

October 11, 2023 Nixon Seminar Transcript

[music]

[00:06:55]

President Nixon: ...there were 85 Soviet ships in the Mediterranean that on those ships, among other things, were helicopters and landing barges, and that 3 Soviet airborne divisions, 50,000 men had been placed on alert. We could not allow the Soviet Union to intervene unilaterally there, because if they had, we would have been forced to intervene. I know that Senator Mansfield had told us earlier in the month, right after the war, he said, "We don't want another Vietnam there." But another member of Congress who was in the majority on the Democratic side made it very clear in contrast, he said, "We want to be sure that Israel continues to have support." And I said, "I will not let Israel go down the tube."

And I knew that under the circumstances we could not stand by and let the Soviet Union move in, and that would risk a world war. So one of the circumstances, therefore, I approved an alert, alert of our forces, nuclear and conventional. A couple of days after that, Russians backed down, and finally the cease fire went into place. This is all by now the 26th of October, only 20 days after the Yom Kippur War began. November 1st, the tide had changed by that time, the cease fire was in place. Golda Meir shortly after that flew into Washington, thanked me very generously for the support we had given. And November the 7th, after a time elapsing of 6 years, Egypt and the United States normalized their relations. And Henry Kissinger started on his very successful shuttle trip.

Summarizing it all, I think it's very important to note here two things. One, this is not a demonstration of the [inaudible 00:08:47]failing, but succeeding. Unless I had had the personal relationship with Brezhnev, unless he knew from what I had said to him at Camp David that we would not stand by unless I had developed that kind of relationship, and unless he was looking forward to another summit the next year, I do not think that we would have been successful in keeping them out [inaudible 00:09:09]. The second point is that we handled the whole situation in a way that saved Israel, but at the same time did not totally alienate the Egyptians because the Israelis, by the time the cease fire occurred, had all totally surrounded the Egyptian Third Army, which was on the other side of the Suez Canal.

So they held back, and the Egyptians were appreciative of that. And so as a result, this was one of those wars which ended with peace without victory. And peace without victory is virtually...you could have too great a victory. If it is too great, what happens is you plant the seeds for another war.

Mary: Good evening and welcome to the Nixon Seminar on conservative realism and national security. I'm your host, Mary Kissel, with Stephens. That video clip that we just saw featured President Nixon talking about how the United States aided Israel during the Yom Kippur War some 50 years ago. And today Israel is once again attacked and at war. And that is the subject

of our discussion tonight. We welcome our co-chairs, Ambassador Robert O'Brien, and Secretary Mike Pompeo, our distinguished seminar members, and you, our viewers.

Tonight, I'd like to start with opening statements from our co-chairs, given the gravity of what we saw over the weekend. Secretary Pompeo, if you'd kick us off, please.

Sec. Pompeo: Well, Mary, thank you. And I know everyone watching, and I know all my colleagues on this tonight, all are here with a heavy heart. We now have close to 2000 murdered innocents in Israel, a couple of dozen of them American. We now have 100 plus hostages, perhaps a dozen or more of them, blue passport holders as well. This is a serious event that will change the Middle East for an awfully long time. And we have an administration that has taken a posture which hasn't recognized the actual actor that caused this harm. They refuse to refer to the Islamic Republic of Iran as the prime generator of this terror that's now done all the horrific things that we have watched in these videos, all the stories now from those who survived from the festival in the Negev. We know the cause of this. Well, I'm sure we'll get a chance to talk about this.

But this was also a failure of deterrence. And so while I am confident that the Israelis will do good work in pushing back against Hamas, we all need to figure out how it's the case that this was permitted to take place. And what was it that we lost? When I was listening to that clip of President Nixon, I was thinking how different the Middle East is today than it was then, 50 years ago. There was enormous opportunity in the Middle East. We built out the Abraham Accords. We were on a pathway towards creating more stability, more peace, a heck of a lot more prosperity. That has been interrupted.

And I was thinking of President Nixon being just a little too self-congratulatory, saying, "Gosh, we came to the rescue." But in fact, it was another example of deterrence having failed. That is the bad actors that moved on Israel 50 years ago didn't see the threat, didn't understand that America would come. And I think what we saw this past weekend on October 7th was the Iranian regime doesn't think that the United States will come for them either. And that absence of deterrence has now caused an enormous calamity in the nation of Israel, and big challenges not just for Israel and the Middle Eastern countries, Gulf Arab states included, but for Europe and the United States as well.

Mary: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Ambassador O'Brien, over to you.

Amb. O'Brien: Thank you. I echo all of Mike's comments. And I just want to say, and I know I speak for everyone on this video conference tonight, Israel is a very special place. I've been there many, many times. Mike has, others on the call have. I know Morgan's been there a lot. We love the people of Israel, and our heart just go out to them. What we saw over the weekend was not war. It was barbarism. Mike was a soldier. I was a soldier. John Noonan, who I think is on the line, was an airman. This isn't how war's conducted. This is just slaughter of innocent

people. And it has to be rebuked with all of the means of national power, both of Israel and the United States.

Let me go back to the 30,000 foot level here. We're in [inaudible 00:13:50] great power competition. America has three primary adversaries. We've got Russia, China, which are great powers, and Iran, which is a regional hegemon. And right now of those three great powers, Russia has invaded Ukraine. Iran has essentially invaded Israel through its kasbah, through its proxy Hamas, and it's threatening Israel with its two proxies, Syria and Hezbollah. And we're waiting for the other shoe to drop in the Indo-Pacific, because Xi Jinping is watching what's happening. He's watching us occupied in Ukraine and now in the Middle East. And how long is it going to be before he goes through with his plans to either blockade, or take great major activities, or even go with a full style Normandy invasion of Taiwan? And we know he's watching what's happening.

This is all happening as the [inaudible 00:14:40] perception of American weakness. I used to start my cabinet meeting and my staff meetings with our senior staff, and I don't know if Julia or any of my other senior staffers are on the line from the NSC, but I used to say, "Weakness is provocative." And even the perception of weakness in international affairs is provocative. [inaudible 00:14:59] These aren't clichés. It's how the world works. When America is strong, America is safer, and the American people are safer, and our allies and partners are safer.

So how did we get here with Iran? And I'm just going to call it as I see it. This is Iran, this is Hamas, this is a tool, as Secretary Pompeo pointed out, of Iran. We got here when the new administration took office, Iran had \$4 billion in foreign reserves, barely enough to keep their economy functioning. They now have over \$70 billion in foreign reserves because the United States decided to turn a blind eye to sanctions enforcement. And in fact, we even encourage implicitly Iran to continue to pump oil. So Iran's gone from 400,000 barrels a day to 3 million barrels a day, generating tremendous revenue for this regime.

We begged them on bended knee to rejoin the JCPOA, and they blew us off because they knew they didn't need it any more. We actually have an Iran lobby, as was reported by Semaphore [SP] in the United States government. The chief of staff of the special operations and low intensity conflict department at the D.O.D. has been communicating with the Iranian government about how she should act in public. This is some of the top secret clearance. We're talking about potentially even a hostage rescue in Israel. And the person, the civilian officer in charge of that...those soldiers has a chief of staff has been identified as being part of the "lobby," the Iran lobby in the U.S. government, he is the U.S. government employee.

We then gave them \$6 billion in ransom for hostages. Now, the administration has spent the entire weekend, instead of condemning Hamas and backing up Israel, trying to explain the \$6 billion that they gave Iran was not a ransom payment. They think the American people are stupid. Whether it's unfrozen funds, or a gift, or a ransom payment, whatever you want to call it, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck. And the American people may not have

gone to Yale Law School, but they understand that money is fungible. So when you give the Iranians \$6 billion and say, "You can use that for food," the Iranians [inaudible 00:17:06] taking \$6 billion, they weren't spending on food, they were spending on terrorism.

And what I said at the time, the reason I came out against the deal, I welcome our American dual citizens home, there are dual citizens, just like the Americans is currently held hostage by Hamas, are dual Israeli-American citizens. Those citizens were dual U.S. Iranian citizens. We welcome them home. We're happy to see them on. Mike and I worked very hard to get them all, and we didn't. [inaudible 00:17:28] finally back. But I said two things are going to happen. Number one, you're going to create a market for future hostage taking because you've just put a billion [inaudible 00:17:36] passport when we never paid a dime in the Trump administration for ransom. But you're also going to fund terrorism, and people are going to die as a result of it.

Now, I made those points. I made them very publicly in tweets and in the news media. What I didn't understand, I didn't get at the time is how quickly and how vividly both those points would be illustrated by this attack over the weekend in Israel. More hostage taking and terrorism, the likes of which we haven't seen since the Second World War, when SS divisions would move in behind the [inaudible 00:18:08] and eliminate entire villages and kill families in their homes, like we saw this past weekend.

So, look, we've got to give...let me wrap up by saying we give Israel our total support. This war is not going to be a two-week war. What's happened in the past when Israel's defended itself and sought to restore deterrence or eliminate its adversaries? After about a week or two, the international community gets together. The U.N. says, "Okay, enough is enough." Well, we've been with Ukraine, and I've been a strong supporter of Ukraine from the start. We've been with Ukraine for a year and a half through very troubled, difficult times we've been giving Ukraine over \$150 billion in U.S. taxpayer money. We've been partners with Israel since we first recognized them in 1948 by President Truman.

We need to stick with Israel at least as long as we stuck with Ukraine. And so in two weeks, in four weeks, in two months, in two years, when Israel's battling to eliminate Hamas and eliminate the terrorists that conducted this barbarism in Israel, we've got to have their backs and we've got to be with them as long as it takes. And there are going to be calls for a cease fire, there are already people calling for a cease fire. That would be like the Emperor Hirohito calling for a cease fire the day after Pearl Harbor was bombed. There can't be a cease fire until Hamas is eliminated. And once Hamas is eliminated and the Palestinians have a responsible government, then we can start talking about a cease fire.

So, again, I'll just wrap up with letting our Israeli friends, our Jewish friends know... And by the way, just a point outside of Israel. We've seen horrific demonstrations in London and Sydney, even in our own country, in New York and Detroit, people rallying around Hamas. We saw posters and leaflets in Chicago with paragliders and holding the Palestinian flag, referring to the paragliders who attacked the innocent youth at the music peace festival, and slaughtered 250,

and took an untold number of hostage. We saw leaflets celebrating those Palestinian terrorists in our own city streets.

So there's a reason Israel exists. It exists to be a homeland for the Jewish people and a refuge and a safe haven. And if there's ever an illustration of why the Jewish people need a safe haven, it's the demonstrations that we've seen around the world following this attack of people actually coming out in support of the slaughter that was so despicable. And so we've got to have our Israeli friends make sure that Israel stays the safe haven for the Jewish people, but we've also got to fight anti-Semitism and fight hatred here in America and in our allied countries. So [crosstalk 00:20:41]...

Mary: Thank you, Ambassador O'Brien. Sure.

Amb. O'Brien: ...a few comments. And God bless you, and God bless Israel.

Mary: Thank you, Ambassador O'Brien, for that really comprehensive statement. There's a lot there, and we've got a short period of time to dive into it all. Secretary Pompeo, while we have you, I want to ask you, given your experience not just as secretary of state, but as former CIA director, and someone who has really intimate knowledge of the workings in Tehran, can you explicate why Iran is involved and how they are involved? Because you've heard a lot of commentators out there, and even our own administration saying that there's no really direct evidence here of Iran's involvement. Can you respond to that?

Sec. Pompeo: You bet, Mary. They're putting a lot of weight on the word direct there. Iran obviously had direct involvement here. Iran is the primary cash generator for not only the terrorists in the Gaza Strip, but Hezbollah, the Shia militias that were firing artillery at our embassy. Mary, you'll remember that when we were in service. Artillery rounds flying into the U.S. embassy in Baghdad. The Houthis fired missiles out of Yemen into Saudi Arabia with great frequency. They're the underwriter, so they're the banker, the financier. Second, they also, and we've seen reporting in "The Wall Street Journal," I don't have any access to classified information, we've seen pretty good reporting suggesting that the IRGC was having their confab in Lebanon, directing, training, preparing, coaching.

The fact that they were able to pull this off in a way that was clearly very OPSEC friendly, that is a...doesn't appear that the intelligence services had at least detailed knowledge of what was about to take place suggests a pretty high level of sophistication, detailed planning, much of which almost certainly took place outside of the Gaza Strip. So it would be not in the watchful eye of the Israelis. And then we also should just take the Iranians and leaders of Hamas at their word. They've all until the last 72 hours, when they realized maybe that's a bad place to be, they've all acknowledged their complicity and their partnerships alongside of each other.

Iran's objective has been pretty clear. They talk about their five capitals strategy, and their effort has been too successful. And then we can see from this past weekend, the Israelis must have

become just a tad complacent about their ability to use technology along defence line there. And the terrorists were able to, with Iranian help, do an enormous amount of damage

Mary: On that point, John Noonan, I'm wondering if you could follow up the Secretary, and talk a little bit about that enormous damage and the operational elements. What did you learn from this attack?

John: Sure. Honor to go after Secretary Pompeo. And look, I think I was shocked by the scope of the devastation. I think, frankly, Hamas was shocked at how effective they were given prior ineffective attempts to infiltrate Israel. It was a battalion sized incursion. The casualty count on the Israeli side continues to climb. They infiltrated the fences along multiple ingress points. They used paragliders, which was an innovative technique to soar over the fence and into Israel proper. They used techniques that, to piggyback off Ambassador O'Brien comments and the Secretary's comments, had to have come from Iranian training. Things like using drones to carry small explosive munitions of grenade size or higher to neutralize some of the sensors along Israel's fence.

And I have heard, I haven't been able to confirm this, but I have heard from people in Israel that one of the big problems was the Israelis fell back and relied a bit too much on technology, a little too much on sensors along the fence, a little too much on artificial intelligence to do the monitoring of some of those critical zones inside Gaza. And Hamas was able to swiftly exploit that, take advantage of Israel's distraction on a vacation, and wreak untold devastation.

I will just finish with this, Mary. There will be a series of reviews executed by the Israeli government, tries to ascertain what went wrong here. I want to be cautious not to point fingers at the Israelis or the Israeli intelligence services. Some of you may know that or may remember that we had our own problem with this 20 years ago on September 11th. This is Israel's 9/11. We had the 9/11 Commission Report where we did a whole of government analysis of what went wrong. We can expect the Israelis to do so as well. And I think we'll find the findings quite interesting. And I think you can expect, the only prediction I'll make is I think you can expect to find the linkages between this attack and Iran to be much sharper and much clearer than they are now.

Mary: Well, we won't know until that time comes, but thank you, John. That's a fascinating analysis. And just to build on that, while there's been a lot of attention to the killings at that music festival, and in the towns and cities just outside the Strip, very few were paying attention to the fact that Hamas actually seized territory inside Israel, as well as military installations for many hours. Morgan Ortagus, I want to bring you in, former State Department spokeswoman. How did you read these attacks? What are the lessons you're taking away?

Morgan: It's interesting what John was just saying. Remember, pre...or after 9/11, we also realized that we had depleted too much of our human intelligence in the '90s after the fall of the wall. At the time we thought we could rely on more technologies. And then I think back to the

beginning of the Trump administration, when Secretary Pompeo was then director of the CIA, and had to rebuild the intelligence against Iran and had to literally, as he talked about in his book, pull people out of the basement to rebuild that team so that we could have the collection that we used to have on the regime. So it has happened to us clearly as well.

It's funny, I've often said to people who work for me, graveyards are full of indispensable people. And what I mean by that, when I say that is like, listen, we're all doing our part, we're all doing our job, but we can all easily be replaced, myself included. The one thing that I've learned over this past week, and I was just in the Middle East [inaudible 00:27:37] on the phone, is that's not true because if Mike Pompeo was the secretary of state, and if President Trump was still in office, we wouldn't have had Afghanistan, we wouldn't have had Russia in Ukraine, and we would not have had the worst annihilation and killing of the Jewish people since the Holocaust.

It wouldn't have happened on his watch. And that's what has haunted me over the past week, knowing that it didn't have to happen. And I don't want to be political at a time like this when we've lost at least 22 Americans, We don't know how many more are potentially held hostage. And we're praying for everybody who is going through the efforts to try and get them out. And I don't want to play politics whenever there's been so many people that have died. But leadership matters. Policy matters. And incredibly poor policymaking, not just with Iran, which is what we're talking about here, but going up to how they treated the fall of Kabul, how they treated the Taliban, how they told the Ukrainians, they stopped the military aid and said, "We will give you military aid after the Russians invade."

And we have had failure after failure after failure of deterrence. And just to think, three years ago, I sat at the White House with most of you on this call, and we watched the historic Abraham Accords signed, the first peace deals between Israel and Arab states in 26 years. And I was very visibly pregnant at the time with my little girl, who is now almost three. And I remember thinking at the time, "What a world she gets to grow up in. I get to tell her that you used to have to have two different passports to go to Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem, and she's no longer going to have to do that." And in just three years, because of a failure of leadership, I have to explain what happened on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War.

And I say all that to say because I'm scared to death now of what could inevitably happen in the Pacific. I don't know that anybody is deterred. And I don't know that any of the actions, essentially excusing Iran's behavior, I don't see how that is doing anything to restore deterrence. So the administration needs to figure out what it is. I certainly know what Robert O'Brien and Secretary Pompeo would do. And I'm heartbroken for the Jewish people. And I just said to someone today, what is the difference between my three year old Jewish daughter and the three year olds that were killed or held hostage this weekend in Israel? Nothing. There's no difference. I just happen to live in America.

Mary: It's very moving, Morgan. Thank you. I'm hearing several common themes here as the seminar members talk. First is obviously the culpability of Iran, as Secretary Pompeo explained.

But secondly, the sophistication of Hamas' attack, and the horrible barbarism that happened there. But thirdly, and Morgan, you raised this, and it's just so important is the fact that it's not a bilateral issue. It's something that has regional implications and global implications, frankly. And I want to bring in Alex Wong to speak a bit to that. Alex, you had Iran and Saudi Arabia, the leaders of those two countries on a phone call. What does that say to you? And please explain a little bit more about the regional implications.

Alex: It's important to look at that because as Morgan was saying, look, agency matters and the United States policy and strategy in the Middle East matters, and it has not just long term consequences, but immediate consequences. And you look at this Saudi-Iranian call between the crown prince of Saudi Arabia and the president of Iran, the first since diplomatic relations were restored. And the readout of that is worrisome. It talks about Muslim world solidarity in the face of this Gaza war now. I don't know what that means, but I think it highlights, and it's worth going back to why in recent years, we've seen greater stability, greater peace, and greater encroachment between Saudi Arabia and our Gulf allies in Israel.

It's, in large part, because of U.S. support for Israel, no daylight with Israel, making Israel strong, and at the same time isolating Iran, where our Gulf allies saw that the strong horse, the strong partner, the more prosperous partner for them as far as creating a brighter future for Middle East, as well as balancing Iran, was Israel. And that was a sea change in strategy in the Middle East. But what we have seen since President Biden has come into office is an isolation of Saudi Arabia, and at the same time an appeasement of Iran under a theory that Iran and Saudi Arabia need to "share the neighborhood," something that President Obama explicitly stated, and President Obama supposedly stated creating daylight with Israel.

And that has been the policy pursued by the Biden administration as a revival of the Obama strategic view of the Middle East. And I think what we're seeing now, and I hope it's not true, but what I think we're seeing now is the beginnings of a reversion to what we had seen in the past two generations of an isolated Israel and a Muslim world that is as being forced to take sides against Israel and against the United States and against the free world.

The strategy of America here, and I hope this is not true in the long term, but the indications from this phone call and what we are seeing now is that the strategy of the Biden administration, the fruits of this, of trying to raise Iran as a balancing power in the Middle East, and to isolate Saudi Arabia has created the conditions where we might be reverting back to another two generations or more of conflict, and tension, and an isolated ally in Israel in the Middle East. I hope that's not true. But as Morgan said, agency matters. And I fear that the agency here and the results of the Biden administration policy will be disastrous.

Mary: Secretary Pompeo, what implications does this have for U.S. support of Kiev and pushing back on Putin's war in Ukraine?

Sec. Pompeo: Goodness. It's hard to know. Maybe a little early to say, but we know a couple of facts that I think are certainly relevant. One, I saw a statement from Putin today. He was kind of mocking the fact that we've moved significant pieces of our naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean. His mocking was something along the lines of nobody cares. Like, who are we? What do you think you're doing moving two aircraft carriers near this place. And it's not that they're not scared of the aircraft carriers, it's that they're concerned about the decision making that sits behind that is the willingness to actually use them in a way that delivers deterrence.

Second, we know that Iran has been providing weapon systems. So one of the things that people, I think, forget about the JCPOA is that it was time limited with respect to conventional weapon systems. It's one of the things that we all worked on, Robert was working alongside it with me. One of the reasons we were in opposition to this and tried to actually execute snapback was to prevent it being lawful for the Iranians to deliver conventional weapon systems, put aside their nuclear program to the Russians. And we have, of course, seen the Iranian factories that are underwritten by the absence of effective sanctions enforcement, that is, they have more money to build stuff, then delivered into the theater in support of Vladimir Putin's effort to terrorize the Ukrainian civilians in the same way that the Hamas terrorist terrorized the people of Israel.

I want to come back to one thing that's very related to this. There's something about the confidence game in the security world, right? There's this idea that people have to have confidence, not only that there is a model out there for deterrence, but they have to have confidence in their own leadership. I am certainly witnessing lots of hard questions being asked about the leadership in Israel, the leadership in the region. I'm confident, to your point about the strong [inaudible 00:36:33] earlier, Alex. They're asking, is America really going to be that? Do they have confidence that the West will fight back against this?

And I'll give you one more data point that is very relevant to this. When we first came in, when I became CIA director, ISIS owned a significant piece of Syria, and we built out a coalition against what everybody said was possible. Everybody said the Trump administration was about going alone, right? America first, America alone. We built out a coalition of 60 plus countries, many of them Islamic countries that defeated some folks that were beheading people all across the Middle East. I wonder if it's the case that America can lead a coalition like that against this particular threat. I pray that it's so because it is going to be required.

This is how you convince the Islamic countries, not just those in the Middle East, think Malaysia, think Indonesia, think Pakistan, think all of the other places with large Islamic population, with large Muslim populations. They too, need to understand that America is going to be strong in pushing back against terrorist threats from whatever nature, whether there's a European threat, like Vladimir Putin, or a threat in the Middle East, like Iran.

Mary: But what can we learn from President Nixon and the Yom Kippur War back in 1973? Elbridge Colby, you're a historian. What are the lessons that you could take away from President Nixon the last time Israel was so very threatened?

Elbridge: Great. Well, thanks, Mary. And let me join the others in just expressing my sympathies for what's going on in Israel. And my strong support for American, strong support for our very close ally, Israel, and its defense in what will be a difficult time going forward. I don't think, unfortunately, there's going to be an easy resolution to this. And I think that's... If you look at the historical... I mean, obviously Hamas intended or knew what it was doing attacking on the 50th anniversary, but the parallels are quite significant.

I mean, I've heard some things similar to what John said about Hamas being surprised, which itself is something also akin to what happened in 1973 that the Arabs themselves may have been somewhat surprised. I think a lesson there is that we should not be deluded into thinking that at least operational surprise is impossible in the contemporary world of AI and so forth. If you just don't use phones and you take precautions and you figure it out, what we're looking for in the indicators we're observing. I think it's a fundamental from what I'm reading, and I'm not there, and I have been speaking to some in Israel who are very well connected there. But my impression is it's a really forceful body blow to Israeli confidence.

I mean, I was there in June. I had the pleasure and honor of going with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies on a trip and had meetings with a range of Israeli leaders. And look into the West Bank, and across the northern border. And the general impression, I certainly didn't see any reason why they were wrong, but there was a sense of confidence about having the situation under control. I mean, there wasn't a sense that I picked up that there was any kind of near term political solution to the problem with the Palestinians and so forth. But basically, the situation was under control. And the security situation, there haven't been significant terrorist attacks in Green Line, Israel, I think, for something like two decades or almost two decades. I may have that wrong, but that was sort of the impression.

And that has obviously been blown apart, that confidence and sense of societal peace and confidence. And as you point out, Mary, I mean, Hamas, which is the weakest or weaker of the two fronts compared to Hezbollah, did seize and hold territory, including senior IDF commander, or fairly senior IDF commanders, and interrupted their operations and so forth. So I think it makes perfect sense that the Israelis are looking to go in and deliver a very strong message. That said, I sympathize with our predicament that Ariel Sharon, [inaudible 00:40:45] of a dove withdrew from Gaza for reasons. I assume Hamas knows that, that they assume that Israel does not want to go back to managing Gaza. So I'm not sure what...

And I'm looking at their stated goal of destroying Hamas, and I certainly sympathize with that and support it. But it'll be interesting to see and important to see how they define that. The other major factor, I mean, people have mentioned Iran rightly, and of course that's the major backer and complicit party here, but also more directly Hezbollah on the northern front. And that 1973

war is the ultimate examples for Israel, but for really anybody looking at a very desperate two-front situation. One of the most interesting things, I've done some pretty deep study of the 1973 war was to be up at the Golan and at the border where there are still burned out IDF tanks, and I think probably some Syrian tanks that are sitting there, and are mined, etc. And you can see the bunkers and so forth, it's quite stirring and admirable, the heroic stand of the IDF soldiers who came off vacation and went up the hills and went right to the fight. And one tank holding off dozens of Syrian tanks and so forth.

But that is the situation that I assume Israel does not want. I am concerned thus far Hezbollah, it seems like it's been largely symbolic artillery, and just kind of maybe smaller rocket fire across the border. The longer it goes on... I saw Frank McKenzie, former CentCom commander, was saying that that maybe Hezbollah will wait till the IDF be bloodied in the south, in Gaza. My instinct, and he's got more military experience than I do, but my instinct would be that it would be more difficult for Israel to handle simultaneous threats.

So the longer Hezbollah waits, and the fact that Israel is mobilizing 300,000 plus reservists, obviously that imposes a tax on the economy. But once those people are mobilized, Israel will be less vulnerable. But I think... And this is, of course, where Iran comes in. And then stepping back, and again drawing to President Nixon's comments about Soviet intervention. I mean, Michael Barone had a very good piece that just came out in "Washington Examiner" comparing it to the world crisis in the 1930s. And I don't think that's an exaggeration. I think you really have a sense, and other shoes are going to drop, I fear, in the relatively near future.

The one I'm most focused on is Taiwan. But Alex and I were just talking about the Korean Peninsula. And influence can only go so far, but [inaudible 00:43:17] if Iran benefits? Well, Russia also has benefited and no one benefits more than China. And I think there is a degree of collaboration there that we now need to recon and deal with.

Alex: Can I follow up on that, Mary?

Mary: Yes, please.

Alex: On Hezbollah, as many are, the opening of the second front to the north with tens of thousands of rockets from Hezbollah is worrisome. But the perfunctory attacks that we've seen from Hezbollah is simply that. They are trying to signal some political support for what's going on. But they are, as Elbridge said, watching and waiting and to evaluate, A, what the Israeli response is, and B, what the success and strength of the Israeli response is. And if it is strong, they will stay back. They do not want to get to a site where they themselves are decimated. I question how much coordination has actually been between Hezbollah and Hamas here. I think relatively little.

But if they see as Israel being bogged down both in terms of...in military terms, but also political terms, in PR terms, informational terms, they will be emboldened. They will see it as a

weakness. And a reason to perhaps think about opening up that second front. So I think that makes it incumbent upon the United States, incumbent on our allies and partners to grant material support, whatever it may need to Israel here to make sure this action is strong and successful. And so that in itself serves as a deterrent to Hezbollah, but at the same time provide political cover so that there is not seeming weakness or weakness among the international community that will give Hezbollah thoughts about opening up that second front.

Mary: Well, speaking of the United States, I again want to refer back to President Nixon. If you go back and read the papers, he wanted to surge support in immediately, even though he was really enmeshed in the Watergate scandal at the time. And even then, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger told him, "Well, there might be repercussions if we surge in supplies for Israel." It's the classic bureaucratic reaction. Ambassador O'Brien, for those that are watching, haven't served in government, don't know how this process works, can you please explain the level of support that President Biden has promised, and how that compares to what President Nixon provided some 50 years ago?

Amb. O'Brien: Well, I think back on that meeting with Henry and the President and the Secretary of Defense at the time, and Henry came with a list that the Israelis asked for, of all the equipment they needed, the platforms, the weapon systems. And Nixon looked at Henry and said, "Henry, double it." And then Henry said, "Okay," and they spoke for a moment. Then he said, "Send everything that flies, send every plane that flies to get it there now." And Henry started to talk to him about the implications of it, and the policy ramifications. And Nixon told him to get out of the office and get to work.

And you can just imagine the two of them, two great men, great leaders, and very sophisticated foreign policy minds with the President exercising his commander in chief role and saying, "Henry, get to work, get it done, double it. Send everything that flies, and go now, sort it out." I'm not sure we're seeing that leadership from the White House. I hope we are. I hope I'm wrong. I hope we'll find out in some future. But I would [inaudible 00:46:52] that President Biden told Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan and Lloyd Austin to get Israel everything they need. But it takes presidential leadership to make that happen. I mean, everybody on this call's been in government at the highest levels.

You have, Mary, everyone, of course, Secretary Pompeo has been in the room with the President when these sorts of decisions have been made. And you need that leadership, you need that command, because [inaudible 00:47:14] empower myself, or Secretary Pompeo, and the other principals to go back to their departments and agencies and say, "This has to be done, it has to be done now. And we're operating it with the highest authority available under the Constitution to make it so." And so it's my hope and pray that that's what's going on right now.

And that the same would be true for a hostage rescue. And I won't get into the details of it, but ought to get our elite hostage rescue elements forward. We have Americans being held hostage. This isn't just a Hamas-Israel issue now. It's a Hamas/Iran-American issue now. So we

need to get our diplomats forward. We need to get our...the hostages rescue elements [inaudible 00:47:49] forward, and be ready to rescue Americans. And again, that takes...to deploy those hostage rescue elements, that takes a presidential [inaudible 00:47:58] that's a national asset, a command asset, so the president has to give the order. And I hope that's being done because it starts at the top.

Mary: Well, when you think about those policy options, surging military support into Israel is one. Freezing the \$6 billion that is sitting in Qatar that was the hostage ransom payment seems like an obvious thing to do. But we have to be creative in how we pressure Iran, and how we pressure these terror groups to stop the fighting. Kim Reed [SP], you were just over in the Middle East. What options do we have? What kind of response did you get from your counterparts there?

Kim: Great to be with everyone this evening. So the Nixon Foundation, the Nixon Seminar, we were actually supposed to be in Israel right now, and obviously we're not. But as Morgan mentioned, Jim Byron, president of the Nixon Foundation, John Noonan, who's with us, Christopher Nixon Cox, President Nixon's grandson, Alex Gray, and myself, we were in Qatar. Qatar, we normalized relations with Qatar during the Nixon administration in 1972. They have a military base of ours. We worked very closely with them. And I know Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien dealt with them regularly and often.

And we were so honored to be in their country, learning about important things, and having all of a sudden this horrible incident happen. And along with the Nixon Seminar members also with us for a delegation of Congressional Chiefs of Staff and two members of Congress. And so we arrived before the incident happened. The attack happened. And then the Nixon Seminar members were having a lunch with Minister [inaudible 00:50:01] who's very interesting, and very focused, and is just an absolute excellent communicator on these issues, and the need for de-escalation.

Qatar sees itself almost as a Switzerland of the Middle East. They like to be a mediator. And so we were with him at lunch on Saturday just we were learning about all of this. And a response by the government had not been made at that point. And a few hours later, you may have heard, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement. And it says, "Qatar expresses concern over the developments in the Gaza Strip and calls for de-escalation. But notably, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs," and I quote, "holds Israel solely responsible for the ongoing escalation due to its ongoing violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, the latest of which was the repeated incursions into the al-Aqsa Mosque under the protection of the Israeli police."

So imagine, we're walking in with members of Congress and congressional staff and the Nixon Foundation members into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as we have this statement. And so the communications director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged again, they said it's their role, they hope to de-escalate by being the mediator. And the minister's communications director noted that Anthony Blinken actually had called the foreign minister at 2:00 a.m. and woke him

up to urge this, and that the Israelis had called to urge this. And part of the statement I just read, that statement, the Qatari said that they called Israel before putting the statement out.

So now I'm back in the United States, and we see a follow up to that statement, an explanation of that statement.

Mary: Kim, I just want to interrupt very briefly. When I hear the word de-escalation, it sounds to me like they just don't want the Biden administration to take significant action against Iran. Qatar is also the home to the Taliban. How much can we really trust what they're saying is genuinely in the interest of peace?

Kim: Well, I'll also defer to my two colleagues on the screen. But Qatar's 25 miles from Iran, and they are very aware of what Iran could do, not only to Israel but to the entire region. And they hold dear the relationship with the United States. So I'm just relaying to you what was relayed to us, and I'll call on others to read more into that. But a new statement has come out. And to reiterate that the Qataris current objectives are, one, to end the bloodshed as quickly as possible, to ensure that all combatants who entered Israeli lands return to Gaza immediately, secure the immediate release of all prisoners, especially civilian hostages, and to prevent any expansion of hostilities to Lebanon and the West Bank or regionally. And so that was sent out to various think tanks and others by Abdelaziz Al-Thani.

So that's...Qatar hopefully will play an important role, but my heart just aches for what's happening in this part of the world. And I have a little bit of good news. Not much, but I just want to pay tribute to some important work that Secretary Pompeo and Ambassador O'Brien and others on the Zoom today did during the Trump administration. So I'm going to read a tweet, a gentleman named Yitz Friedman, who's an American, tweeted today, "I would like to thank President Trump. After days of fear and anxiety in Israel, I am finally on my way home to the U.S. Almost every airline canceled all flights, including our flight home. We weren't sure what to do. Luckily, one of the few airlines still running flights is Emirates."

"My wife and I just flew from Tel Aviv - passing three or four armed military checkpoints to get to the airport - and are now safe in Dubai waiting for our connecting flight to the U.S. If not for the Trump Abraham Accords, this would be unthinkable. There would be no flights from Israel to the UAE. To be able to fly to a friendly Arab country when even American flights won't dare, at a time of war, is miraculous. Thanks to Trump's efforts, thousands of American citizens have a way home from a very dangerous situation. Even as it seems the Middle East is imploding, this historic peace agreement is making things a little better."

So before I end on that high note, I just also want to put on the map, going back to comments on what else is happening in the world. And so on October 17th and 18th, China is hosting its Belt and Road Forum. They're celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road. And we know what that is. We discussed that on this seminar. And the guest will be President Putin. He is going to attend on a rare trip abroad. And there will be representatives from countries in Latin

America and Africa. So the world is in a perilous situation right now. And we need strong, strong, strong leadership.

Mary: We certainly do. And Kim, you raise such an important point there of the difficult situation that some of these countries that sit so close to Iran do have. Secretary Pompeo, Kim mentioned the Abraham Accords. Was one of the points of this attack to derail Israeli-Saudi normalization? And is it dead for now, in your judgment?

Sec. Pompeo: Hard to know motivation. I suspect the timing, the noise surrounding the work that was going on between the kingdom, the United States and Israel may have had an impact on timing, but they've clearly been working on this for a while. I was reminded when I have heard people make that argument, no one knew we were working on the Abraham Accords. It may have been the only thing that didn't leak for four years. But we were working on it not to make a domestic political point, but to solve a problem that the Biden administration was running around the world saying, "We're going to get this done. We're going to get this done." Giving everyone who was adverse to it the opportunity to think, "How might we derail this?"

So very different set of processes and tactics surrounding their effort than the one we engaged in. We had it in a very small circle. We did our level best to make sure that nobody knew because we wanted it to be successful. And second, we also knew that gave space for our Arab partners to have a serious conversation about what it was needed to actually get them to the right place instead of us saying, "Oh, gosh, we're working on this. Isn't that's going to be great?" Putting enormous pressure from all the folks who want to put sand in the gearbox, and sand that they did put in the gearbox.

Having said that, I actually think that there is a real logic to what the Abraham Accords concluded with. I think there's a logic there that says that this is not shelved permanently. That in fact, if the world can stay strong in condemning what took place there, that the countries that are sitting in this very difficult position are being essentially forced to hedge with Iran because of American dalliances with the Iranians. This idea of balancing. I think they may come to see that there will be a different time, and there will be a different set of leaders in the West who are in a place where we can deliver these same outcomes.

And they will come to see what was pretty obvious, which was recognizing the right of Israel to exist is a pretty commonsense thing to do. And that whether that's the Saudis or other countries, including the Kuwaitis and others, I think they'll come to see that recognizing Israel's the right thing to do. So I am still hopeful that the Abraham Accords will not only continue but expand.

Mary: Well, that is unusually hopeful, Mr. Secretary, and I'm glad to hear it, although I guess we're going to really learn more as the situation evolves in the coming days. I want to bring back Alex Wong into the conversation. Alex, you thought a lot about how to deal with another very, very difficult regime, North Korea, and all the policy choices that you had to exert pressure on that regime. Are there any lessons there that could be transferred to the current situation?

Anything that can be done beyond sanctions, military support that we could be thinking about right now?

Alex: Yeah, I think it's important to note that with North Korea, the Trump administration and really Secretary Pompeo went into that engagement, went into that that pursuit of peace and that pursuit of denuclearization from a position of strength. We spent a year...more than a year in the Trump administration building sanctions to an unprecedented level, and building military deterrence to an unprecedented level, where our focus was to make the North Koreans worried. But it made our other other partners and countries in the region worried as well, where their incentive was to create political pressure, diplomatic pressure on North Korea to enter into talks that could have some positive outcome.

Now, we didn't get there, but we never let up on pressure. And that is key to indicate to the wider world, to any other actor, that if they pursue nuclear weapons or pursue any other bad action or policy that's in contravention of international norms, that they too would be subject to such pressure. And that kind of lesson brought to bear here, whether it's on Iran or whether it's on Hamas in Gaza, has to be thought of. It has to be from... The world wants peace. The world wants to prevent any types of the atrocities that we've seen over the past weekend. But you don't do that immediately by diving into diplomacy, or appeasement, or a cease fire, or a both sides type approach.

You effectuate that long-term stability, that long-term deterrence in that resetting of the norms at the level of the civilized world by being strong and setting the terms and indicating both to Hamas, to Iran, and to all the partners in the region. Those are the terms on which the United States, our allies, and our partners are going to operate on. And going back to what I was saying before, I think in significant part we're in this mess and other messes around the world because we departed or the Biden administration departed from a very simple axiom of the United States Marines is that America will provide, will be no better friend and no worse enemy. And departing from that has created the situation we're in.

And that's an approach, again, that we applied with North Korea. It's an approach that we should apply here. That broad approach, that broad principle should guide the policy going forward. And I fear that departing from it has created the situation that we have here and around the world.

Mary: John Noonan, do we have the stamina to do that today?

John: Look, it's a great question. Yeah, I think that we have the war in Ukraine, and that's placed considerable strain on our ammunition stockpiles. We've given about \$3 billion in aid to Israel. Their demands, I imagine, will be things that both the Ukrainians need and we need, which is precision guided munitions, interceptors. I think most of you recognize like Iron Dome, for example, is an example of that. South of the Korean Peninsula goes hot, all of a sudden, we are completely overwhelmed. I think it's very clear to me that America could have the stamina if it

decides to have the stamina. We need an arsenal of democracy to policy in the United States. We need to rekindle our defense arms manufacturing, a lot of it atrophied after the Cold War, we lost a lot of very good companies who were able to manage these supply chains. And frankly, keep not just America well-armed, but our friends well-armed as well. That's a possibility. If the Biden administration shows leadership to do it, if the Congress backs them, and I think that the American people are there indicative of polling and both support Israel, and about 70% support for Ukraine.

Mary: We've got four minutes left. I've got to show Elbridge in here before we go to the Secretary's closing statement.

Elbridge: Well, I was just going to agree with John. And I mean, I may differ with him and some others on particular points as we're dealing with the situation of scarcity that I think he rightly and honestly is pointing to. So kudos to that. But the real solution here is to regrow the defense industrial base so our forces have the peace through strength that Robert O'Brien is talking about. Harkening back President Reagan earlier...or President Nixon. But also to be able to support our allies. I mean, we want to support our very close ally, Israel, in its moment of need. But the central idea of Zionism and the Israeli state is they're going to fight their own wars. They're not going to rely on us. So if you look at Operation [inaudible 01:04:18] in 1973 that resupplied the Israelis, that was in a much different defense industrial context in the United States.

Now, the key here is I think that the American people don't see this as just pouring more money down the existing system. And John gestured in this direction. That if there's a way, and I think it can be to make the defense industrial base concept seem more equitable, more open, I'm not using that in the politically correct term, but more competition, not just benefiting the primes, helping to reindustrialize, bringing back blue collar jobs. I don't see why that can't be attractive across the [inaudible 01:04:50] and I were going back and forth in a debate, and then we ended up agreeing on this point. And it just seems like an equilibrium among Republicans, but also among a lot of Democrats and people like Ro Khanna. Why can't we get back? Then we won't have to have so much of these hard calls that unfortunately, we're going to live with for at least some time.

And what I don't get, and again, not to be political, as Morgan rightly put it, but I think...I don't...the president was getting very high in his horse yesterday, the other day, I think yesterday. And I thought to myself, "Why are you angry at the rest of us, you could have been building up the weapons that we don't have any of these problems. Don't berate the rest of us. We spent trillions of dollars in COVID aid, and basically none of that went to resuscitating our defense industrial base." And that should be something that everybody could get behind. And I think we have no more time. John is absolutely right. We know there are huge constraints and there's a big python that's digesting slowly in the defense industrial base. We need to be very forthright about that. I hope that's something that people across the political spectrum could get behind. Maybe not AOC, but a substantial majority.

Mary: Well, I guess it's easier when we have vigorous economic growth, which we unfortunately don't have. Secretary Pompeo, we've got a minute left. Over to you as our chair for final comments.

Sec. Pompeo: Thanks, Mary, and thanks to everyone. Elbridge and John, I couldn't agree with you more about this absolute necessity that we get this right. Forget the current conflicts. We need this right for those that lay ahead of us, and the deterrence necessary to prevent those from taking place. And my closing thought is this. I think you've heard uniformity here about what we all have observed over this last now handful of days. I hope that when we all gather again in a month, that we all share this same thing. This is going to be difficult. There are going to be moments.

We absolutely have the will in America to do this. And we should never forget that this isn't some faraway problem. There were 11, 14, 20 Americans killed. And when Hamas launched this attack, they surely knew that they would kill Americans. It wasn't that there was some American just randomly there. They knew there would be Americans killed as a result of this. And that's something that if America walks away from defending us wherever we may be, traveling, living, spending time in Dallas, Texas, this risk is real. And the United States has a responsibility to make sure that we protect our own sovereignty and our own people.

And I think there's no truer lesson about if we get that wrong, if we forget the importance of American leadership, it is exactly this kind of thing that we are doomed to repeat. And I pray that the American people will come to see that we can do this, we can protect America and we can get it right. It just takes leadership, and real resolve, and leaders that speak honestly about what it takes to actually deliver that.

Mary: Very well said. Our hearts go out to our Israeli friends. I want to thank Secretary Pompeo and his co-chair, Ambassador O'Brien. Thanks to our very distinguished Seminar members, the Nixon Foundation, and to you for watching. Please join us just in a week's time, October 18th to 19th, for the Grand Strategy Summit in Washington, D.C. Many of the seminar members, and the Secretary, and others will be speaking there. That's it for this month's seminar. We'll be back next month. I'm Mary Kissel. Goodnight.

[01:08:09]

[silence]