

## Israel at a Crossroads

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LucaiQEnP5c&list=PL7fuyfNu8jfP8TWSJzPCsyScNGwbW6xbQ&index=17>

### Speakers

- Amos Yadlin, President and Founder, MIND Israel; Former Chief, IDF Intelligence Directorate
  - Michael Herzog, Former Ambassador of Israel to the United States; Tisch Distinguished Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy
  - Brett McGurk, Venture Partner, Lux Capital; Former National Security Council Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa
  - Dan Senor, Partner, Elliott Investment Management; Co-Author, THE GENIUS OF ISRAEL & START-UP NATION; Host, CALL ME BACK Podcast
  - **Moderator:** Mary Louise Kelly, NPR
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### Kelly

Nick, good afternoon, everybody. Nick, thank you. In my business, the title of a panel “Israel at the Crossroads” is what we would call an evergreen. When is Israel ever not at a crossroads? General, Ambassador, Brett, Dan, welcome that panel title is calling to mind words credited to Orson Welles, the actor director who said, If you want a happy ending, that depends where you stop the story. Flip it around. Think about where you start the story. In the Middle East. We could pick any of 1000 moments over many 1000s of years, but for our purposes today, we are going to pick 648 days ago, October 7, 2023 and we're going to look at what has changed for Israel and its neighbors, and what maybe hasn't. Brett McGurk, I'm going to give you first word. You were serving in the White House. You were President Biden's top advisor on the Middle East, you found out about the attacks of October 7 because you got a call from somebody else on this stage today. Tell the story.

### McGurk

Thank you so much for having me. And this is an extraordinary panel. I'm just honored to be on the stage with all of you. So it was October 6 for us, Friday, and a busy day at the White House. Actually had delegations of officials from other regional capitals, including the Saudis and others, talking about where the region was. I'm pretty, we were working on some things that were potentially going to be quite positive over the coming six months to a year. And I went home and I put my daughter to bed, and I started to unwind from the week a little bit, I knew I'd be back in the White House in the morning.

White House in the morning, as we always are. And I started to get reports of rocket attacks from Gaza, which is not totally unusual. We've had an 11 Day War in 2021 but still we hadn't seen that in a while. And then they started to come a little more rapid fire, starting around 10 o'clock. And actually, I got a message from you, Mike, at 10:23pm on Friday night, saying, it's a massive attack. This is war. And I think we talked a few times that night. And as it unfolded, I was up the entire night, and I knew at that moment, the Middle East would never be the same. I could just see what's happening. It was a multi front invasion from Hamas. We still did not know the scope and extent that would unfold over the coming hours and days, but I knew it was something we'd never seen before, and everything had changed.

### **Kelly**

Ambassador, pick up the story. Where were you that night? How did you find out? And did you share the assessment the Middle East was never gonna be the same?

### **Herzog**

So it was October 6. First, It's a pleasure to be here and share the panel. All of them are friends, especially privileged that Brett is here, because Brett was the best partner that I could wish for. We worked very closely during the war. It was October 6. I was with my wife in Southwest US. It was the eve of a Jewish holiday. Late at night, I get a call from an Israeli senior general. He's shouting into the phone, "Mike, this is war. It's not another round. It's a war. Hamas started war," and he hung up. I had no idea what he was talking about. I had no clue. So I called my defense attache, who just landed in the US. He didn't know anything. I look at the website and I see massive rocket firing from Gaza into Israel. I connected the dots. I saw some reports about infiltrations. I understood that this is war, and I also understood that this could also escalate into a war with the whole Iranian axis, because Hamas was an Iranian proxy, and I've seen the intelligence of how they together, the concept of encircling Israel with a ring of fire. So first thing I did, I canceled all my plans. I put all the senior people in our Embassy on a conference call. I said, "This is war. We're switching to a war mode, 24/7," and then I communicated with Brett. I wrote him, "This is war. We need your support." And Brett wrote to me, immediately, "We are with you."

### **Kelly**

Yeah. So I suspect most of us in this room have tracked pretty closely what has unfolded in the months since I'm going to direct this next one, one more to you, Ambassador, and then I want Dan and your general to jump in. We are where we are, what will count as a victory?

### **Herzog**

That's a very big question. So I want to analyze Gaza through the goals that our government set for the war in Gaza since October 7, the government set four goals: to defeat Hamas militarily, to remove Hamas from power, to release all of our hostages, and to make sure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to the State of Israel. While we excelled in our military operations, and it's not a minor thing, because Hamas built, over the years, a major, major underground terror complex, 400 miles of terror tunnels, there's no comparison anywhere in the world, at the same time, we did not develop a coherent plan... alternatives to Hamas, who and what is going to replace Hamas? We... it's not for lack of thinking about it. We had a lot of groups. I was part of them. It's for lack of political decisions, political pressures within our governments and developing disagreements, the great ideas of, like, General Patraeus, like ideas of seizing territory, claiming that territory from Hamas, and creating a basis for alternatives. But we never developed a coherent plan. We worked together with the United Arab Emirates, and I was part of that work, and we finalized nearly all the work, but it was too late in the day, and here we are, 20 months later, and when we talk about our military operation in Gaza, nobody can tell you what's the alternative to Hamas. We also have a big problem with stabilizing the flow of humanitarian assistance into Gaza. That is because throughout the month, most of this system, which came through UN agencies, fell into the hands of Hamas and fed its governance. So that's, we are at a crossroad, and we have to find a way to exit this war.

### **Kelly**

I have follow ups on that, but let me bring you in. Dan, President Trump initially floated that his plan for Gaza and what would count as victory would be that it would be empty, that 2 million Palestinians would go somewhere else, not clear where. What is the state of Trump administration thinking on Gaza, as best as you can make out, and to what extent does the personal relationship between Trump and Netanyahu influence it?

### **Senor**

Sure. I'll just before I answer that, I just want to just respond to one thing Mike said, I do think one of the challenges for Israel here, I'm going to, you're going to be tougher in your own government than I'll be. One of the challenges for Israel is their military was never designed to fight the kind of war it is fighting in Gaza for the length of time it is fighting this war, the Israeli wars were always supposed to be short and away games, preferably not home games. And this is right on Israel's border. And here we are. You know, October will be two years and Israel is still fighting this war. And Mike alluded, you know, to these points that humanitarian aid is a huge problem. It's Israel's responsibility, according to the international community, to get humanitarian aid, figure out a way to get aid into Israel. You can't point to another war like this, where one party is responsible for getting aid to the enemy's population while the enemy is taking that aid

and using it as leverage against its own population. And of course, the hostages, proportionate to the US population, it's equivalent of like having 1000s and 1000s of US citizens underground in tunnels being held hostage against while you're trying to fight this enemy. So for a variety of in the ring of fire you mentioned, for a variety of reasons, this was not a terribly easy war to fight. And to fight, and the Palestinian population has generally been terrified of Hamas. It's not so easy to develop an alternative within the Palestinian population of Gaza. If the population is terrified to stick its neck out and say, I'll be the alternative to Hamas, keep in mind the architect of October 7, Yahya Sinwar, he was in an Israeli prison for what was it almost 20 years, not for killing Israelis, but Israelis, but for slaughtering Palestinians, for imposing retribution against Palestinians that quote, unquote, collaborated with the Israelis. So I do think putting it on Israel to find an alternative to Hamas is not terribly easy.

### **Kelly**

I do not think I would just point out that Israel is continuing to fight there for this amount of time by choice. There was a ceasefire.

### **Senor**

Well, there was an interim Cease fire. I think the idea there could be a permanent cease fire would only work if Israel would agree for Hamas to stay in Gaza. And that back to Mike's point, in terms of the objectives of the war, there's no world in which Israel can agree to Hamas staying in power in Gaza. You know, when the war is over, that means the war is not over. Go to the US, yeah. So I do not believe the relocation of the population out of Gaza is going to happen, at least not at scale. There's actually been a little bit of it happening, but it's not the solution. I think at this point, and I think June 12, June 13 to June 22 was a turning point. Was an inflection point, the joint, ultimately, the joint Israel-US war against Iran, because you cannot look at the war in Gaza in isolation, right? It would be like looking at World War II and saying, "Hey, you know, what did you think of the US Italian War of 1943?" like no one talks about these individual battle fronts in World War II. You talk about World War II, Israel has been fighting this ring of Ring of Fire, the seven front war, of which Gaza is one front, and the head of the octopus was Iran. And the fact that Israel and the US had such extraordinary success against Iran means I do think, and I just returned from Israel this morning, there is a sense that there's an inflection point. Now, if Israel and the US are looking for a way to gradually wind things down, this is actually the ideal point. The question is this population, how do you separate the population from Hamas? And I have still, I just spent a few days in Israel. I still have not, Israel. I still have not heard of a concrete plan for doing that. And so as Israelis are repopulating southern Israel, it's not gonna be so easy to build those communities back up in southern Israel if they know that a Palestinian population that is not separated from Hamas is gonna re-emerge up there in northern Gaza. So I think the

primary goal right now, if there's gonna be any kind of permanent solution, is to move the Palestinian population as far south, deep into Gaza as possible so there's a big perimeter, a big security area...

**Kelly**

One second because I suspect others may want to jump in and I want to get the general land but you want for a quick question the Trump Netanyahu relationship I have?

**Senor**

And this is new, by the way, I did not see this in the first Trump term, and I didn't even see this at the beginning of this Trump term. But when I talked to officials in Israel and I talked to officials in the Trump administration, I've never seen a closer relationship between an Israeli prime minister and a US president, as we're seeing now, we can get into why that is, but there is a real sense that President Trump sees in Israel an extraordinary, extraordinarily successful military and intelligence juggernaut, and he likes being President Trump likes being associated with success and awe and they definitely see the Trump administration. Definitely, sees this alliance with Israel as providing real capabilities to the United States in the Middle East that it did not have. And so I think I mean I would compare it to like Bush-Blair, Reagan-Thatcher, I mean that's how deep the relationship is now. It'll be interesting to see if it sustains but right now, it's pretty extraordinary and unprecedented.

**Kelly**

Do you want to weigh in on anything you just heard? If not, I have another question for the two of you.

**Yadlin**

Yes, I think we need to go beyond Gaza. Because Gaza have started it. Israel is fighting the most justified war ever. However, at that moment, continuing the war is not serving Israeli interest. I think...

**Kelly**

In what sense?

**Yadlin**

In the sense that we, as Dan said, our defense doctrine is saying the walls of Israel should be short and with decisive victory. That's what we have done vis a vis Hezbollah, that's what we have done vis a vis Iran. And Gaza is different because of the hostages, because of the underground tunnels that they have prepared, and most of all because, Hamas is using the population of Gaza to shield himself. [Hamas] not

caring about the fact that this population is starved, that this population is bombed. He use them against Israel, and Israel is losing the public opinion fight because we are continuing this war. Nobody remember the seventh of October and how much this war is justified. So I would put on the table, the end of the war as something, that Israel will contribute to the end of the war for all the hostages, all of them in one push, and then Gaza will not rebuild without demilitarized. We have to coordinate with our friends in the Arab world that they will take over Gaza and rebuild it, only if it will demilitarize. And then Israel has the right, if Hamas stay, to attack Hamas again, because this is a terror organization that's threatened us, and we have done it to... we done a very good agreement with about Hezbollah, that if Hezbollah is not comply with 1701 UN Security Council resolution that they have to go north of the Lethani River and not smuggle the weapon to Lebanon. The Lebanese army will do the job, and if they are not doing the job, Israel is going to do. And this is happening as we speak. So this model should be applied to Gaza, and we should look at what the end of the war is promising us. It's promising us an opportunity to shape the Middle East differently, a normalization with more Arab countries, American, Israeli, Arab moderate camp, against Iran, Axis of Evil, against the Islamist, and making a different Middle East. And on the issue of President Trump, I think, for the first time, American president pre-empt against a nuclear program in a rogue country. It was not done against North Korea. It was not done against China, not even against the Soviet Union in the 40's. So President Trump showed to the Americans that the Middle East is not only a place that you are losing, it's a place that you can bring a lot of good interest for America is voyage to the Gulf, the \$3 trillion investment, and the fact that Iran is now weakened and Iran, Axis of Evil is not exist because Hezbollah, the most formidable talks he was destroyed as a regime was collapse and they run is much weaker.

### **Kelly**

Okay, so we're going to move to Iran and the wider region, please. Two things I want to note, you're wearing the yellow lapel pin. Several of you are. This is in support of hostages, the hostages and bringing them home. For those who don't know it, this is something you see everywhere now, on the streets in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem and Israel. One more question, because you opened the door to this general after telling me, right before we walked on stage, you didn't want to talk about Gaza. I am curious, for the two Israelis on this panel, how you see the moral stakes for your country, of the staggering toll of death and suffering we are seeing in Gaza. And I know that's a difficult question as an official, would either of you care to answer it as a human, as an Israeli?

### **Yadlin**

I think this is one of the reasons we have to finish the war, because our enemy, as I said, he is to blame. He is to blame for starting the war. He is to blame for holding these hostages. This is a huge humanitarian issue, because this is people...

**Kelly**

Do you feel the weight of this?

**Yadlin**

640 days are in tunnels. Try to be eight hours in a tunnel. Eight hours, that's all, without light, without nobody, beating you, torturing you, and then you will understand what these people are going through. After saying that, I'm not happy for what's happening to the Palestinians in Gaza, I think if Hamas leaders would have been cared about their people, they would have stopped the war bring back the hostages a year ago, a year and a half ago, and I think once again, it was Brett who said that you cannot blame the Israeli government on that, you blame Hamas. But I think we should put on the table a proposal that Hamas cannot refuse, because they are saying, end the war.

**Kelly**

Let me shift us to Iran, and I'll steer this to you...

**McGurk**

Let me just say real quick on ending a war, because this history is being rewritten by people who weren't involved in this. Just some dates, May 27 there's a deal put down. Israel accepts it. It has about 85% of everything Hamas wants. The war could stop on May 28. Joe Biden made a speech on May 31, laid it out to the world. The UN Security Council unanimously adopted it. If Haman said yes, the war stops, Hamas did not answer. They answered on July 2, about six weeks later, and fundamentally changed the whole thing. We then patched it up on August 16, we put down a proposal with Qatar in Egypt. It had about 95% of what Hamas wanted. And again, they did not say yes. They didn't answer. Two weeks later, we had a number of hostages killed in a tunnel under Rafah, and then Israel decided to go north and took out Hezbollah, and that changed Hamas' calculations. We finally got the deal. I just want to make clear, like the moral toll of this awful situation tears at the soul of anyone who's worked on this anyone but this war could stop. It could have stopped multiple times. If Hamas stopped the war and released hostages multiple, multiple times. And where we are right now, right now, there's a deal on the table to stop the war for 60 days. That's a long time. And where we are given where we are. I think you stop the war for 60 days is the end of the war. It is the end of the war. And we're still negotiating over maps. And all the pressure comes on Israel, which I get, and by the way, we should be. But I hope President Trump's putting pressure on Israel to get to get to a point where we can close the deal,



but there's like no pressure on Hamas. Just release 10 hostages. We stopped the war for 60 days. I mean, this is a fundamental issue from the beginning. I'll just finish this here. Yep, Hamas started the war on October 7. This panel is about Israel, but the enemies of Israel have agency. Hamas started the war. Hezbollah joined the war on October 8, all the militias in Iraq started shooting at us and at Israel right away, Iran enabling the whole thing through Syria. And then the Houthis join in, and then Iran joins in directly. All the enemies of Israel made a choice to start this war against Israel. Okay, okay, and Hamas, Hamas, from the beginning, said, fundamental demand, you can have the hostages. We stay in power, we stay in security control, and that is still their demand. Today, they have not budged on that.

**Kelly**

Hold on Ambassador. And then I am going to shift us to Iran, please.

**Herzog**

So I agree with everything Brett said. I would like to add the following, look, Hamas put us in an impossible situation because they built the whole military complex within civilian populated areas. They built under the hospitals, mosques, and everything, and they put us in an impossible situation, because if you don't take action against them, they win. If you take action against them, there necessarily is collateral damage, and any loss of life is tragic. But what I must say, the art of policy is to translate military success into a political exit. We found the right way in Lebanon after we hit Hezbollah very hard. We did a cease fire deal. Brett was there. We did it together, and that was a very successful exit, because he put political pressure on Hezbollah, which never was. We have yet to find a way on Iran. We'll discuss it, but we did not find a way on Gaza here. I want to say that there is war dragged on and on, the tension between those two war goals of removing Hamas from power and releasing the hostages became intensified. More and more, both of them are worthy goals. I support, nobody wants to see Hamas in power after this war. They should not be there. But here we are, 20 months after that war started was forced on us, and we have, we need to find the right sequence. And I, like almost and many other Israelis, believe that it's time to put an offer to release all the hostages and stop the war for now, and we'll deal with Hamas later. In the meantime, we focus on Iran, we expand the circle of normalization in the region, and we start the healing process in our own society, which is traumatized since October 7, and that process will not start until all the hostages are back.

**Senor**

Can I just very quickly?

**Kelly**



Hold on, hold on. If it's a sentence. A sentence.

**Senor**

You keep referring to Lebanon as the model when Lebanon you had ultimately the Lebanese Government, the Lebanese army wasn't a vacuum in Gaza. It's Hamas. No other Arab countries are stepping in.

**Herzog**

Agreed.

**Senor**

We talk about the Saudis. We talked about the Emiratis. We talked about the Egyptians. No one wants to show up, almost. I was just in Israel, and everyone was talking about demilitarizing Gaza. We just got to demilitarize Gaza. It sounds great. Who's going to do it? If IDF soldiers are sitting there patting down every Palestinian to look for a gun, you have a lot of dead IDF soldiers, okay? And the Saudis and the Emiratis don't want to send their young men to do that job.

**Kelly**

Okay.

**Yadlin**

Demilitarized doesn't say that you are.. get rid of the last Kalashnikov. This is like an American has a family car. So they have Kalashnikov, but they will not have rockets, They will not have drones. They will not have a commando forces training to capture a kibbutz and kill and burn and rape. This will be a different Hamas, if they will choose to be there as but nobody will rebuild them. So the idea, they already gave up the governments, they now have to give up the weapon, and some of the leadership have to go out. And this is easy to achieve. And the Emirates and the Saudis will come, and they will know that if Hamas is gone, in the term of militarization, demilitarization for reconstruction, then I think you know why the Arabs will come? Because of President Trump, because for the first time, he came with this idea of removing 2 million Palestinians to where? And the Arabs are against him, and suddenly they are willing to put some skin in the game that they were not willing to do a time ago. And I think you cannot destroy an idea, you cannot destroy a religious belief. ISIS was defeated by a coalition of 85 countries led by Brett McGurk and General Ellen, and they were defeated, but they are still there. In the mask, on the internet. You cannot defeat them on their belief, but you can make sure that seven of October will never happen again.

**Kelly**

Here, here. Let's do Iran. And I want you each to take a quick bite at this. Did we all overestimate Iran? And if so, if the military was not as formidable as many intelligence services military seemed to believe, what might that tell us about the political leadership? Dan, you first.

### **Senor**

I don't think Israel and the US overestimated the threat from Iran. It was the military capabilities. What Iran built up, invested billions of dollars in years, was in a proxy system. It wasn't its conventional military. That was the real capability. It was a proxy system. It was the Houthis, it was Hezbollah, was Hamas, was militias in Iraq, and after over time, systematically started eliminating the proxy system, culminating, of course, in taking down Hezbollah. If you think about the three inputs Israel needed to go, it was the threat of Hezbollah they are bringing down its throat, removed it needed to be able to get, basically through Syria, in the air, into Iran, Assad regime falls in December after 53 years, and then, of course, you had to so it was the Assad regime gone. It was Hezbollah gone. And then it was Israel. Israel's extraordinary intelligence. Now it had the extraordinary intelligence before, but those two other factors, Assad falling and Hezbollah falling, and then the whole proxy system being broken down. That was the capability that Iran had, and Israel systematically took it out. I don't without taking out the proxy system. I don't think Israel could have done it.

### **Kelly**

General?

### **Yadlin**

I don't think we overestimate Iran. I think we underestimate Israel and its capabilities. And it's not only the intelligence, it's much more the Air Force, and the combination between the two. The capability to achieve air superiority in a place like Tehran. It's not Gaza, it's not Beirut, it's 15 to 200, 1500 to 2000 kilometers air superiority, Russia and Ukraine are fighting two and a half years, and none of them achieve air superiority. Here in two and a half days, air superiority was established, and then the beginning of the war with intelligence to decapitate the leadership of the Iranian military, the IRGC, 15 most important commanders and generals. And in the same time, couple of scientists who were in the groups that started to work on weaponization, which was the last step, because I already have enough fissile material in rich uranium for 10 bones in 60% to move them to military grade 90%. It's two weeks, and the polarization was the next to do this. To do decapitation of a whole group, you need amazingly good intelligence and the capability to to launch the missile or the bomb to intercept them in the right place. Some of them were on moving from their houses to their command posts, and the

Israeli intelligence and the Israeli Air Force were able to move the bomb and the missile to the right place.

### **Kelly**

So I'm hearing from two of you, very little surprise at how the attacks by Israel and then the United States played out, and the feebleness, I think, is not too strong a word of Iran's response. Brett?

### **McGurk**

Let me give a couple anecdotes to kind of make your point. So October 8, fog of war, is this a coordinated attack? Hezbollah is joining the attack. Hezbollah is kind of maneuvering. Are they going to attack? Iran? Like what is going on? And if it was a coordinated attack, Israel faced an existential threat. I mean, one of the first call from President Biden to Prime Minister Netanyahu, is either on the seventh or the eighth, but Netanyahu said, "Joe, we're in the Middle East, and in the Middle East, if you're weak, you're roadkill and like, everybody's sharpening their knives," and that's what was happening. So the power of Israel, of Iran, at that moment, I do not think we were underestimating, nor do I think we did underestimate it. Now let me fast forward just a few days, because on October, few days, because on October 11, the Israelis believe they saw indications of Hezbollah preparing a ground invasion of Israel. And we were trying to figure out what was going on, and Israel was thinking about a preemptive attack, and we discussed it throughout five very intense hours of that day. And one of the arguments against a preemptive attack at that time was that Hezbollah still had full strength, 150,000, 200,000 missiles and rockets and everything else. Is this the best time to start a new front? I think there's some debate about this. I think it was the right call not to start that front at that time. But finally, on October 1, I'm in the Situation Room with 200 ballistic missiles, 200 ballistic missiles fired from Iran at Israel. Did Israel attack Iran, though? Israel took out Hezbollah on its borders and some IRGC people that were in Syria planning attacks against Israel, and Iran launched 200 ballistic missiles against Israeli cities. That was like the worst case scenario, and a missile takes about 12 minutes to fly, give only about three minutes to take them down, but there's about nine minutes of silence as you're just watching these missiles streak across the screen. And I thought to myself, everything I know about Iran, everything I've dealt with Iran, this country that would do this, can, first of all, never have a nuclear weapon. And we were bracing for hundreds, if not 1000s of casualties. Unfortunately, we deflected, defeated that attack, and then Israel very effectively took out Iran's air defense systems, which set the conditions for what happened. So no, I do not think we underestimated Iran. I think the force of arms of Israel in the Middle East, responding to attacks against them with very close coordination from the United States and with work done across administrations over many, many years, led to where we are now.

**Kelly**

Ambassador, I'll give you the last word on the Iran question, and then we're going to open it up to a couple from y'all. I'm curious, given your diplomatic background, we're hearing the description of Israel, starting with Nick Burns, introducing us. Israel has defeated or seriously degraded its enemies, from Hamas to Hezbollah to the Houthis to Iran itself, the Houthis, not yet "Department of Multiple Things can Both be True." That is true. Israel also finds itself more isolated, some something approaching a pariah on the international stage because of what has happened in Gaza. How do you reconcile those?

**Herzog**

So first, I agree with my copanelists that we did not overestimate Iran. You have to remember that Israel prepared this war for decades, for many, many years, especially the last few months, for decades. And first we dismantled the Iranian axis. We took away their shields, Hezbollah, Syria, air defense and so on, and some of the air defense capabilities in Iran itself in October, in the strike in October, but in the strike itself in June, we first achieved surprise, and we hit the main center of gravity in their nuclear program, missile program, air defense system, and the senior defense official done. And that took them totally off balance. They were planning a massive retaliation against Israel. They were thinking that we're going to may attack them, and they're planning, but they couldn't execute it. Just couldn't carry it out. Now you're right about your question about Israel's international standing and so on, it's something that I had to deal with extensively as Ambassador here. And people don't realize we Israelis often talk about us fighting on seven fronts. That's a military campaign, Hamas, Hezbollah and the rest of the Iranian axis. But there is another front, which is an international front, a campaign to delegitimize the State of Israel, to cast us as an immoral entity. And this is another war that we have to fight in parallel with narratives and perceptions. And I think we should do a better job at that.

**Kelly**

Your questions. Saw this gentleman in the front center here first. Please keep it short. Please keep it a question.

**Unnamed Audience Member**

My question is directed at Brett on looking back at your time at the White House, what's your biggest regret on Abraham Accords expansion and the lack thereof during your tenure?

**McGurk**

I think we did a lot of work to set the conditions for which I think eventually will happen. I gotta say this issue is kind of described as we were, like chasing this white whale. Israel came to us early, and other countries, including Saudi Arabia, came as early as if they help us kind of facilitate and we did. I wish it was done. It suddenly became front page news, like the whole thing. It should have been done much more quietly, and it should be done quietly, and I think ultimately it will happen. So what knocked it off was Hamas. Look, Hamas does not want that vision for the region, and Iran does not want that vision for the region. And I think the fact that you now have a much stronger Israel and a strong Israel-US relationship is important. I think those deals eventually will happen, not in the media term, but looking over the coming months and years, I think we'll eventually get there once, Gaza, but Gaza has to get into a cease fire, that war is to end.

### **Unnamed Audience Member 2**

Thank you very much for the information. Back to the conference. It says we have to rethink organizations and the way we've done things here in the States and how we rebuild nations, et cetera. The panel is "Crossroads for Israel," and back to the point on the front, the different front wars we are fighting here in Israel, not only the government or the political wars, but America. On October 8, college campuses and American kids all over America chanted "Death to Israel" and all sorts of the Intifada and all sorts of things. And the media, to this day, says things like the detainees in Gaza instead of the hostages. So my question is to the panel, whoever wants to answer it, what are we? What are we to tell our college students, university heads, the people in Qatar that are funding these programs and funding these things, and the media in America that continues to demonize Israel inadvertently or advertently, but they do it, and that's a big war. That's the biggest war I think we have to fight right now.

### **Kelly**

You want to take that one?

### **Senor**

Yeah, I, other than the shock of the shattering of Israel in the Day on October 7, the days after. What was most jarring to me was I honestly, naively, I say now, naively, believed that the outrage of the world after October 7 would be directed at those massacring Jews. I did not think the outrage of the world would be directed at Jews for objecting to being massacred. But that's exactly what happened, including on college campuses. And to be clear, when questions about the moral stakes and should Israel be concerned about the moral stakes, the heated rhetoric and accusations apartheid, genocide, all of that war crimes that we're hearing today, we were hearing being thrown at Israel, held at Israel on October 8, at Harvard, in Times Square, at this Melbourne orchestra, symphony or Opera House in Australia. There were chants outside the Opera

House. "Gas the Jews." I mean, this is October 7. For reasons that are beyond the scope of this conversation, brought something to the surface that was not about Israel's the way Israel has operated in Gaza. It was like it was triggered by the attack and Israel is Jews being under siege. Was the trigger moment for the kind of the trying to drive Jews underground. As it relates to colleges, you know, there's a reckoning in higher education right now, in elite higher education, happening on a range of fronts. And I would just say, rather than focusing on which foreign government is funding which college campus, I mean, it's not a waste of time. Look at that. But we all, I'm sure many people in this room are trustees of universities and donors to universities, and parents of students who are going to universities, these elite universities, what we've been raised to believe are elite universities are making our kids dumber. They are making our kids dumber. Now they're just indoctrinating them. They are making them dumber and so and so. If Jews are not comfortable at these universities, and they shouldn't be, they should go to other universities. There are plenty of rising star post secondary institutions of higher education around the country, especially in the south, the some that have really been like, you know, rising the last couple years, and I think investing in institutions that are actually have a real sense about the difference between right and wrong, and actually believe in defending Western civilization and not attacking it every day, and tendering professors that attack Western civilization every day are worthy of the support of people in the room and this room of people you know.

### **Kelly**

If I may, I would add Jews, and I'm sure you would agree Jews should be welcome at all American universities, as should everyone. Last question, this gentleman right here in the blazer. Yes, sir?

### **Edward Joseph**

Thank you very much. Mary Louise, Edward Joseph, Johns Hopkins SAIS. Question for General Yadin and maybe Ambassador Herzog would like to answer as well. You mentioned the Iranian uranium stockpile as the key reason why Israel needed to act. I believe you mentioned in your New York Times out there as well. Of course, that uranium stockpile now is missing, although perhaps Israeli knows more about that. So what can you say about continuing uranium capacity in the nuclear realm? And I would give you the opportunity and Ambassador Herzog, to address the argument that you hear, that you know, with respect to the Iranian nuclear program, Israel and the region and the United States would still be better off under the Obama JCPOA. Anything you want to say about Syria, you're welcome. So thank you.

### **Kelly**

General? Feel free to make news; where is the missing uranium?

**Yadlin**

I think the missing uranium is not, was not the target or the objective of the attack. When you develop a nuclear bomb, if you are not a nuclear engineer, you need the fissile material. You need all the bomb, the weaponization, the core that is transferred from 90% gas enriched uranium into a metal, and then the implosion, and then the fusion, and then integration into a missile and all this very complex kind of system was attacked. Nobody thought that you can destroy the 60% enriched uranium, which was nothing, if you cannot enrich it to 90% and weaponize it. So the question, and then I want to go into a more important issue, whether we move them back a couple of months, as New York Times and CNN are saying, or two or three years, as the President and folks are saying, it's not important. What is important is what next, what kind of agreement there will be achieved. It must be better than the JCPOA of 2015. That was not a bad agreement, but it was a good agreement for the first seven years, and a catastrophic agreement to the last seven years. So if we close the loopholes in the JCPOA, which is inspection everywhere, every time, no sunset, no release of the limitation, no sunset, and no weaponization, as it was not covered well in the JCPOA. Then the attack achieved its goal to stop Iran for reaching the nuclear bomb. However, the ball is in the Iranian yard. They may decide not to come to negotiate. They may decide to try and re-establish the program. Then the ball is again in Jerusalem, and this what are we doing? If we see the Iranians going forward, it is not going to be easy for them, because for the first time, the Iranians know that what they thought before was wrong, that America has the capability but don't have the will, and Israel has the will but not have the capability. Now they know Israel has the capabilities and America may have the will, so they have to be very careful, and it's up to us whether we can enforce them not to go forward again into the goal that they only have to it was an empty goal that they only, have to decide to go to the bomb, and they were there without capability to stop them that we have now.

**Kelly**

Ambassador, a final thought?

**Herzog**

Yeah, so, there are a couple of questions that surround the Iranian issue following the war. First question is, what are the residual capabilities that are left in Iran in terms of uranium stockpiles, centrifuges, nuclear infrastructure, missile infrastructure and so on? I believe, for one, that we hit them very hard and took them, you know, way back. But we don't have the full answer, because a lot of this is buried underground. It will take months to get to it. So we don't have the full answer. To the second question, what impact did this war have on the Iranian thinking, strategy and planning ahead that those



who think that it will motivate Iran to raise to a nuclear device so that they can announce it and then immunize themselves against attack like North Korea? I, for one, think differently. I think very slow and very careful, because they are deterred, because they are exposed, because we can fly over Iran at will, and because they know that what Israel and the US did to them, we can do it again. So they have to be very careful. And that has to be factored into the picture when you talk about the time span. The third question is, how do we maintain the achievement of the war. And here, there are two causes of action. One is to get Iran back to the table and secure a deal, a different one than the JCPOA, no enrichment in Iran and intrusive inspection. And the other, there are people in Israel who are not in love with this option, because Iran is left to give and they will want, such as relief, and with that money, they can build off capabilities. But the alternative is to enforce our interests so that they cannot rebuild their capabilities. It's also complicated, 1000 miles away. Many dilemmas: what you hit, what you don't hit, they will fire back, challenges. Fourth question that I want to raise, I don't want to discuss it, what impact will they serve on the Iranian internal scene, because the regime, I believe, lost the majority of the population, there is a deep divide, and I hope that this war will deepen that divide.

**Kelly**

To be continued in the Iran panel that is still ahead of us in the forum thank you to you all, thanks for.