist the war must continue until Hamas is destroyed. Yet paradoxically, in order to destroy Hamas, there must be a viable alternative to fill the governance and security vacuum left behind by Hamas's attrition at the hands of the IDF. Otherwise, Hamas will continue to regenerate its ranks and perpetuate an insurgency, feeding off the chaos and the suffering of Gaza's desperate population. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis, dissatisfied with Netanyahu's approach, have regularly taken to the streets to protest and pressure him to prioritize the pursuit of a ceasefire that returns the remaining hostages.⁶³

U.S. Policy: Support Israel, Help Palestinians, Deter Regional Escalation, Negotiate a Hostage Release/Ceasefire

Following the events of October 7, U.S. policy has coalesced around four lines of effort: 1) ensuring Israel has what it needs to militarily defend itself, 2) expanding humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza, 3) deterring escalation from Iran and its proxies, and 4) advancing a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas that includes the release of the hostages in Gaza. After the attack by Hamas, President Biden immediately offered rhetorical support to Israel, indicating through two speeches that the United States would support Israel fully in its moment of crisis.⁶⁴ He visited Israel in October, becoming the first U.S. president to visit Israel in a time of war.⁶⁵ These demonstrations of U.S. support, very well-received by the Israeli public, were followed up with major, continuous transfusions of military assistance to the IDF. Since October 7, the United States has rushed approximately \$7 billion-worth of military aid to Israel.⁶⁶ Last October, President Biden submitted to Congress a supplemental budget request, which including funding to support Israel and humanitarian efforts in Gaza. Congress passed measures that appropriated the requested funds in April.⁶⁷

The Biden administration has worked to ease the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza by working with Israel, partners and allies, international organizations, as well as unilaterally to deliver humanitarian aid into Gaza. U.S. efforts included the temporary establishment of an off-shore pier by CENTCOM. The Joint Logistics Over the Shore (JLOTS) capability succeeded in enabling the delivery of over 8,100 metric tons of aid to Gaza before concluding its mission this summer.⁶⁸

For the past eleven months, the Biden administration maintained a large U.S. military presence in the Middle East to deter escalation against Israel from Iran and its proxies as the IDF is largely consumed with its operation in Gaza. While the U.S. military's regional posture has been massive by any measure, violence in the region has steadily crept upward over the last year, including aerial attacks from Hezbollah, Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Syria, the Houthis, and from Iran itself, targeting Israel, U.S. forces, and commercial shipping vessels in and around the Red Sea.⁶⁹

Finally, U.S. officials have attempted to achieve a pause in fighting in Gaza between Israel and Hamas in exchange for the release of hostages, using Qatar and Egypt as mediators. Negotiations succeeded late last year in achieving a pause in fighting that enabled the release of 105 hostages. Efforts to achieve another ceasefire deal thus far failed to yield an agreement.⁷⁰ U.S. mediators sought to reduce the escalating violence between Israel and Hezbollah, which risks expanding into another war which neither Israel nor Lebanon can afford.⁷¹ The Biden administration has reportedly also sought to engage Israel and Arab partners in "day-after" planning that would begin the process of rebuilding Gaza, restore and strengthen legitimate Palestinian governance and security institutions, and facilitate Israel's continued integration into the region, and normalization with new and emerging partner nations in the Middle East.⁷²

IV. Recommendations for Navigating the Crossroads: a Bipartisan Middle East Strategy

The Middle East is indeed at a crossroads—in more ways than one. It is perhaps such a historically-contested place because it sits at the crossroads of the world; a strategically important piece of key terrain that has connected Europe, Asia, and Africa throughout human history. Its importance has only grown in the modern era, particularly since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the discovery of oil in the early 20th century. Regardless of which region the United States chooses to prioritize its resources and focus, the Middle East will remain of vital importance to U.S. national security interests.

Besides sitting at the geographic crossroads, the Middle East is at another crossroads—a geopolitical moment of sustained tension and consequence which requires unflinching, thoughtful and unified American leadership. Israel is consumed by a conflict against Hamas in

Gaza that it did not choose, yielding devastating consequences on millions of civilians. Iran and its proxies and partners opportunistically seek to flare the level of regional violence, the consequences of which have rippled across the globe. The growing violence risks igniting an unthinkable destructive regional conflict that serves no one's interests. Iran continues to methodically advance toward a nuclear weapon through the stockpiling of highly enriched uranium. It has solidified its "axis of upheaval" with Russia, China, and North Korea, combining their nations' respective resources and competitive strengths to produce and proliferate deadly drones and missiles, evade western sanctions, and bolster their resilience all in an effort to dominate their respective regions and undermine the rules-based order which has allowed the United States and free nations around the world to succeed and prosper since the end of the Second World War.

The stakes are as high as they have been and the cost of failure unthinkable. Because of this, policymakers and legislators must put the synthesis of a viable, bipartisan Middle East strategy above politics and petty partisan reproach. Reaching bipartisan consensus on the present and future of U.S. policy in the region is attainable and very much worth pursuing. Below are two thematic areas to consider as points of departure to support the creation of a bipartisan Middle East strategy to meet the moment:

Restoring Israel's Security and the Path Back to Two States: A Bridging Paradigm

Both Republican and Democratic administrations have sought to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians through a two-state solution. President Biden has repeatedly affirmed the need for the two-state solution, as did President Trump, with his administration's pursuit of "the deal of the century."⁷³ However, the immediate challenges in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, both political and practical, make an immediate pivot to a peace process unrealistic. In Israel, the trauma of the October 7 attack persists as an everyday reality as over 100 men, women, and children remain hostage to Hamas in Gaza. In the wake of October 7 and the ongoing war, most Israelis doubt they can live in peace with a Palestinian state.⁷⁴ Israel's current government continues to hold fast to the policies of a failed security paradigm that sought détente with Hamas and the dissolution of the PA. Though Israel's government lacks popular support, it has not made any effort to change course. It continues to pursue policies that have exacerbated the insecurity on Israel's borders in service to maximalist territorial claims, informed and supported by ultra-nationalist ideologues. Irrespective of whether Israelis support the creation of a Palestinian state, Israel needs a functioning and legitimate Palestinian entity to govern and secure the West Bank and Gaza, as Israel does not have the military capacity to re-occupy Gaza and the West Bank while defending itself from Hezbollah and Iran. The PA is heavily weakened, both by internal corruption and two decades of Israeli policy.

Washington should articulate and support a bridging strategy that assists Israelis in taking critical steps in service of their own security, that also support better outcomes for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The restoration of functional and supported Palestinian institutions of governance and security in the Palestinian Territories better enable Israel to focus on the more strategic threats it faces from Hezbollah and Iran, while closing two fronts Iran has used to weaken and consume Israel's military resources. By doing this, it can begin to welcome greater engagement and support from Arab states and normalization, leading to better coordination against shared threats emanating from Tehran and its proxies and partners. These steps, while necessary for a return to a viable two-state peace process, are more immediately necessary to stem the instability and risk Israel faces from being militarily overwhelmed. In time, with stability, security, and quality of life restored, a return to a conflict resolution paradigm that results in a negotiated peace may seem less daunting. This bridging paradigm concept is the subject of a forthcoming CNAS report. The pillars of a bridging paradigm include:

- Recalibrating Israelis' understanding of their strategic security interests toward the pursuit of stability in the West Bank and Gaza, in coordination with Palestinian governance and security institutions, so Israel can focus its resources on confronting and overcoming strategic threats posed by Iran, in coordination with the United States and Arab partners
- Recapitalizing Palestinian governance and security by engaging Palestinian civil society in coordination with European and Arab partners to identify new leadership and a succession plan for PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Congress could authorize a robust security cooperation mission to build the capacity of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF).
- Leveraging regional partners in multilateral regional security and economic efforts to stabilize the conflict and restore political and structural conditions to enable a viable, eventual return to a two-state peace process
- Restoring economic opportunity and quality of life in the Palestinian Territories through the introduction of capital investment and revitalized schools with curricula supportive of tolerance and peace

An Iran Policy Reset

The partisan politicization of the U.S.-Iran policy debate has devolved into over-simplified pabulum, devoid of the necessary nuance and complexity it requires. Policy options have been boiled down into partisan caricatures of “war-mongering” or “appeasement.”¹ To effectively confront the challenge posed by Iran, and to serve as an effective and credible coordinator and leader of our partners and allies in Europe and the Middle East, we must wipe the slate clean and begin anew. Whether or not one supported the JCPOA, looking ahead, a deal modeled on the basis of removal of specific sanctions in return for Iran’s nuclear compliance seems unworkable in a reality in which the United States and our partners in Europe are regularly foisting new sanctions on Iran for its support for terrorism, domestic repression, and proliferation of arms to Russia for its illegal war in Ukraine. Alternatively, virtually every facet of the Iranian state and economy is impacted by sanctions. We must face the fact that sanctions are a tool, and not a policy all their own—and that tool is becoming less effective over time. Beyond the diminishing returns of new sanctions, Iran has sought to make its economy more sanctions-resilient, while working with Russia and China to skirt the sanctions regime. The White House and Congress should work together to identify new ways to hold Iranian regime decisionmakers accountable and to impose painful costs on them for their decision to pump the billows of instability in the Middle East by continuing to arm and empower the Houthis and their other proxies and partners with arms and lethal intelligence.

A new Iran strategy must recognize the threat posed by Iran’s collaboration with Russia, China, and North Korea, and identify new ways to confront, challenge, and overcome the compounding threat of America’s adversaries. How might the United States animate its own partnerships and alliances around the world in service of this effort? How might legislation support such and empower it? These are the issues and challenges of dealing with Iran that require a bipartisan, consultative approach between our legislative and executive branches. The United States must have a policy grounded in American resolve and our collective leadership to succeed. The pillars of a new Iran strategy should include:

- Coordinating and planning with European and Middle Eastern partners on an approach to Iran that best leverages snapback sanctions, before the JCPOA provision expires in October 2025
- Identifying a spectrum of tools of U.S. power, drawn from across Title 10, 22, and 50 authorities, to hold Iranian decisionmakers directly responsible for decisions that foment instability in the Middle East region and beyond
- Identifying ways to impose costs on Iran’s partners Russia, China, and North Korea that expose and exacerbate the seams in their shared interests. For example, Congress could create an authority that scales and speeds the process of sharing captured Iranian weapons with Ukraine to be used against Russian aggression.

V. Conclusion: *Shnat Ha’avel* – The Year of Mourning

It is customary in Judaism that when someone dies, we mourn them. Typically, Jews mourn for seven days, commonly known as “sitting *shiva*.” There are mourning rituals that extend thirty days: *shloshim*. However, when Jews lose a close loved one, like a parent, they mourn for a year: *shnat ha’avel*, “the year of mourning.” For those who lost their loved ones on October 7, 2023, the end of the year of mourning is approaching. While 1,200 people lost their lives in Hamas’s unspeakable crime that day, the past year has only brought continued misery and death for Israelis, Palestinians, and others throughout the region. But soon, the first of the mourners will end their ritual and attempt to move forward. This act serves to remind me that following even the most unimaginable tragedies, there is opportunity for renewal, growth, and a better future. Similarly, in the wake of October 7, the ongoing Israel-Hamas War, and the regional insecurity enabled by Iran, America’s policy and legislative leaders too, must look forward and seek renewal. Together, you can advance a strategy to secure America’s national security in the Middle East, and those of our partners and allies.

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Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, brother, appreciate you all very much. Let's see.

Yes, now I recognize myself, which I always think is an odd thing to say, looking in a mirror, hey, it is me, I am very good looking, I realize that, thank you. Ms. Fontenrose, sorry, these glasses I have got to adjust. There was minimal response to Iran's attack on Israel earlier this year, do you believe that Iran has been deterred from launching another attack?

Ms. FONTENROSE. Mr. Chairman, I absolutely do not. I think that first attack was a test of Israel's air defenses, and a test of the network that the U.S. has put in place to help defend Israel and other partners in the region. I think we are definitely looking at a round two of some sort once Iran reassesses, checks the reliability of its weapon stockpiles, since many of them failed during that attack.

And they may choose to operate in another way, we could see attacks elsewhere globally, it may not be the same kind of attack, but this is not over.

Mr. BURCHETT. The economics of that attack were it was basically sending a quarter over the border, and then firing a ten dollar bill at them, is that about your assumption of it?

Ms. FONTENROSE. The proportion is probably even worse to be honest.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, probably worse, that is what I thought. Is there a direct correlation, ma'am, between the attacks on Israel, and the Biden-Harris administration's lack of oil sanctions enforcement on Iran?

Ms. FONTENROSE. It is understood that the funds that Iran receives from oil transactions are fungible, and are often redirected to the IRGC, which does put these funds into attack operations, and into funding proxies, and arming them with additional weapons.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. Mr. Abrams, what role is Iran playing in arming the Houthis?

Mr. ABRAMS. It is fundamental, Mr. Chairman. They don't have the ability to create any kind of advanced weaponry, for example ballistic missiles. So, it is not true that they could do nothing without Iranian help, but without Iranian money, training, know how, and actual weaponry, the threat from the Houthis would be minimal.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right, they're just in those jon boats running around chasing big boats basically with .22 rifles, and they have armed them with modern warfare. The Houthis have already attacked Israel as you know, do you think they will try to do so again?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, the Israelis struck back at Hodeidah, the port, and there is at least some hope that that was a strong enough response to teach the Houthis a lesson. But I think in the passage of time they will do it. What concerns me also is they are attacking us, and we have not responded as sharply as the Israelis have.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. How should the U.S. change our policy to put an end to the threat that the Houthis pose?

Mr. ABRAMS. I am not sure we can put an end to it in the sense of absolutely nothing else, but above all I think this wouldn't be happening without Iran. We let the Iranians get away with this

without paying a price, to me, that is critical. Iran has to pay a price. If a Houthi missile hits, as Kirsten Fontenrose said, hits an American destroyer and kills Americans, that is because the Iranians gave them that missile.

I think we need to make it clear to the Iranians right now if that ever happens, and we hope and pray it doesn't, the response will be against Iran.

Mr. BURCHETT. What would that look like, in your opinion?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, you have a wide range, but if an American ship is hit you can go from something like hitting, depending on how much damage is done, buoys off the coast of Iran, you could hit an Iranian ship, you could hit an Iranian naval base, there is a wide spectrum. And I think we should be letting the Iranians know right now that will be the response.

Mr. BURCHETT. What threat do they pose in the next years if we do not successfully put an end to their actions?

Mr. ABRAMS. They have the ability over the next few years to build a nuclear weapon. That presumably emboldens them. So, with their network of proxies, it is a greater threat to Jordan, which right now they are trying to subvert. It is a greater threat to Israel through West Bank, it is a greater threat to our allies in the Gulf. And it is a greater threat to the U.S. Navy and to international commerce.

It is only going to grow as their oil revenue grows, and they get bolder.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay, thank you. I have got 20 seconds left, and I am going to yield that time to my good friend Brad Sherman from California. Mr. Sherman?

Mr. SHERMAN. We all pray for the health of Joe Wilson, and glad to see he is back on the Hill. We have heard it declared for five or 10 years pounding the table, America says Iran will not be allowed to have nuclear weapons. Been around here almost as long as Mr. Abrams, and remember that over 100 times America said with great determination North Korea will not be allowed to have nuclear weapons.

Solemn statements even by a powerful country are basically meaningless. With regard to oil sanctions, that means higher prices for Americans, something that I think we should be willing to deal with, because our security comes first. But it works only if countries around the world will acquiesce. We don't import any Iranian oil, can we tell China and India not to import any oil?

We were able to do that by threatening to cutoff all countries with transactions involving the U.S. dollar. Back just a decade or so ago, the U.S. dollar was absolutely formidable in international transactions. Today the crypto bros declare they are trying to destroy that power of America. They are partially successful, and they have bought a lot of friends here on Capitol Hill.

We renounced the JCPOA in a way that undermines our ability to convince other countries not to buy Iranian oil, even if we pressure them. The Houthi have not just cutoff trade to Europe, food from Russia and Ukraine needs to get to the poorest countries that border the Indian Ocean. Many people are living on two meals a day instead of three because of what the Houthi have done.

The number of deaths that will cause will never be reported, but people living on two meals a day die more than those who live on three meals a day. These deaths will probably exceed the number who die in Gaza, and blood stains the hands of Houthi supporters around the world. Just as the hands of Hezbollah supporters are stained by the over 250 Americans Hezbollah has killed since 1983.

Some have asserted Biden has not punished Hamas and Hezbollah, have you seen the pictures from Gaza? Whose weapons are those? We provided \$14.1 billion to Israel, and Israel is doing a pretty good job of punishing Hamas and Hezbollah. The best way not to have a nuclear Iran is not to have an Islamic Republic in Iran, we need to see democracy, some of the witnesses have said that.

The question is how do we get there? I won't ask for a public question on this because it should be done secretly, but we should be funding every major dissident group everywhere inside and outside Iran that is dedicated to a democratic, non-nuclear Iran. The future of the world may depend upon it, and if we are spending money, we are not spending near enough.

We need to provide free internet, and use all of our technology to make sure that the great internet wall of China does not extend around Iran. But I want to shift to another issue, and that is it is said well, what about the Saudi nuclear program? Bin Salman says he wants the same deal as Iran, of course he doesn't, he doesn't want American sanctions and hatred, he just wants the same nuclear program.

Now, just because the Saudis are not Shiites does not make them Zionists, but what really concerns is all the great hardware that we shipped to the Shah was soon in the hands of the Islamic Republic. Mr. Abrams, is Saudi Arabia becoming a nuclear power in the interests of the United States?

Mr. ABRAMS. Saudi Arabia becoming a nuclear weapon State is—

Mr. SHERMAN. Weapon State, yes.

Mr. ABRAMS. Certainly not in the interests of the United States. Developing a nuclear energy program under a 123 agreement that does not permit enrichment, I think would be in the interest of the United States.

Mr. SHERMAN. And they simply follow the same agreement that the UAE entered into with us, they are here lobbying for less control, why would they want that? Is there any benefit other than the chance to become a nuclear power that Saudi Arabia would get by watering down the 123 agreement model that we signed with the UAE?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, there is a problem, which is that we are permitting Iran to enrich uranium, we did that under the JCPOA, and the Saudis then asked well if your enemies can do it, how come your friends can't do it?

Mr. SHERMAN. Well, our enemies get to be our enemies, and we do many bad things to the Iranian government, and we should be doing a lot more. And any funding we provide to dissident groups ought to be done covertly. And I will point out, if you want to know the weakness of Iran, look at what their government does. Killing dissidents in Europe, trying to kill them in the United States, kill-

ing their own people, they are worried, and that tells us their vulnerability.

I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Sherman.

I now recognize Jim Baird of Indiana.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank our witnesses for being here. My first question deals with the Washington Post reported that Iran is pursuing partnerships with two Chinese satellite companies, and Iran has previously sought such support from Russian entities. So, how would this help Iran expand its capability for remote surveillance, potentially including high resolution images of military targets? And I am going to start with Ms. Filipetti.

Ms. FILIPETTI. Thank you, Congressman. So, this is part of how Iran is able to project power internationally through its not only nuclear weapons program, which we have been discussing already, but also through its coordination with other powers like Russia and China. In particular, we have seen how Russia has helped amplify the nuclear weapons program that Iran has been producing.

And so, their coordination with China has also allowed them to evade sanctions quite extensively. So, we know that their coordination with both of these powers is intended to antagonize the United States, and replace the American led system. So, any additional access they have, particularly coming from Chinese technology, which as we know is very sophisticated in terms of its ability to surveil, is deeply problematic.

And just to connect this back to the Western Hemisphere component, which is what I always try to bring up, we have seen how China is also trying to establish satellite connections here, not only as it relates to surveillance systems in Cuba, but also over Argentina, which means that if Iran has a connection to Chinese satellites, then they may also have the ability to monitor us here.

Mr. BAIRD. Ms. Fontenrose?

Ms. FONTENROSE. I would agree with everything that Ms. Filipetti just said. I would add that one option we also have not considered is that Iran has a lot of commercial availability as well. There are plenty of companies around the world that sell to the Chinese and Russian government, and also produce for other markets that are very capable of fairly good, at least low earth orbit imagery, and surveillance is probably the least of our worries.

Once Iran is able to surveil, the next step if they're actually partnering with Russia and China on a space program is weaponizing in space.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Abrams, do you want to add anything to that?

Mr. ABRAMS. No, thank you.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you. Mr. Lord, do you want to add anything?

Mr. LORD. I think it has all been quite well covered, but I do think that the overriding point I think you will hear, is that to think about Iran in isolation, or even the elements of Iran's malign activities at this point, isn't just going to cut it. Iran's capabilities are made worse and more powerful by its cooperation with Russia, with China, with North Korea, as are its proxies and partners.

And from here on out when we think about Iran strategy, it implicates our China strategy, it implicates our Russia strategy. These things can't be thought about in isolation anymore. And I

hope, as much of a fan as I was of our current national defense strategy, which really racked and stacked these adversaries into sort of a priority order, I would expect and hope that our next national defense strategy starts to think about them as a combined power.

And what this axis of upheaval is capable of, and ways that we might work together with our own partners, and animating our own partnerships and alliances to really confront, create dilemmas, and challenge the capabilities of these forces combined. Thank you.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you. My next question goes back to you, Ms. Fontenrose. How can we more effectively block the CCP's illicit transfer of dual use technology to Iran and its proxies?

Ms. FONTENROSE. Congressman, that is the question of the year. Because we are certainly trying, but many of these components, again, are commercially available. A lot of them are very small and difficult to detect, they are also shipped in small pieces. A lot of it is blueprints, and much of it is transfer of knowledge, so it is in the presence of advisors for instance, instead of in actual pieces.

So, we have to hit rat lines, we have to hit free trade zones, and look into cargo containers. There is so many things that go into trying to block that transfer, and really what we should be looking at also is financial transactions, and just the relationship, the trust. Because the less trust they have with each other, the less they will share. So, there is also an information operations piece here.

Mr. BAIRD. I thank all of you, and I would like to mention that Purdue University has developed a program for making chips, the CHIPS and Science Act, and they have a program for undergraduates as well as graduates, so that is trying to onshore chip manufacturing.

So, I have got 3 seconds left, and I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you for your generosity, Representative Baird.

Now I yield to my good friend Gerry Connolly from Virginia. Gerry?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our panel. Good to see you, my old friend, Mr. Abrams. Mr. Lord, Mr. Abrams in his testimony decried the fact that Iran is now close to developing, or producing nuclear weapons, is that correct?

Mr. LORD. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Was there any type of international agreement that would have stopped Iran from producing highly enriched uranium, or the plutonium that could be used in such weapons?

Mr. LORD. As I recall, Mr. Connolly, yes, there was.

Mr. CONNOLLY. What was the name of that agreement?

Mr. LORD. It was known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And were Russia and China party to that agreement?

Mr. LORD. They were.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And who led that agreement, who initiated, and helped write that agreement?

Mr. LORD. The United States.

Mr. CONNOLLY. It was our agreement?

Mr. LORD. Yes, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And we had Russia, and China, as well as Iran, and Europe as members?

Mr. LORD. Yes, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Wow. As part of that deal, were there steps taken to ensure that Fordo, Natanz, and Iraq facilities pursued only low level enriched uranium for civilian work, medical work, and industrial research?

Mr. LORD. Yes, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And did that agreement require Iran in fact to ship out of country excess enriched uranium to a third party?

Mr. LORD. Yes, sir, in fact it did.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And did that agreement require Iran to close down a plutonium production reactor?

Mr. LORD. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Did that agreement limit the number of centrifuges, and the kinds of centrifuges that otherwise might be used to produce a nuclear weapon, did that require Iran to agree to stipulation limiting those centrifuges?

Mr. LORD. Mr. Connolly, yes, it did require them to agree.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And did the IAEA certify eight times that in fact Iran was in compliance?

Mr. LORD. Yes, I believe it did.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And did the Trump administration agree with that certification not once, but twice in 2017?

Mr. LORD. To my recollection, yes, it did.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, when we decry the fact that Iran is now days away if it wants to actually produce a nuclear weapon, it is instructive, is it not, to reflect on the fact that we actually had an agreement that was certified, working, and by the way, I should ask one more question. Because again, Mr. Abrams complained that Iran is now defying IAEA inspections. Were there IAEA inspections when the JCPOA was enforced?

Mr. LORD. Yes, sir, there were.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And they were unannounced?

Mr. LORD. Correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, if we were to renounce that agreement unilaterally, it is a little much to expect IAEA inspections in Iran if the agreement is no longer enforced, wouldn't that be a fair statement?

Mr. LORD. At least those that were a part of the JCPOA.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right, it is kind of in the category of you can't have it both ways. You can't complain that Iran is close to a nuclear weapons capacity, which I decry, and that is why I supported the JCPOA, because it was the only instrument at hand that actually would push back the nuclear weapons development program in Iran, would you agree with that statement?

Mr. LORD. Yes, at the time I think it was the most effective too.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And again, we have IAEA inspections, I know that for a fact because I actually went to Vienna and got briefed on a bipartisan basis by some of the inspectors, and their reports. And I think you have to admit, you tell me if you disagree, the JCPOA in fact was working. In fact, against predictions, Iran was complying, is that a fair statement?

Mr. LORD. Yes, it is, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And what happened to the JCPOA that was working, and they were in compliance with virtually every metric we set forward in the treaty, in the agreement? What happened to the JCPOA?

Mr. LORD. The United States withdrew from the deal, sir.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Who did that?

Mr. LORD. That was a decision made by President Trump.

Mr. CONNOLLY. President Trump. And now we are where we are, is that correct?

Mr. LORD. We are in fact where we are.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, forgive an editorial opinion, but for those who want to decry Iran's proximity to nuclear weapons development, they have only one person to blame, and that is Donald Trump.

I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Senator.

I now recognize Rich McCormick from Georgia. Rick?

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. Next month marks October 7th, not only my birthday, but obviously an infamous day in history in which Israel was attacked, about 1,200 people slaughtered, 250 people kidnapped, including many Americans. This attack, in my opinion, was made a reality by Iran in support of evil people.

We have seen them support Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, Russia, China, pretty much every enemy we have, they have supported openly. They have created this unholy axis, which they as a small country, with a very small GDP has become literally a purveyor of hate, and death around the world now. Ms. Fontenrose, it doesn't make the front news anymore, but we continue to have attacks in the Persian Gulf, mainly from the Houthis.

We have seen ships attacked, we have seen a couple of them recently attacked in September, earlier this month, and then September 9, we shot down another drone. We know that they have these capabilities only because of Iran. The question is how do we cutoff the flow of these weapons from Iran that are going to our enemies, especially the Houthis particularly in this instance?

Ms. FONTENROSE. Congressman, there is a lot of coordination to happen with some of our partners in the region. Iran uses both water means and land means to do these transfers. We have rat lines crossing some of the countries in the south of the peninsula, and about 6 months of the year when there are not monsoons, you have dowels taking tiny pieces of weapons that are hidden in tiny places into Yemen to arm the Houthis.

They also have 3D printers, and many of these parts are ordered on whole on AliBaba.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Would it be safe to say that it is almost impossible to cutoff their supply via routes that basically are endless?

Ms. FONTENROSE. Cutting off the supply of much of this material would be very difficult, yes, you would—

Mr. MCCORMICK. I agree with you.

Ms. FONTENROSE. It is better to aim for bigger targets.

Mr. MCCORMICK. There we go, we are setting up the conversation here, aren't we? Mr. Abrams, since Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, in 2022 Iran provided Russia with scores of the Shahed

suicide drones. Secretary Blinken confirmed last week that Iran recently provided Russia with a large new shipment of ballistic missiles that will undoubtedly be used to kill Ukrainian civilians, and ultimately to try to win the war for Russia.

Which basically is an invasion of Europe, which NATO was set out from the very get go to resist, it is the most germane time of NATO's existence since its creation. So, we are at essentially war with an invading, expansionist, tyrannical government into Europe that we formed an alliance to resist. Why has this administration basically stood idle while Iran continues to supply our enemies with something that we really can't stop them from doing just by supply lines, as we already said with the Houthis?

We are having the same problem with Russia, but on a much different scale, and for much different reasons, but why haven't we done anything?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think that we should be doing much more enforcement of sanctions. The administration says we don't want confrontation, and we don't want escalation. I would actually rather that Iran didn't want escalation, or confrontation out of fear of us.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Bingo. So, you served in Reagan's administration, did you not? I am jealous by the way, Reagan, I mean this guy is the guy for me. What do you think Reagan would have done given his history with nations that were probably troublesome, but not even as troublesome as Iran. What kind of response do you think he would have given?

Mr. ABRAMS. He would have tried to talk them into, negotiate them into stopping, and if it failed he would have acted, and—

Mr. MCCORMICK. He would have acted.

Mr. ABRAMS. In 1988 he did, sank half their Navy.

Mr. MCCORMICK. He certainly did. And I remember people going oh my gosh, it is the beginning of the end, these guys are going to come after us, they hate us. Yes, they do. And Muammar Gaddafi, after losing a son, rolled over on his back, showed his belly, and said I want to be friends. Because we understand that region, and they understand strength. If you show weakness, you give them an inch, they take a mile.

And thank you for being of service to such a great President, such a strong President. I saw it during Reagan's administration, I saw it during Trump's administration. When you break out the MOAB, the mother of all bombs, when you hit somebody in the jaw that is a bad person, they roll over and they say I don't want any more of this. And this is the time to act, in my opinion, before they become a nuclear power.

Are we waiting for Iran to become a nuclear power before we do something? And then of course we won't, because we will be scared to. This is the time to act, weakness has created war. Weakness creates death. Weakness creates a propagation of this hatred, and these propped up enemies that we have. And I think we should hit Iran hard, it really disappointments that the Biden administration has been absolutely inept, weak, and ineffective.

With that, I yield, thank you.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. McCormick.

Ms. Manning, ma'am, you are recognized.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for bringing a slice of Hee-Haw to this hearing, it takes me back to my childhood. So, the threat posed by Iran has been clear for many years, as evident from all of your expert testimony, and we have made wide ranging efforts to stop Iran's malign behavior. We have imposed sanctions, we have worked with our allies, and entered into the JCPOA.

As Mr. Connolly so deftly detailed, Donald Trump pulled us out of the JCPOA, and Iran is now closer than ever to becoming a nuclear power. We have asked our allies who remain in the JCPOA to trigger snap backs. We have worked with Arab allies to create a regional alliance to stand together against Iran. We have moved Israel from European Command to CENTCOM, where they logically should be.

And yet, Iran continues to wage its holy war against Israel, against the U.S., against the west, and against its own people. So, what should our short, medium, and long term strategy be to defeat Iran's battle against Israel, against the U.S., against its own people? And I know this could be a 24 hour answer, so I am going to try to ask each of you to give me a piece of that answer.

Mr. Abrams, please address the nuclear issue, because I know you had a lot of questions, you disagreed with the JCPOA. I don't know whether you would agree that maybe we were better once we were in it, and not getting out of it. But what should we be doing to address the nuclear issue?

Mr. ABRAMS. One of the most effective things we could do now, I think is snap back. I think we should be asking, you mentioned the British, French, and Germans to do that. I think that if a new President asked them to do that, they may well be willing to do it. And that would have a real impact on—

Ms. MANNING. So, we should ask our allies to do what we are no longer really able to do because we got out of the deal?

Mr. ABRAMS. Correct.

Ms. MANNING. Anything else?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I would like us to enforce the oil sanctions, because the more funding that regime has, the more harm they can do.

Ms. MANNING. And what should we be doing to address their other, their non-nuclear malign behaviors?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, we have talked about the Houthis, and I think we should be—the U.S. Navy should have a much stronger response in keeping the sea lines of communication open.

Ms. MANNING. That is one instance, but should we have a grand strategy for addressing the non-nuclear malign behavior?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, one piece of it, again this could be 3 hours, but one piece of it, the ultimate solution is a democratic Iran with a different foreign policy. And we should be doing more to help the people of Iran in their struggle against that regime.

Ms. MANNING. OK, I can't disagree with you, but I am going to move to Ms. Filipetti on this one, because you addressed the issue of what we should be doing to help the people. And I guess my question for you is how should we address Iran's attempt to radicalize people around the globe to spread an anti-western holy war?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you for the question. One of the most significant threats that I think Iran poses in addition to its nuclear threat, is the disinformation and propaganda risk that it is posing, both outside the United States, as we see all across the world through, as I laid out their propaganda outlets. But also inside the United States. So, we are constantly seeing them use social media, use TikTok and other outlets in order to promote anti-American propaganda.

So, we need to figure out how to address the propaganda aspect of this in addition to the nuclear component of it. I would also say that this Congress passed some really important legislation that allows for more human rights related designations against the Iranian regime, like the Mahsa Act. And I have not seen that the executive branch has yet used those authorities, which I think are critical authorities.

So, ensuring executive branch compliance with the authorities that this Congress has rightly passed is key.

Ms. MANNING. So, enforce the laws that we have already passed, and be more vigilant in enforcing that. Ms. Fontenrose, like you, I am deeply concerned by the director of national intelligence's finding that Tehran has sowed discord here in the U.S., particularly some of the anti-Israel protests that have taken place on college campuses. They have emerged as the leading source of disinformation, and a top threat to the security of our elections.

So, what should we be doing to address that, what consequences should Iran face?

Ms. FONTENROSE. First we should do something here at home, which is inoculate our own population, make sure they are extremely aware that this is happening. And frankly, this ODNI report is perfect justification for something as Jonathan mentioned, a bipartisan approach to this kind of conversation. This is something we cannot countenance as a country, this kind of meddling.

And it is not only Iran, it is other actors as well. So, there is really a larger strategy that needs to be looked at here.

Ms. MANNING. OK, thank you. I wish I had three more hours to get your answers to these difficult questions, but my time is expired.

And so, I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Ms. Manning.

Gabe Amo, how do you say your last name, Gabe?

Mr. AMO. Amo.

Mr. BURCHETT. Amo, all right, brother, I got it, Amo.

Mr. AMO. All right. Well, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you regardless. Thank you so much to our witnesses for being here today. As we approach the 1-year anniversary of October 7, I reiterate my call for an immediate and lasting cease-fire. One that releases the remaining hostages, and surges humanitarian aid into Gaza. I also reaffirm my support for a long term plan.

One that ensures a lasting, peaceful, two-State solution, and provides self-determination for both Israelis and Palestinians. An immediate cease-fire, and comprehensive day after plan are essential for containing the conflict, and countering the threat of Iran and its proxies. Even before October 7 though, it is clear that Iran has

been a destabilizing force in the region, threatening our national security interests, and preventing a lasting peace from taking hold.

For decades, support for regional proxies has been central to Iranian foreign policy. It has funded armed groups and terrorist organizations including Hamas and Gaza, Hezbollah and Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, and militias in Iraq and Syria. Iran has reveled in chaos as it seeks to expand influence by carrying out attacks on Israel, and United States personnel in the region. The United States considers Iran the foremost State sponsor of terrorism for good reason.

After October 7, we have seen increased activity from Iranian proxies in the region. We need to understand the kind of support that Tehran is providing to prevent future attacks. So, I will start with Mr. Lord, but I certainly welcome other feedback on my query here. How is the United States tracking the support Iran is providing their proxies, and let's project a little bit, but what should we be expecting in the support of proxies as we move along and they continue their campaign of chaos?

Mr. LORD. Mr. Amo, thank you for the question. We have a pretty capable means of tracking, and there is a pretty good doctrine in history to follow here, where Iran has sought to move sophisticated weapons to these partners, and then over time actually move the capability to create those sophisticated weapons in those partner zone territories.

And we have seen that with Hezbollah, who really is the most developed proxy, and partner of Iran, certainly the oldest. Where it begins, or began as the shipment of weapons and capabilities, and then really began to morph into the shipment of the industrial means to build those capabilities in Lebanon's—in Hezbollah's own home turf. So, those are the things that we have seen Israel over time really attempt to target most in their campaign between the wars.

Their m'aracha bein ha-milchamot, as they call it, mabam, when we get news reports of something blowing up in Syria or in Lebanon, or at IRGC Quds Force individual, and some others, they are going after the capability that allows Hezbollah to continue to perpetuate conflict. So, we have to think very carefully about how we do that ourselves, or how we support that with lethal intelligence with our partners.

If in fact we ourselves want to engage in that, and I have heard a lot of tough talk here about what we should be doing on Iran, and I think I said it last year on a Syria hearing, I will say it again. If you are interested in a war with Iran, if you are interested in getting kinetically involved, congratulations, you serve on the one committee in this House that has jurisdiction over war powers.

And so, if there is to be an authorization of the use of military force, it is going to get marked up here. So, if that is something that you believe the President should be doing, it really starts with you, here on this committee. So, I have talked enough, but I will leave it at that.

Mr. AMO. Great, thank you. And I know I have got limited time, but I do briefly want to speak to the concerns that I expressed in April about the growing ties between Iran and Russia, and whether

they would continue to share advanced technologies. And we have heard from Secretary Blinken in the past week, and the Department of Defense, the confirmation that Iran is sending ballistic weapons to Russia to support their illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Trade is a two way street, raising some real concerns that Russia is sharing advanced, and even possibly nuclear technology, or information with Iran. And so, briefly, Mr. Lord, can you share any concerns that you might have about that transfer of nuclear technology, or information between Russia and Iran, and what more can we do to counter this growing relationship?

Mr. LORD. We are short on time, so I will be very quick. The stockpiling of uranium is a problem, but the technological deficit that Iran has to actually weaponize is the X mark beyond building the stockpile. That is a gap that Russia could choose to close instantaneously if they felt they needed to, if they needed more arms and support, if Iran wanted to extract something from them.

We need to think exactly about this problem, and how we create dilemmas for Russia and Iran. And I will just point to a piece of legislation that came out of the House, I believe it was written by Mr. Trone, sponsored in a bipartisan way by Mr. Scott, Mr. Schneider I think was a co-sponsor of this amendment for the NDAA that would actually make it easier for the administration to take weapons that were captured from Iran on the way to the Houthis.

And then use Presidential draw down authority to send them to our partners in Ukraine to fire back at Russians. And I think those are the types of things we need to be thinking about that this Congress could be helping to do. Unfortunately, that amendment did not make it past Rules Committee here in the House. It may be under consideration in the Senate version of the NDAA, but I would strongly encourage those types of means as a way to think creatively about how we can impose real dilemmas on this axis.

Mr. AMO. Thank you for your responses.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, sir.

I now recognize Kweisi Mfume, did I get that right? Close?

Mr. MFUME. Mr. Chairman, you are in the ball park, God bless you, you are a great American.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, brother.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much. My thanks also to our witnesses today. Mr. Abrams, it is good to see you from way, way, way back, and not through the Wayback Machine, but in terms of working together on a lot of these issues. It was instructive to me when the chairman talked about how in fact far back we go on this issue as a Congress.

And it occurred to me that as a young member of this body in 1987, it was Ronald Reagan that called myself, John Lewis, Nancy Pelosi, Ben Cardin, and a bunch of us who were part of the freshman class to the White House to get to know us, and to have some off the record talk, but mostly to reach out. He had been under a lot of criticism from some of us during our campaigns, and so we had a chance to talk there.

And one of the things that I remember President Reagan specifically taking pride in was his decision to carry out the Carter administration sanctions against Iran, rather than, after he got the

hostages released, as we know in January 1981, rather than to go in a different way. And I guess he was trying to signal bipartisanship. One of the things I learned is that there have been a lot of lessons to be learned about Iran over the years.

And the poignancy of all of this are the lessons that have not been learned. And one of those lessons is that you can only trust Iran so far. That is the bottom line. And so, when we look at what occurred during the Reagan administration, or fast forward to the Bush administration, and in 2005 that administration decided, because Iran did not want to stop its uranium enrichment, to pretty much sever ties, and to start putting in sanctions.

And through the Obama years with the Green hostages, and the things that went along with that, one thing that keeps coming back to me is we, in the absence of a consistent, and I do mean very consistent approach to Iran, we are going to hop, skip, and jump from one administration policy to another, to another, to another, which does not give us credibility in my mind, in the larger international community.

Because it becomes well, we will see what the American policy is with the next President. And the people who are sowing the bad seeds, and are creating the unrest have that luxury, to sit back, and to wait in a very clandestine manner, do what they were continuing to do all along. And then there is another election, and there is another version of U.S. foreign policy.

It just does not bring about the kind of change that we want. So, I want to ask all of you a question about our allies in the region. I know we are sharing intelligence, but I don't know how that is taking place. And if the intelligence sharing is in fact something that can be quantified, where we see real results. Because this is about our allies in the region, and how Iran continues to sow its terror that affects all of us in the larger international community.

So, Mr. Elliott, since I have known you the longest, I am going to begin with you, and we can go down the line. If you would take a short, 30-second period to respond, that would be good to everyone.

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Mr. Mfume. We get a fair amount of intelligence on Iran from Israel, and we get intelligence on Iran also in knowledge from allies outside, because they have something, many of them, we don't. They have embassies in Iran. So, we get from those embassies, from their Ambassadors, a much better sense of what is it like, what is going on in there, that we actually lack because we don't have an embassy.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you.

Ms. FONTENROSE. Congressman, I interpreted your question slightly differently, I thought you were asking about how we share intelligence with our regional partners, so I will address that just briefly. And we do have very close intelligence sharing relationships with most of the Gulf countries, with Egypt, with Jordan, they do complain they don't get enough.

We are doing some things right now to try to pass more. A lot of the issues are trust within them, we have to serve as a hub, because intelligence can't be shared, for instance, with a group of them, since they simply don't trust one another. But CENTCOM has done quite a bit through the integrated air and missile defense

construct, to the regional construct they are building to share intelligence.

And we have seen the proposed AI Accords Act that will have additional steps for intelligence sharing with countries in the region.

Mr. MFUME. OK.

Ms. FILIPETTI. I am happy to pass to my co-panelist if he has anything to add.

Mr. LORD. You are very kind, Carrie, thank you. Very little, but just to sort of hop on Kirsten's point, our intelligence sharing with partners has grown tremendously over the past few years. We almost feel a duty to share. The challenge is there is intra-Gulf tension which reared its head, I think in 2017 which we saw with the Qatar rift. But some of these partners trust Israel a lot more than they trust their neighbors for a whole host of reasons.

And so, if we can think about ways that we can build trust, and comity between our partners in the Gulf, that can go a long way to supporting a broader intelligence network, as well as our efforts to build the interoperability, regional security architecture that we are seeking.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you. Let me reclaim my time quickly. The key is trust, so each one of you spoke and said the same thing. The problem here is that you never know who trusts who, and who is doing something that is clandestine that ultimately undermines that trust. I mean, it is a terrible steer of operation, because it is porous, it has got holes in it.

And I am asking this because I am really concerned about the safety of our troops, of our intelligence people, of our people who are on the ground over there, and ultimately what I have said before, the security of this Nation, and the security of our allies. My time is up. Mr. Chair, I want to yield back. I do want to underscore the consistent refrain that we have got to find a way to have a cease-fire, to bring the hostages home, and to have a, again, consistent foreign policy.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, I yield back, and I appreciate the extra time.

Mr. BURCHETT. No, I appreciate you, and I appreciate your little bit of history lesson in the beginning, you as a freshman, I thought that was pretty cool. I actually visualized that as you were saying that, and that was kind of cool.

Mr. MFUME. A long time ago.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, sir, I guess I was a sophomore in high school if that makes you feel any better.

Mr. MFUME. No, it doesn't.

Mr. BURCHETT. I know, I am sorry, sir, but you have always been extra kind to me, so I appreciate you very much.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you.

Mr. BURCHETT. Mr. Schneider, Brad, you are recognized. Thank you, brother.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank you and the ranking member, but also all the panelists for being here today, this has been very helpful, and informative. I want to pick up on what Mr. Lord, you said in your opening remarks. I appreciated them talking about the Jewish traditions of mourning,

and our tradition is really centered around this idea zachor, memory.

And it is true that we keep, generation to generation, the spirit alive. We are coming onto the 1-year anniversary of October 7, immediately after that is Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish year. Where remember all those who came before us, that we have lost. But the high holidays, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, Sukkot, which was connected to the October 7 attacks, is also a time of renewal.

And I appreciated your remarks about a vision of peace and security for Israelis, Palestinians, and everyone in the region. I think that is truly what we are here talking about at its core. Is there a way, and the way I frame it, a breaking free from the gravity of so much of the history of this region to create a path to peace, or we are going to be stuck in a cycle of war.

And at the core of that cycle of war is Iran, who with support of Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, I can go down the list, they are the single largest sponsor of terror, and the threat to peace. Which is why we are here today. And October 7 a year ago was not an isolated incident, it was a pinnacle, the timing was also not by accident. Saudi Arabia and Israel were this close to normalizing relations.

And who loses from that most? But it would be Iran and their aspirations for chaos within the region. Iran's role can't be overstated, Tehran has long funded, armed, and trained Hamas and the other terrorist organizations, enabling them to launch attacks on civilians, and disrupt the hope for peace. We are currently facing a very real threat of a second front opening in the north against Hezbollah, between Israel and Hezbollah.

Hezbollah has 150,000 or more rockets, many of which are precision-guided, poised to escalate. We saw this week Israel in a clandestine attack, detonate the pagers of Hezbollah. Anyone who had one of these was connected to Hezbollah, was a member of a terrorist organization. Well, not everyone, because the Ambassador from Iran to Lebanon also had one of these Hezbollah pagers.

Why is Iran communicating in a terrorist communication chain with this? And there was tens of thousands, nearly 100,000 people in Israel on the north evacuated from their communities, I met with many of them yesterday. They can't go home because of the threat from Hezbollah. And until we relocate the Radwan fighters away from the border, to the north of the Litani River, there is not going to be peace.

And we can talk about Iran, and we touched on that—not Iran, Yemen, we touched on that. Yemen is a wildcard in all of this, because yes, they are being armed and funded by Iran, they also overtook all of Yemen's government's weapons, and they aren't necessarily going to just listen to Iran. In all of these threats, we are left with the threat of a nuclear Iran, and I have questions, and looking at the time, I want to get to these questions.

But we cannot allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. We have been fighting this, or working against this for now more than a generation, and Iran has kept marching forward. Ms. Filipetti, you talked about the anniversaries, it was Iran and Hezbollah who bombed the Marine barracks. It was Iran who bombed the Jewish

community center in Argentina, I was there for the 30th anniversary.

It is Iran that is expanding and building its nuclear stockpiles, but also working to develop all the other aspects to have a nuclear weapon, which threatens the region. And a war with Iran today is nothing compared to what a possible war with Iran would be if they have a nuclear weapon. We cannot allow that to happen. So, we have to see a different path forward.

And the Abraham Accords are a piece of that, we have talked about that, building on those opportunities. Many of us are part of the Abraham Accords Caucus, bicameral, bipartisan, in fact today we will have a meeting with the Ambassador from Saudi Arabia, and a bipartisan group of members from the House to talk about that different vision. My broad question, and everyone has gone long, so I am going to ask for some indulgence here.

I will start with you, Mr. Abrams. We talked about Iran can't have a nuclear weapon, but we are, for 25 years we have been trying policies and different tactics. What can we do to make our policies more effective? You touched on some of those earlier. What do we need to do, how can we make Iran understand that the United States are deadly serious, that our allies are deadly serious, and we will take whatever action is necessary?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you. First, I think, as I said before, I think both Presidential candidates should say this.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Absolutely.

Mr. ABRAMS. And particularly, more important, whoever is elected should say it. And I think we should take the military moves that suggest to Iran that we are serious. For example having the force structure there, because I think if they think we are really serious, then they may not cross the threshold.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Just go down the line.

Ms. FONTENROSE. Sanctions only work if they are on the books, and if they are enforced. So, that is certainly a first start. We also have other tools available to us, we don't have to be talking about air strikes on Iran necessarily, we have lots of cyber tools, we can build human asset tools. There are ways to dismantle programs once they exist, or ways to prevent the acceleration of the program that perhaps won't cause mass casualties.

Ms. FILIPETTI. Thank you, Congressman, I would only add I agree with both of my co-panelists. I think a lot of this has to do with constraining the resources that Iran has in order to commit acts of terrorism. When you look at the threat again from the Western Hemisphere, we have seen many Iranian spies, and terrorists who have attempted to plan for attacks on American soil from their position in Latin America.

So, that means we need to deny the Iranian regime the resources that it needs in order to fund raise for these attacks. That is why I think in addition to the 2231 snap back that Mr. Abrams mentioned, it is also important to work with friendly jurisdictions to make sure that they are also sanctioning not only the IRGC, but also Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, other terrorist entities.

I also think that we need to look at shifting to a full terrorist designation for the Houthis given the severity of their attacks on global shipping.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. OK, and Mr. Lord, in 2 seconds, because I am getting the hook here.

Mr. LORD. Very quickly. Sanctions are being enforced, and they are being as effective as they can be. Iran is getting better, and more capable at evading those sanctions. Sanctions themselves are a tool, they are not a policy. We need to think much more broadly. Finally, I will say this President has been very effective in deterrence. I think we had a moment here, we could have seen a repeat of April 13th after Haniyeh was killed.

But the presence of two carrier strike groups, and not only that, but the messaging about all the stealth capabilities, F-35s, F-22, a guided missile destroyer, these are first strike capabilities. And obviously it is not going to get talked about publicly, but I am fairly convinced that Iran was put on notice, and President Biden had his hand on the holster, and made it very clear. Deterrents can be effective.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, I will close with this, Mr. Chairman. Sanctions are most effective on their first day, and whoever is under sanctions are going to try to get around them, we need to ratchet them up. And last thing to say with the USS Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt, among the escort ships was the USS Cole.

The irony should not be lost that the ship that Yemen tried to destroy a generation ago was defending the U.S. interests and our allies interests, including Israel this summer, and let all know that the United States stands prepared, and that is our committee's responsibility. We will not allow Iran ever to have a nuclear weapon.

I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you for yielding negative time to me. This reminds me of that scene from Godfather where he stands up and says I have to go chair my own committee now, so I will not be able to listen to any more of this. But the difference is I am not a United States senator, and you all are definitely not mobsters.

So, other than that, I am going to yield to Mr. Lawler from New York, and I want to remind him the great power that comes with that gavel, and don't let it go to his head. Thank you all, it has been a pleasure.

Mr. LAWLER [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes. As we have talked about repeatedly, the main way that Iran is funding their terror proxies has been through the illicit oil trade with China. And over the last three and a half years under Kamala Harris and Joe Biden, the illicit oil trade has increased by over \$100 billion.

That is what is being used to fund Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other terror networks in the region. And it is what is being used to fund Iran's nuclear program. I have fought to get two of my bills, the SHIP Act, and the Iran China Energy Sanctions Act passed through this Congress, and signed into law. Both of these bills were included in the supplemental aid package that passed months ago.

Regrettably, the administration has failed to act. They have failed to uphold the law. And only a few days ago did the President finally task the Secretary of Treasury and State with these authorities. Secretary Yellen was here before our August recess, and I

asked her specifically about the SHIP Act, and you would have thought I was speaking to her in a foreign language.

She had no idea what I was talking about. So, my question is how is cutting off Iran's revenue stream from China, where China is purchasing 90 percent of Iran's petroleum, how do you see that impacting Iran's ability to fund terrorism in the Middle East? Mr. Abrams?

Mr. ABRAMS. It would be very important to do that. At the end of the Trump administration, Iran had reachable foreign currency assets of about \$4 billion. And now it is something like 60 billion. I mean, they have made, as you said, over \$100 billion. So, denying them these resources, which, I mean, we know what they do with them: Their own armed forces, and these terror proxies. It would have a real impact on the threats we face.

Mr. LAWLER. Any other comments?

Ms. FILIPETTI. Congressman, I would only add that during the Trump administration, one of the actions that was taken was specifically designating some of these Chinese companies, including COSCO, which is a significant Chinese purchaser of Iranian origin crude. Those sort of sanctions were effective in deterring China from continuing to engage, which is how we got to the 4 billion dollar number in foreign currency reserves.

So, additional sanctions that target those suppliers and those purchasers, I think would be very beneficial to our counter Iran policy.

Mr. LORD. Nice to see you, Chairman Lawler. I was a resident originally of Rensselaer County, it makes me proud. Let me just say that your characterization of the Biden administration's actions during this time, I think, are a little bit unfair. I am not a surrogate or representative of the administration, but I think it is important to note that this administration took some very creative, and effective action in closing the dollar options in Iraq.

Which were a massive sieve by which Iran and its proxies were able to gain dollars, as well as Syria, as well as other illicit actors. As many as 80 percent of those transactions were sketchy at best. There is a lot of work to be done, but that happened under this administration. I think if you look across the recommendations in our testimonies, there is a lot of shared thinking here.

And it is not because I am a fake Democrat, or Carrie, or my colleagues are fake Republicans. It is because fundamentally the Biden administration, the Trump administration, Republicans, Democrats really want the same thing here. The challenge becomes what you are discussing when it comes to China, is this implication of our China policy.

When we start sanctioning Chinese entities, we start to implicate the issues and questions around Taiwan, and we get well away from my level of expertise, so I will leave it there. But I will say that there is a tremendous amount of sanctions busting and evasion which sanctions is not going to get to, because they have de-dollarized these processes.

Mr. LAWLER. Look, a broken clock is right twice a day, OK? And yes, the administration has taken some actions that have supported the effort to crack down on Iran. But when Joe Biden and Kamala Harris came in, their objective was to renegotiate the Iran

nuclear deal. And as part of that they lifted the secondary sanctions that were implemented under the Trump administration to go after the purchasers of Iranian petroleum, OK?

And so, by doing that, the illicit oil trade was allowed to resume, and thrive. And you have over \$100 billion that came in. We have talked in this Congress about the \$6 billion in unfrozen funds. That pales in comparison to what was allowed to occur under this illicit oil trade. So, the approach to Iran has been wrong. This administration has taken a very wrong tact in trying to go after Iran and its proxy network, which is raining terror across the Middle East.

And Hamas, where they get—93 percent of their budget comes from Iran. So, these are fundamental problems that, frankly, this administration has failed miserably to address. And yes, if they take a right step, great, bravo. But they have taken many wrong steps that have created this climate we are dealing with. My time has expired.

I now recognize for 5 minutes, the gentleman from Minnesota, the Ranking Member Dean Phillips.

Mr. PHILLIPS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me just, in response to this last exchange, State my opinion. Which is as long as the world relies on petroleum, there will be a flow of dollars to our adversaries. And it is clear that Iran will direct resources to our adversaries at expense to their own population. Their economy is in the worst condition it has been in, probably during my lifetime.

And I would simply pose that I don't think there is any sanctions regime that can effectively stop that flow. So, I would like to go down, dig a little bit deeper, and try to find solutions. But first a question about the West Bank. I am concerned about escalating violence, there have been, I think 1,350 attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians.

A reduced flow of resources to the PA, which is the only source of stability. So, let me actually start with you, Mr. Abrams. Do you believe current Israeli policy, as it relates to security policy, economic policy, and otherwise in the West Bank is accretive to stability and security, and also to United States objectives?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think there has been a real effort, there is a real effort in the last year or two to introduce money and weapons to Jordan and the West Bank by Iran. A real effort to create violence and subversion in both places. And we have seen a diminution in the ability of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces to control the West Bank. I think Israelis are actually reacting to that.

Now, settler violence is something else, that is unlawful activity, and it should be prevented, and it should be punished whenever it occurs. But the background here is a big, new Iranian effort in Jordan and the West Bank.

Mr. PHILLIPS. But anything more—what about current Netanyahu policy toward the PA, do you think this is helpful, or not?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the Palestinian Authority has, for certainly a decade now, proved itself to be corrupt, and incompetent. And I don't think that Netanyahu policy—well, I mean it does go back more than a decade, but is the problem here. I think the problem is the PA.

Mr. PHILLIPS. OK, and Mr. Lord, your perspective on my questions about current policy, settler violence, and also strategy toward the PA?

Mr. LORD. Yes, respectfully, I will have to disagree a bit with Mr. Abrams on this one. Really for about the last 20 years Israel has been operating on a national security paradigm that assesses that this conflict is only manageable, and not solvable, coming off of the failures of Camp David in 2000. But unlike previous paradigms of conflict management, this one has been inextricably tinged by an ultra-nationalist ideology, which fundamentally rejects the two-State solution.

And we have seen that most prominent, most vocal in this last government led by Prime Minister Netanyahu, where settlement has grown at an extraordinary pace. Settler violence has similarly grown, and the consequences for settler violence have never been lower. And all one need do is look at the overt statements of the ultra-nationalists in this government who have their fingers on the knobs of this.

To know exactly their purpose is trying to destroy the Palestinian Authority, and export the chaos we are seeing in Gaza to the West Bank, that fundamentally allows them to come in, and ultimately annex large swathes of the territory. And I think it is inimical to Israeli security interests.

Mr. PHILLIPS. All right, I appreciate it. I want to move on to the border between Lebanon and Israel. Ms. Fontenrose, do you see any potential, especially in light of what has transpired over the last few days, to enforce Resolution 1701, to actually establish a reasonable buffer zone, and how should we in Congress, and how should our allies proceed with re-establishing dynamics for a return for both Lebanese and Israelis that have been displaced?

Ms. FONTENROSE. At the expense of sounding flip, I think the actions of the last 2 days may encourage fighters to move away from that border simply because hospitals are full. But certainly, it was a message sent about the reach of the perpetrator to Hezbollah's rank and file. So, they will have much more trouble now conducting command and control. They will have obviously trouble communicating, they will have trouble recruiting.

You will have mothers throwing away anything with a battery in it in their son's bedrooms, and locking them in. We have definitely seen where the network reach goes, and that will give many of the rank and file fighters cause to question whether or not this is an activity they want to engage in. I think the time for negotiating that is a bit stronger now. On Israel's side, it is certainly worth an attempt.

Mr. PHILLIPS. OK. And back to you, Mr. Lord, on the same question, your perspective on 1701, and the dynamic in the buffer zone?

Mr. LORD. Immensely difficult. What we have seen in the last few days is some cause for concern. I have been very public in the indicators and warnings that will see forces come away from Gaza and start to be repositioned north, likely in advance of a conflict on the northern border, and we are now starting to see that. What we have seen really in just the last 48 hours, 72 hours, I think may be unrelated to that, but may not be.

And Israel is trying to use unpredictability, and demonstrate ways in which they can come at Hezbollah in unpredictable, unknowable ways from Hezbollah's perspective to make them more compliant, and put them in a position of weakness. Because very much right now, they feel they are in the driver's seat, and it is leading toward a bad scenario.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I want to close with one more question, and any of you can respond. As I reflect on post-World War II, and the Marshall Plan, and how our arch enemies became friends through investment, it is my belief that the human condition will act in the same way when it is oppressed, does not see hope, whether it is Gary, Indiana, or the Gaza Strip. Do you see any analogy between how we handled post-World War II investment in peace, and the Middle East?

If so, how might that look, a Marshall Plan of sorts for the region? And if not, what are the impediments? And I would welcome perspective from any of you before I close. Not all at the same time. Mr. Abrams.

Mr. ABRAMS. I would resist the Marshall Plan analogy for one reason at least, which is that Marshall Plan countries for the most part were industrial democracies. So, you were rebuilding, you were returning, you weren't trying to create something that had never been there before. I think everyone wants ultimately to move to the reconstruction of Gaza. The problem there, I think, is the security side of it, without which it won't work.

But the difference I think in the Middle East is that there are lots of local resources in the Gulf, but not only in the Gulf. I mean Lebanon, apparently, has a fair amount of offshore energy wealth, although it is the kind that you might not like, and so does Israel obviously, and so does Egypt. So, there are local resources that could be applied.

Mr. PHILLIPS. OK. Any—Jonathan maybe, or Ms. Filipetti, anybody to close?

Mr. LORD. Thank you, sir. Yes, I think there is real opportunity here, but the challenge is getting to the day in between, let alone the day after. Security is going to be hard, but fundamentally there needs to be a change of understanding in Israel politically about what comes next. If not immediately a two-State solution, and I have a report coming out on this next month.

I am advocating for a bridging paradigm that enables the reconstitution of Palestinian governance and security institutions in concert that brings in these partners to rebuild, and displace Hamas, and terrorist organizations, and creates the ability to come forward incrementally. But everyone ultimately needs their goals to align, and we are missing that right now.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I look forward to reading it. Many thanks to each of you, and appreciate your perspectives.

And I yield back.

Mr. LAWLER. The gentleman's time has expired. I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony, and the members for their questions. The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to these in writing. Pursuant to committee rules, all mem-

bers may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to the length limitations.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:54 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman**

September 18, 2024

Revised

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia at 10:00 a.m. in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Thursday, September 19, 2024

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

LOCATION: ~~2200 Rayburn~~
2172 Rayburn

SUBJECT: Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How
Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and
our Allies

WITNESSES: The Honorable Elliott Abrams
Former Deputy Assistant to the President and
National Security Adviser

Ms. Kirsten Fontenrose
Former Senior Director for the Gulf
National Security Council

****** Ms. Carrie Filipetti
Executive Director
The Vandenberg Coalition

Mr. Jonathan Lord
Senior Fellow and Director

Middle East Security
Center for a New American Security

**NOTE: Witnesses added or changed

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chairs

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

To fill out this form online: Either use the tab key to travel through each field or mouse click each line or within blue box. Type in information.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

Day Thursday Date September 19th Room Rayburn 2172

Starting Time 10:08 am Ending Time 11:54 am

Recesses ☐ (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Chair Tim Burchett (R-TN)

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☐

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☐

Stenographic Record ☐

To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Burchett, Rep. Baird, Rep. Lawler, Rep. McCormick, Rep. Phillips, Rep. Sherman, Rep. Connolly, Rep. Manning, Rep. Amo, Rep. Mfume, Rep. Schneider

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED 11:54 am

Note: Please include accompanying witnesses with their titles, etc. (please note the fact that they are accompanying witnesses)

Clear Form

Meg Wagner
Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads: How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies

Date: 9/19/24

Convened: 10:08 am

Adjourned: 11:54 am

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Mr. Wilson (SC-02)		X	Mr. Phillips (MN-03)	X	
Mr. Mast (FL-18)		X	Mr. Sherman (CA-30)	X	
Mr. Burchett (TN-02)	X		Mr. Connolly (VA-11)	X	
Mr. Jackson (TX-13)		X	Mrs. Manning (NC-06)	X	
Mr. Baird (IN-04)	X		Mr. Amo (RI-01)	X	
Mr. Lawler (NY-17)	X		Mr. Mfume (MD-07)	X	
Mr. McCormick (GA-6)	X		Mr. Schneider (IL-10)	X	
Mr. Zinke (MT-01)		X			

Questions for the Record
September 26, 2024
Ranking Member Dean Phillips
Israel and the Middle East at a Crossroads:
How Tehran's Terror Campaign Threatens the U.S. and our Allies

Questions for Mr. Jonathan Lord:

Secretary Blinken confirmed publicly that Iran was indeed sending ballistic missiles to Russia for its use in its illegal and unjust war in Ukraine. The Biden Administration has imposed considerable sanctions on Russia and Iran for its malign behavior as well as its cooperation.

Question: How would you assess the military, diplomatic, and economic relationship between Russia and Iran, especially since Russia's invasion of Ukraine? What more should the U.S. and our allies and partners do to counter this expanding relationship?

Answer:

The election of President Pezeshkian was a surprise to many who watch Iranian domestic politics. Pezeshkian has spoken outwardly about his interest in engaging with the West and recently chose Abbas Araghchi to be Foreign Minister, who was chief nuclear negotiator in the P5+1 talks. Nevertheless, Iran's nuclear development continues unabated, and Secretary Blinken has stated publicly that Iran's nuclear breakout time is between one and two weeks.

Question: How does President Pezeshkian's election impact Iran's foreign and domestic policy? What does his election demonstrate about Iran's intentions, if anything?

Answer:

In June, IAEA Board of Governors voted to censure Iran for failing to cooperate fully with the agency following a report that said Iran has further increased its stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels. Since then, Iran has continued its nuclear development as the U.S. and the E3 (UK, Germany, & France) consider their approach leading up to the October 2025 deadline to trigger snapback sanctions in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Question: What steps should the U.S. and the E3 take to ensure that their next steps with respect to Iran's nuclear file are coordinated and advance their strategic goals?

Answer:

On October 8, 2023, Hezbollah began an exchange of fire with Israel in solidarity with Hamas. The ensuing cross-border violence has prompted the evacuation of tens of thousands of residents from northern Israel and southern Lebanon. The fighting also has raised fears of a broader escalation in which Hezbollah's estimated arsenal of 120,000-200,000 missiles and rockets could threaten Israeli strategic sites and population centers, and Israel's military could bring devastating consequences upon Lebanon's already fragile state and society. Such concerns escalated over the summer as a Hezbollah rocket attack killed twelve young people in the Golan Heights and an Israeli airstrike in Beirut killed senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr. In August 2024, Israel and Hezbollah engaged in their largest exchange of fire since October 2023, and although tensions have since cooled down, there remains widespread fear for a potential wider conflict.

Question: What more can the U.S. do to support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and ensure they have the resources necessary to effectively deploy further personnel and resources to the south if requested in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1701?

Answer:

I have been pleased by ongoing efforts to reform the Palestinian Authority, including the formation of a new government and the introduction of measures to improve transparency and fight corruption, overhaul the justice system and security sectors and improve public sector efficiency.

Question: How would you assess the Palestinian Authority's reforms so far, their willingness to continue down this path, and the accountability mechanisms to ensure this reform effort is effective?

Answer:

I am deeply concerned about rising tension and violence in the West Bank, including attacks by Palestinian militants and Israeli extremist settlers against civilians and/or their property and Israeli raids into some Palestinian areas. At the end of August/beginning of September, Israeli forces conducted a major operation against militants in the northern West Bank amid heightened Israeli fears that terrorist attacks from the West Bank could become another front. Amid these tensions, including Israeli security operations and continued withholding of tax revenues transferred from the Israeli government to the Palestinian Authority (PA), the PA has been considerably weakened and its security forces face significant difficulties in maintaining law and order. On December 5th, the State Department implemented a new visa restriction policy targeting individuals believed to have been involved in undermining peace, security, or stability in the West Bank. On February 1st, President Biden issued Executive Order 14115, which authorizes the imposition of sanctions on any foreign person determined to be responsible for or complicit in, or to have directly or indirectly engaged or attempted to engage in actions that threaten the peace, security, or stability of the West Bank.

Question: What have been the main contributors to increasing tension in the West Bank since October 7, but particularly in the last few months? How do economic factors in the West Bank, including withholding of tax revenues and revocation of work permits, impact stability in the area? What can the Biden Administration do to strengthen the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) and prevent violence in the West Bank?

Answer:

Question: How do current Israeli policies impact security and stability within the West Bank and on the Temple Mount? How do personalities within the current Israeli governing coalition exacerbate these tensions and how might that impact Israeli security? How have sanctions under EO 14115 shifted behavior or changed the conversation in Israel related to settler violence, if at all? What additional actions should the Administration consider if such behavior is not sufficiently addressed?

Answer: