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### **CENTCOM after Midnight Hammer: Iran and the Evolving Security Landscape in the Middle East**

#### **Moderator:**

- Mr. Oren Liebermann, CNN

#### **Panelists:**

- Senator Joni Ernst, U.S. Senate, Iowa
- Senator Tim Kaine, U.S. Senate, Virginia
- Dr. H.R. McMaster, 25th U.S. National Security Advisor

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#### **Oren Liebermann:**

Thank you everyone for joining us. We'll be talking about the Middle East Operation Midnight Hammer, and we don't have a lot of time to figure out a region that has historically been somewhat complex and that has not changed. As a reminder, you can submit questions. I will try to get to these, but I can't make any promises at this moment. So let's get right into it.

We're six months on from Operation Midnight Hammer—and I'll bounce around just a bit here, and one of the key questions is—where does Iran's nuclear program stand now six months later with their attempts to rebuild it? So Senator Tim Kaine, I'll come to you first here. What is the state of Iran's nuclear program right now as they try to rebuild? And to what extent does it still pose a threat to the region and the US National security?

#### **Tim Kaine:**

So it still poses a threat because knowledge can't be destroyed, but obviously the Midnight Hammer exercise,—which was so successful militarily—set them way back. Remember the day before Midnight Hammer, Israel said that their 11 day campaign had already set the nuclear program back two years. It had been maybe months away from

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breakout if they chose to. It was set back two years, and now the Midnight Hammer campaign set it back even further. The one thing I will say is someone will write a study in about 10 years, which set Iran back farther: the JCPOA or Midnight Hammer—I'm probably in quite a tiny minority on this panel, thinking that the JCPOA though not perfect was much better than the status quo. And diplomatically, because of limitations on centrifuges, limitations on enrichment, comprehensive inspections, and parties around the table to insist upon performance while leaving all the sanctions that we still could use against Iran for regional bellicosity, ballistic missile programs, human rights violations. But we'll see, and somebody can write this down the road, which set it back further, the Midnight Hammer exercise, which was performed perfectly or a diplomatic deal.

**Oren Liebermann:**

And now I understand the seating arrangement here we have. Senator Joni Ernst—Israel clearly wanted to go further in its strikes on Iran and President Trump actually forced Israel to turn around fighter jets in midair. Do you believe Israel should have had the green light to go further? And if they could have, do you believe they should have gone after the Ayatollah?

**Joni Ernst:**

Well, most certainly not my call, thank God. But Israel has been an incredible partner to us and I've spent a lot of time in the Middle East working with our partners in Israel and many of the Abraham Accords caucus countries. And while they didn't maybe have the full capability to do it, they needed to lean on the United States as a strong and allied partner. And I think that was key and that's what I want people to take away, is that in this particular operation, in the months that have followed and in the months preceding it, relationships matter. Relationships matter. We've got strong relationships through that region and because of that, we were able to execute Operation Midnight Hammer by working on the airspace, making sure that those other countries in the region allowed us to pass through and to do what we needed to do. We certainly have worked on integrated air and missile defense systems throughout the region. We share intelligence and that doesn't just happen overnight. So between the Israelis, between the United States, and many of our partner countries, this mission was executed beautifully because of those partnerships. So regardless of who did what when it happened the way it did, because we have the relationships we do.

**Oren Liebermann:**

General McMaster, the Reagan National Defense Forum Survey found that 60% of Americans supported Operation Midnight Hammer, a targeted strike and Iran's nuclear facilities. In your book, *Dereliction of Duty*, you were critical of a graduated approach to

a military strategy and one based on political calculations instead of military needs. Under what circumstances would you support another U.S. strike and Iran's nuclear facilities?

**H.R. McMaster:**

Well, thanks and thanks to you and the Reagan Foundation to be with two people for whom I have tremendous respect and to talk about this topic. Well, it really depends on what the objective is. What we're talking about with a strike is really a rate that has a limited purpose, short duration, and planned withdrawal. And so the problem with graduated pressure has applied to Vietnam is that we had a much broader political objective and we were operating under the assumption that this application of coercive power would affect the calculation of interests of North Vietnamese leadership as well as Vietnamese communist leadership. And they would desist from their assault on the South Vietnamese Government. Well, that was a flawed assumption in this case.

The objective was to impede or block Iran's path to a nuclear weapon as part of a the 12 day campaign that Senator Kaine mentioned. I think it accomplished that objective. And I think the Iranians now, I mean they've got to make a tough choice. Do I want to restart this really expensive campaign knowing that you're penetrated from an intelligence perspective. And knowing that certainly the Israelis—if not the Israelis and the United States—will strike them again. So I think it was extraordinarily successful based on, again, a very limited objective. But now what you're seeing is I think the Trump administration apply a broader strategy to dry up the cashflow to the regime and to make sure that the regime no longer has the resources necessary to reconstitute its terrorist proxy and client organizations across the region, which is another big part of the context. Here is the degree to which Israel and its effective campaigns have dismantled those next decapitated and decimated Hamas, Hezbollah, the proxy Army in Syria, had a significant effect on the Houthis along with us as well, and finally then again in the very successful strikes across that 12 day campaign going after the nuclear program, the missile program, IRGC leadership, and I think they were extraordinarily successful and demonstrated really how weak Iran was.

**Oren Liebermann:**

I'm going to come to you again for a follow-up. You just mentioned Hezbollah, and let's go to Lebanon here for a second. According to the ceasefire agreement signed about a year ago, they have until the end of this month to disarm under both U.S. and Lebanese political pressure, and Israeli military pressure. And yet Iran, which poured a billion dollars into Hezbollah each year for 20 years, is trying to rebuild its proxy, one of the most powerful non-state actors in the world. Israel has clearly signaled they're ready to resume the war at full strength if Hezbollah doesn't disarm. Do you believe that's

inevitable? And are there any circumstances under which you would urge the U.S. to get involved if it came to Hezbollah?

**H.R. McMaster:**

Well, I think what's really important is to dry up the resources that are available to Hezbollah. And I think there are some real possibilities associated with that, not only from the financial flow perspective, but also the illicit shipping of oil, for example, and other sources of financial support for Iran that would dry up the resources available. But also what they don't have anymore is they don't have that land bridge across Syria to the Mediterranean. And I think what we should be pursuing—and this might be difficult given the Israeli strikes in Syria the last few days—is can you imagine if there was some kind of a defense agreement or pact between Syria and Israel? I think that's a possibility. And I think the pressure that we're putting on the Lebanese to seize the moment and to disarm Hezbollah, that's where I think we should get involved, is supporting [President Joseph] Aoun and supporting the efforts of [Ambassador] Tom Barak, who I think he's doing a very good job in the region. Whatever we can muster not only from our perspective, but also from the influence that others can bring to bear, like the Emiratis and the Saudis. Together, we have a lot of leverage just by not writing checks to either the Lebanese or to the Syrians, for example.

**Joni Ernst:**

I'll interject as well. I was in Lebanon just a few months ago and we met with the president, we met with the CHOD, which was an interesting experience. The CHOD, in his demonstration, we were killed by PowerPoint. It was Senator Mullen and I, Congressman Jimmy Panetta was there with us as well as Jason Smith. And in that discussion, the CHOD kept referring to the Israeli forces as the Israeli enemy forces—the IEF. And when you continually describe your neighbor and their forces as the Israeli Enemy Forces, then we're not really moving forward. So the discussion really devolved in such a manner that finally, Senator Mullen and I said, timeout, I think the discussion is over and we are going to exit, and we actually walked out of the meeting. You can't resolve if you don't have our own resolve to say we're not going to take this, y'all need to figure it out and come together. Hezbollah has to disarm and CHOD, you're in charge of that. We haven't seen it yet, but we as members of Congress have to be strong on this issue as well.

**Oren Liebermann:**

Senator Kaine, Israel has continued to strike, carry out targeted strikes in Lebanon against Hezbollah. How do you, from where you sit, balance Israel's need/ desire to destroy Hezbollah, and the need to have political space for Lebanon to be able to sort of take agency here and participate in the disarmament of Hezbollah?

**Tim Kaine:**

So my worry about Israeli security has always focused on Lebanon. I felt like they posed even more of a danger to Israel because of the mass of weaponry so close to the Israeli border. And so I think what's been done to dramatically weaken Hezbollah has been fantastic. And I give the Trump administration some credit—it wasn't widely reported—but just within the last week or 10 days, the administration brokered the first real meetings between the Israeli government and the Lebanese government for a very long time, kind of to your point, Joni—Joni and I serve on the Armed Services Committee together. There was such amenity between the governments, but now with this new opportunity and Hezbollah degraded, there is a real opportunity for Israel and Lebanon to begin to work closer together. So I appreciate the administration encouraging that dialogue. Dialogue guarantees nothing; the absence of dialogue usually guarantees something bad, especially

**Oren Liebermann:**

Especially in CENTCOM.

**Tim Kaine:**

Yeah, so I'm happy to see this happening. I think the role of the U.S., I agree with what General McMaster said. And in addition, we have been a supporter of the Lebanese Armed Forces—which sadly has the acronym LAF, which is not a good acronym for armed forces—but I do think they have been a partner in Lebanon, one of the few entities that somewhat respected across the different confessional lines, and I think we need to continue to do that as Hezbollah's degraded.

**Oren Liebermann:**

And that next meeting is scheduled for December 19th, and we've looked at it as this is the U.S. trying to make sure there are meetings to prevent an escalation, but it is from where we sit, the willpower of the Trump administration that is holding ceasefires together. But if that's what it takes. Senator Kaine, another question for you. You've been outspoken on the need for an AUMF, the legal authorization in backing to carry out strikes. The Trump administration has faced questions around that regarding Operation Midnight Hammer, continued strikes against alleged drug boats, but the Biden administration faced those same questions for strikes in Yemen, strikes in Syria, and throughout. In today's political environment, how do you make sure that it's relevant, that the AUMF is needed, and that as the oversight committee, you have authority here to be able to say yes or no. You cede too much power there to the White House.

**Tim Kaine:**

I'm a real purist to the point of sometimes being a crank, I guess, about we shouldn't be at war without a vote of Congress. I do think presidents have the ability to defend the United States against imminent attack, but the framers of the Constitution believe we should not be at war without a vote of Congress. And I've insisted upon that whether it was President Obama, President Trump 1, President Biden, President Trump 2. Some of the Biden instances you mentioned there was a war authorization against Al-Qaeda and affiliates that covered a lot of the Biden era attacks because those affiliates had some connections even if attenuated with Al-Qaeda.

I do believe—I mean just this is a CENTCOM hearing, but just to put something in a paragraph—that we're 90 plus days into a war in Southern Command where about 90 people have been killed in two dozen raids where the Southern Command legal advisor raised questions about its legality. The Southern Command commander has been encouraged to retire because of questions about the legality. The UK is not doing intel sharing with us in the regions because questions about legality, and we haven't even had a single public hearing of either the Armed Services Committee or Senate Foreign Relations Committee about these operations. I'm shocked by it. If we had that hearing—the Secretary today at lunch said, we're going after the drug guys just like Al-Qaeda. Yeah, but Congress had declared war on Al-Qaeda. That's not the case with the narco traffickers. So I do believe it gets the American public more knowledgeable of the stakes and then follows our constitutional command that except in instances of imminent self-defense, Congress needs to engage. And it is my hope, I think we're going to have some hearings soon. I think one of the things we've been doing on Armed Services is let's get the NDAA done, and then we can turn our attention to today's challenge. And I think we're really close to that and hopefully we'll then start to have the public hearings I think we should have.

**Oren Liebermann:**

Senator Ernst, just curious to hear your perspective. Same question.

**Joni Ernst:**

Well, the AUMF, so we will leave the AUMF in place that does allow us to take action on Al-Qaeda and ISIS in the Middle East and elsewhere where we need to. We have two zombie AUMFs that we took a voice vote on when it came to. So we are repealing those what we call the zombie AUMFs, so those will be removed, they will no longer be enforced. But I believe the boat strikes are constitutional. The President of course has his article two authorities to go after what he deems as an imminent threat to the United States of America. I'm not a lawyer, but I do believe that he has that authority. Do I want proper oversight from the Armed Services Committee? Absolutely, I do. I think it is

important that we are able to exercise oversight of any of the operations that are being undertaken, whether it's by our Joint Special Operations Command or whether it's by conventional forces. We should be able to review that and understand the intelligence behind it. So I do think it's important that we continue to get the information and have greater transparency. And the President did say that he would release that footage. So we all await the time when we can review the footage from the boat strikes and understand what was going on at that time.

**Oren Liebermann:**

Senator Ernst, do you believe right now you're able to conduct proper oversight given the current environment? And if I may ask one more question, last year at this exact forum, Pete Hegseth had just been nominated, a key question was how you would vote: would you vote the same way today to confirm why or why not?

**Joni Ernst:**

Well, I do think there needs to be greater transparency with members of Congress. We do have a SCIF in the basement of the Capitol, and I would love to have greater oversight ability. Now when Admiral Bradley—who I think is a tremendous American hero—when he came to Capitol Hill, there were only select members of certain committees that were allowed to hear what he had to say. And so we need broader hearings on that, and I'm fine if it's in the SCIF; if we need to make sure that information is protected from the public, we should do that. We can meet in the SCIF. But I do think we need to have greater oversight.

As to your other question, I'm not going to answer it in front of all these good people, but there are some frustrations that exist out there. And certainly the United States is seen as a leader by many countries around the globe. And I think we need to continue to foster those relationships, understand that other countries do need to step up, they need to do more for their own national defense, but these are relationships that are very important, and we should remember that, because there will be times in the future when the United States needs these allies and partners, and we do not want to alienate them.

**Oren Liebermann:**

General McMaster, the Trump administration has—and I think rightly so—viewed the Middle East, viewed CENTCOM as a chance and a location for foreign policy accomplishments. We've seen that in multiple occasions— defense pact with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, investment deals, the intended sale, I should say, of F-35s to Saudi Arabia. From your perspective, do you believe the administration is moving into these with the necessary consideration on the potential risks and rewards to US national security? Are they moving into these too quickly, do you believe?

**H.R. McMaster:**

No, I think that the administration is doing a very good job in engaging in the Middle East. And of course, President Trump always makes the point that, hey, we're not going to conciliate the furies of the Middle East or solve people's problems. But I think what we've seen, especially after the four years of the Biden administration, is that if you disengage from the region under the belief that it just can't get worse than the Middle East, it actually can get worse than the Middle East, right?

**Oren Liebermann:**

The Middle East has proven that repeatedly.

**H.R. McMaster:**

If you look at the main message in the recently released National Security Strategy is to prioritize U.S. interests. Well, what are our interests? First of all, hey, things that happen to the Middle East don't adhere to Las Vegas rules, they don't stay there. So this is of course the problem with jihadist terrorist organizations and the need to sustain that campaign. The threat from Iran and Iran having potentially the most destructive weapons on earth and the long range missile capabilities and their ability to use proxies in the region. And what was their effort? Because they thought we were on our way out of the Middle East and that Israel was weak and that the U.S.-Israel relationship was weak.

October 7th happens because I think Ayatollah Khamenei said, hey, it's time to light the ring of fire around Israel. He had conducted scores of attacks—the Iranians through the proxies against us to which we weren't really answering. And so I think it was that perception of weakness that made things worse. Iran was really ambitious. I mean, they wanted to drive us out of the region as the first step in isolating Israel and killing all the Jews. That's really what they wanted to do. Well, in that overconfidence, they overextended and then Israel—the IDF—by doing everything we advised them not to do, actually, were quite successful and revealed how weak Iran is.

And then finally for those who say, hey, we should play little kid soccer and all run to the Taiwan Strait, actually the Middle East is really a very important arena of competition for the fundamental reason that China doesn't want us to have the keys to its gas station. And so I think that what you're seeing with the administration's approach is a prioritization of U.S. interests, meaningful engagement, I think the potential for extending the Abraham Accords, increasing economic integration within the region. I mean Syria, I'm a skeptic of Julani—

**Oren Liebermann:**

We'll come to Syria.

**H.R. McMaster:**

I'm looking at Tony Thomas right there, I bet he shares my skepticism—but I think we have leverage there that I think we can use to maybe get that security pact, to break that land bridge. Could Turkiye begin to play a more productive role in the region? Maybe we'll have to see. But I think we have influence that we can use and we do have agency. We're not going to solve the problems, but we can advance our interests

**Oren Liebermann:**

And that's one of the challenges of the region. Naturally, if you try to bring Turkiye or Qatar more into how the U.S. operates in the region, you're going to run into very quickly Israeli resistance. And we're seeing that in Gaza. Another area where we're seeing resistance is probably too strong a word, but concern is the intended sale of F-35s to Saudi Arabia. A similar type of deal between the U.S. and the UAE was announced at the end of the first Trump administration and fell apart over concerns of the UAE military relationship with China. Can this deal with Saudi Arabia survive the same concern? Are you concerned, Senators, that Saudi [Arabia] is too close to the Chinese and that maybe we shouldn't sell them F-35s? Your thoughts on that, both of you?

**Joni Ernst:**

I'll take that. Thank you very much. So I am concerned about the sale of F-35s and I just need to explain, we need to make sure that Israel and the United States obviously have the qualitative edge and that we stay ahead of any of our peers. Even though Saudi Arabia has now been granted major non-NATO ally status, we still need to make sure that we're top dog around the globe. And so yes, I do have concerns about that. But with that being said as well, I do think that there is a bright future by bringing the kingdom of Saudi Arabia closer into the fold. And I think it's very important, again, relationships matter. I'm going to keep saying that folks: relationships matter. And if we are bringing them into the fold, we're pulling them closer to the west, we hope that they will gravitate away from China. We will need to be very firm in what we expect and should those suggestions or demands be broken, then we will pull back some. But it is just like with Syria: trust but verify. Same with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia: trust but verify. But it is an alliance that we need on our side. If we bring them into the Abraham Accords or some expansion of that, we do stabilize the region much more so than we are right now. And I think that's a really good trajectory and a good bet for the United States.

**Tim Kaine:**

So I am probably in the same time zone as Joni, but maybe a little more over to the skeptical side, but close. I'm skeptical about the Saudis. Jamal Khashoggi lived in Virginia, his family are Virginians. That atrocity—I don't think you just suddenly say, well, all is forgiven. I think there have to be consequences for actions like this.

We actually will have a chance to do what Joni has said, which was sort of exercise some oversight and then potentially step in if we don't think the Saudis are doing the right thing. Because there is something in the Senate called a privileged motion that any Senator, a single Senator, can challenge an arms transfer and force a vote on the Senate floor. Now you don't challenge it until the transfer is ready to happen. So the mere announcement of it doesn't trigger the ability to do the transfer. It's a privilege motion. Hear it on the floor within 15 days. Can't filibuster it. Simple majority. So we'll have a chance to monitor the Saudi interaction with the Israelis.

Is the Abraham Accord's motion happening? The Saudis have said for them to fully buy into that, there has to be a path forward for Palestinian autonomy. They've put that on the table. That's so complicated, obviously. But unless or until we find a future for Palestinians—which we promised them in 1948, just like we promised Israelis a future in 1948—until we find a path forward, it's always going to be an agitation having the Saudis around the table to try to help figure out what the circa 2025 version of that is can be helpful. We just have to monitor their behavior.

**Oren Liebermann:**

A question for all three on the same topic, should normalization with Israel be a precondition for Saudi [Arabia] getting F-35s, or no?

**Tim Kaine:**

Interesting question.

**Joni Ernst:**

That is interesting. I like that wrinkle. I do.

**Oren Liebermann:**

That's what Israel's trying to demand. Whether it's a realistic demand is a different question.

**Joni Ernst:**

Again, it's pretty complicated there, and I think there are many things to work out until we see a full normalization. Obviously Senator Kaine had laid out that there needs to be

a Palestinian state, but Israel will not accept that. I don't believe they will accept that, because that in turn, then would be a reward for Hamas and the invasion on October 7th. So I think we've got a ways to go here, but it is something certainly that we all need to be discussing.

**Tim Kaine:**

Here's the way I would look at this third triangle of three parties, should the Saudis, to get F-35s have to recognize Israel. And the Saudis have said to recognize Israel, they have to see a path toward a Palestinian state, and I disagree that a Palestinian state is a reward for October 7th.

The world made a commitment to states for two people through the UN in 1948. You can argue whether that promise should have been made, but it was made. And you can argue why it hasn't been accomplished and there's a million reasons for it. But the world made a promise and the world has kept the promise to Israel and has not kept the promise to Palestinians. Until there is some keeping of that promise—even if it looks different in 2030 than it might've looked in 1948—you're going to have a continued agitation in my view. So if you put the U.S., the Saudis, and the Israelis—the Saudis want something from us, Israel wants something from the Saudis, the Saudis want something from Israel. We're in dialogue with Israel all the time. You could see something coming together. It's going to be tough. If it would've been easy, it would've happened before now, but there is a door open—albeit narrowly—a door open between the Saudis and the Israelis that could be positive.

**Oren Liebermann:**

And General McMaster, do you think the sale of F-35s should be preconditioned on normalization?

**H.R. McMaster:**

No, I don't. But I think there should be a number of items on the table; I would include S-400—Russian systems in Saudi Arabia as well. Just point out to them, hey, they don't work anyway. That's why I think there are a number of issues that ought to be part of this kind of discussion. I do think though, if it's contingent from the Saudi perspective on a resolution of the situation in Gaza with Hamas, that's going to be a longer time. I do believe that if you're for some kind of prospect of a two-state solution in the future, I think you also have to be for the destruction of Hamas, because an organization that's committed to destroying Israel and killing all the Jews, that doesn't sound like they're signing up for the two state solution to me. And so, from my perspective, the only living hostage that Hamas has not released are the Palestinian people that are under their

control in the 47% of Gaza that they control. So there's still a long way ahead there, and if Saudi Arabia's holding off for that, it's going to be quite some time, I think.

**Oren Liebermann:**

Going from Israel's southern border to its northern border in Syria, I promised we'd get there. Senator Ernst, it was at this conference on the Saturday, one year ago that Bashar al-Assad fled Syria and went to Russia, and that began a fairly rapid rise of Ahmed al-Sharaa. You have championed him—I don't think that's too strong a word—and I wonder what do you see first, what do you see in what he brings and what are the risks? What are you watching out for as Syria moves forward here?

**Joni Ernst:**

Well, I wouldn't say that I'm championing him.

**Oren Liebermann:**

Okay, too strong.

**Joni Ernst:**

That's too strong. And when Bashar al-Assad fled Syria, I'm like, don't let the door kick in your you know what as you're leaving. We don't have a great alternative in Syria. We do have al-Sharaa. And so again, trust but verify. I was able to meet with him—again a number of months ago in the same CODEL where I went to Lebanon. We—Markwayne Mullin, Senator Mullin, House members Panetta and Smith and I—went into Syria as the first official congressional delegation in 15 years. We sat down with the new president at his residence at his workplace, and as we went through introductions, I looked at him and I said, I served in Iraq too. And he didn't know how to take that, it was a little tense at first, but we laughed about it, and that's what we have to do right now because we're in a very odd situation. A very odd situation.

But he has disavowed Al-Qaeda. He wants to go after ISIS. He wants to see stability for his people in Syria. That's what he has stated. Now, whether he does that or not, that is up to him, but we have no other alternative right now. So again, we are with him until we're not. So I'm not championing him, but I certainly will continue to shape and influence his moves to make sure that again, he is leaning further to the West and being supportive of stability in the Middle East, which brings greater peace and prosperity, not only to Syria, but to Lebanon, to Israel, and everyone in between.

**Oren Liebermann:**

It tells you a lot about the Middle East that we are now getting to Gaza in the last few moments here. So one question, and given the time left here, I'll let whoever jumps in

first take it. Do you believe the Gaza war is actually over? To what extent is there a risk that it restarts for whatever reason? And how do you make sure the Trump broker 20 point ceasefire plan doesn't fall apart because it appears stuck as it tries to get into the second phase, the much more difficult second phase?

**Tim Kaine:**

Well, I'm not sure that it's over, but that's not for lack of trying. I give President Trump a lot of credit for trying to make something happen, and it could restart and it could stop, it could restart. But we do have the United States trying to make something happen, and that is important. We've got to get the nations in the region—who've often paid lip service—to support for Palestinians without really doing anything other than paying lip service. We have to get them to be helpful. They will be necessary. If there is a more peaceful chapter in the West Bank and Gaza, it's going to have to be with security assistance from regional neighbors and so we've got to get them in. So I think the President's team got to stick with it, and we have to keep regional actors engaged in their belief that it's better for their own internal stability, the more we do to try to extend the ceasefire and then find the next better chapter.

**Oren Liebermann:**

I feel like you have something to say.

**H.R. McMaster:**

It's not over, I mean, but at least the living hostages are back. I think you're going to see almost like a metaphor, an example like East-West Berlin there between the 47% and 53% of Gaza. I think the lesson for Israel of October 7th is to never again allow a hostile terrorist organization to control territory on your borders. And so whatever international force comes in to the 53% of Gaza that the IDF is in, there's going to have to be a lot of IDF visibility into that security force, and they're going to have to have the authorities that makes them not like UNIFIL—which was an ineffective organization and essentially gave cover to Hezbollah as they put all that infrastructure that Senator Kaine described in southern Lebanon. So hey, I mean, I don't see an end to this now. I think maybe a decade from now, we can talk about some kind of an enduring peace. But given what happened on October 7th, Israel is just not going to tolerate, I don't think, anything that even moves closer to a two-state solution at the moment.

**Oren Liebermann:**

That'll be my first question for you on our panel in a decade. I'll jump off your tie there and just say Merry Christmas to everybody and happy Hanukkah. Thank you for joining us.

**Joni Ernst:**

Thank you.

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