

EXPANDING THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

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EXPANDING THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

Thursday, March 9, 2023

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:11 p.m., in room 210, House Visitor Center, Hon. Joe Wilson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. WILSON. Ladies and gentlemen, the Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia will come to order. The purpose of this hearing is to identify opportunities to strengthen and expand the extraordinarily successful Abraham Accords.

And at this time, I would like to ask for unanimous consent that the gentleman from Illinois, Mr. Brad Schneider, be allowed to sit on the dais and participate following all other members in today's hearing. No objection. I am not going to recognize you. And so, without objection, so ordered. OK. And 1 day we will recognize people from Rhode Island. But it is going to be June, if you do not mind, after you are gone.

I now recognize myself an opening statement.

And good afternoon and welcome. And this is really meaningful to me, the first hearing of the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia Subcommittee in the 118th Congress. And I am really grateful to ultimately be serving again with Congressman David Cicilline, who has been the prior chairman, and prior to that, Ted Deutch. And so it has been a bipartisan experience with Dean Phillips I am confident will continue. And then Kathy Manning from the Republic of North Carolina is going to be sitting in today. One day it is going to be a State.

And I want to thank our members for being part of the subcommittee. And I want to thank the expert witnesses for being here today to provide insight into how we can most successfully expand the groundbreaking Abraham and historic Accords.

I regret that the ranking member, Dean Phillips, is unable to be here today. But, indeed, we are very fortunate to have Representative Kathy Manning from North Carolina.

I look forward to a compelling conversation today of very talented people and in many more important hearings during this Congress as we promote the United States as the country that it is, so important in maintaining world stability.

The historic Abraham Accords are one of the most consequential diplomatic achievements of my lifetime and a success of the Donald Trump Administration. I was grateful to be present at the signing at the White House. The signing of these accords by the leaders of

Bahrain, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates represented the single most significant step toward a stable and positive Arab-Israeli relations since Egypt and Jordan normalized relations in 1979 and 1974 respectively.

We have already seen positive results with Morocco formally joining and Sudan pledging to join the Accords in 2021 and additional memorandums of understanding being signed to address issues of mutual concern.

These agreements are a win for the region and a win for the United States. For decades, we have known that our friends in the Middle East all have shared interests for mutual benefit. Now at long last, we can work together collaboratively to protect our countries' shared technology and information and grow our economies, address creating jobs, addressing the threat emanating from the kleptocratic Iranian regime. It is an issue of foremost concern.

Both Israel and our Arab allies live under constant threat of Iranian-backed terrorism. And Iran continues the enrichment of uranium while testing satellite-launched vehicles in proliferating drones to its proxies, as well as to war criminal Putin to kill innocent Ukrainians.

Sadly, the Biden Administration still seems to believe that diplomacy via a nuclear deal is possible. You cannot negotiate with those acting in bad faith, as we have seen time and time again. Working with our partners to deter these threats is critical to maintaining peace and stability through strength.

The Abraham Accords coincided with Israel being moved into the responsibility of the U.S. Central Command from European Command. Now our Middle East partners can work together directly with U.S. military on issues of shared concern, like Iran and the integrated air and missile defenses.

After three major countries joining the Accords in quick succession, UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco, we hope to see more countries join the Abraham Accords during the Biden Administration. Changing minds is hard. Diplomatic breakthroughs are hard. It is not easy to change longstanding policies or public opinions.

With all the momentum built up during the Trump Administration, there have been at times questions regarding whether the Biden Administration is sufficiently prioritizing the Accords. I am pleased the Administration has now embraced the name Abraham Accords and has also worked to convene Israel and the Arab partners through the Negev Forum.

This forum is important for helping to deepen the relationships between Israel, UAE, Egypt, Morocco, and Bahrain, and the United States. It shows other countries in the region the positive benefits that can come from a relationship with Israel.

In addition to security cooperation, the Abraham Accords have ushered in unprecedented economic cooperation. We are witnessing significant increase in bilateral trade between the signatories, as well as joint projects in technology, energy and infrastructure, health care, and tourism. These efforts will undoubtedly yield positive person-to-person results and increased prosperity for all involved.

Still, there is more to be done. I hope our witnesses today can speak to the types of initiatives that will be required to bring im-

portant countries, such as Saudi Arabia, into the Abraham Accords. We look forward to hearing from them about more details of how the Accords came to be, how we can strengthen relationships between countries that are parts of the Accords, and how we can bring new countries into these incredible agreements.

I want to thank the witnesses for their time and expertise. And I yield to the stand-in ranking member, Congresswoman Manning, for her remarks.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing. And on behalf of Ranking Member Dean Phillips, who asked me to fill in for him today, congratulations on holding your first hearing as subcommittee chair. We are all looking forward to working together with you in this Congress. And I want to thank our distinguished panel of witnesses for joining us today to share your expertise.

In 1967, the League of Arab States put forward what is often referred to as the three no's: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel. Despite these overtures, Egypt was the first country to break ranks and make peace with Israel in 1979, a decision that cost President Sadat his life. Jordan then followed suit in 1994.

And since then there had been no significant progress on regional peace agreements until the Abraham Accords, in which Bahrain, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, and Sudan agreed to normalize relationships with Israel. This historic agreement changed the region practically overnight, leading to incredible opportunities for regional coordination and cooperation.

With U.S. support, these countries chose to form a forward-looking group of nations in the Middle East focused on building a better and brighter future for their people and a more integrated and secure region. These countries also recognized a common interest in cooperating to counter the threats posed by Iran, the principal source of instability in the region. Iran's advancing nuclear weapons program, expanding ballistic missile NUV programs, and support for armed proxy groups, including but not limited to Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen all pose deep challenges to security and stability across the Middle East.

Our partners and allies are clear-eyed about this threat and are working side by side in coordination with the United States to advance their shared security. Israel's integration into CENTCOM marked a huge step toward creating a more secure and prosperous region. And its role in the recent international maritime exercise, along with increased intelligence sharing, communication, and training have demonstrated significant progress toward a more integrated regional security architecture.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses today about opportunities for expanded security cooperation, the prospect of a more integrated regional security framework, and how shared security concerns can promote further expansion of normalization between Israel and its neighbors. Security cooperation is important. But it cannot be the only leg on which relations between Israel and the Abraham Accords' countries stand.

The Biden Administration has sought to deepen and expand Israel's engagement with its neighbors by establishing the Negev

Forum, a new vehicle for implementing the Abraham Accords on a multilateral scale. The forum established six working groups on regional security, food and water security, tourism, trade, health, and education and tolerance, areas that highlight shared regional challenges and create opportunities for tangible benefits to the citizens of each country.

These buckets have provided a framework to weave together the fabric of the Middle East. For example, the signing of the Israel-UAE free trade agreement aims to bolster economic cooperation between the two countries, bringing trade volume from around one billion to ten billion within 5 years. Increased trade and tourism, investment in technology and health, cooperation on cyber security and green energy, the opportunities are seemingly endless.

I look forward to hearing from our guests today about how to advance Israeli-Arab engagement, promote greater regional cooperation, and engage the private sector and civil society in this effort.

As we celebrate the Abraham Accords, the milestone for regional security and stability that it represents and look ahead toward opportunities to expand the Accords, we must also try to find ways to include Palestinians in regional cooperative initiatives and continue working toward a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace. Key additional regional players have indicated their interest in normalizing relations with Israel, but not without significant steps toward peace.

As we look for ways to strengthen and expand the Abraham Accords, I am interested in hearing about how these efforts can be used to help both Israelis and Palestinians make progress toward the long-term goal of a negotiated peace. And as we hold this hearing just weeks away from the convergence of Ramadan and Passover, I would further ask how the U.S. and our regional partners can support steps to de-escalate tensions.

Since the Abraham Accords were announced by President Trump in 2020, there has been bipartisan support in Congress and across Administrations for the Abraham Accords and ongoing efforts to support peace between Israel and its neighbors. The Middle East today is not the same region it was even a few years ago. And efforts to continue to enhance and expand the Abraham Accords are integral to building robust security and economic relationships, establishing people-to-people ties, and contributing to a more tolerant, peaceful region.

So, again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel. And with that, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you, temporary ranking member.

I ask unanimous consent that a statement by Senator Jim Lankford of Oklahoma and a statement of Representative Ann Wagner of Missouri be entered into the record. Without objection, so ordered.

We are pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this important topic.

The Honorable Rob Greenway, a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, is President and Executive Director of the Abraham Accords Peace Institute. He previously served as Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Middle East and North Af-

rica at the National Security Council under the Trump Administration.

Also, General Joseph Votel is a Distinguished Fellow at the Middle East Institute. He served as Commander of U.S. Central Command in 2016 to 2019. And I know of his great service because I had the opportunity to visit with him and to great success. Thank you.

Ambassador Daniel B. Shapiro is a Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council. He served as the U.S. Ambassador to Israel from 2011 to 2017. I think you must have set a record, 6 years.

I want to thank you all for being here today. Your full statements will be made part of the record. And I will ask each of you to keep your spoken remarks to 5 minutes in order to allow members for questions. And they, too, will be strictly maintained, including me, of 5 minutes.

I will now recognize President Greenway for his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROBERT GREENWAY, PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ABRAHAM ACCORDS PEACE INSTITUTE

Mr. GREENWAY. Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Manning, members of the subcommittee, thank you all for the opportunity to testify on the development of the historic Abraham Accords peace agreements and the ways in which the United States can help ensure they reach their true potential. It is an honor to join Ambassador Shapiro and General Votel today.

The Abraham Accords Peace Institute, where I serve as President and Executive Director, is a non-partisan, non-profit U.S. organization dedicated to supporting the implementation and expansion of the Accords, the primary platform for disseminating Accord progress. And we work with a broad range of actors abroad as appropriate to develop new opportunities in the fields of trade, investment, tourism, and people-to-people relationships.

The Abraham Accords constitute the beginning of a transformation of a region that will continue to be a vital battleground astride security and economic interests of world powers. American leadership was a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of these agreements. And American leadership will remain essential to its growth and evolution.

The alignment of our regional partners and allies in economic and security domains will ensure that the agreements endure. It will also be incentivizing to others to join, pooling critical capacities to advance and defend mutual interests.

This transformation serves to constrain the malign influence of Iran and Russia and predatory practices of China. These countries will continue to manufacture and exploit fissures among the U.S. and its regional partners if we fail to take advantage of the favorable shift in the region's security and economic architecture.

On the other hand, appropriate support will allow the Abraham Accords to advance and secure America's interests with the use of significantly fewer resources and with more capable partners integrated as never before.

To give just a brief sense of the impact the Accords have had in just less than 3 years, in 2022 trade between Israel and regional peace partners as a whole reached \$3.47 billion, up from \$593 million in 2019. 470,700 Israelis have traveled to Abraham Accords countries in 2022, up from 39,300 in 2019. Seventeen new flight routes have been established to accommodate this growth. Cooperation has flourished in the fields ranging from water and food security, renewable energy, technology and innovation, health care, sports, trade, and investment.

I would suggest five ways the U.S. can encourage and support these historic agreements.

The first would be for the U.S. to support the establishment of an Abraham Accords free trade area, ensuring progress toward members' aspirations, preserve the integrity and stability of global markets, provide a tangible alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. We could begin by leveraging the matrix of free trade agreements and other bilateral agreements already in place between the U.S. and Accord members and between the Accords' members themselves.

According to RAND analysis, the benefits of a multilateral free trade area encompassing current signatories would create more than 150,000 new jobs and new economic activity exceeding \$75 billion. A multilateral free trade area among the expanded number of potential Accord signatories could create as many as four million new jobs and one trillion dollars in new economic activity.

A second avenue would be to ensure that resources dedicated to regional peace encompass the Accords and work with Accords' members to reestablish the Abraham Fund, providing financial and technical support necessary to reduce poverty, expand infrastructure, and help improve health and education, reinforcing the Accords.

A third way would be to connect Accords' members and other partners to establish new overland trade routes, connecting its members from the Mediterranean to the Gulf. Such routes would revolutionize East-West trade, decrease associated transit times, costs, and risks, and strengthen resilience and prosperity.

The fourth would be to support and resource a new enduring regional security architecture in the Middle East, the Abraham Accords as a foundation, while accelerating protected security systems to Accord member countries. Only by making our partners and allies more capable will we mitigate the spectrum of risk to our vital national interests in the global economy. This would also reduce, but not eliminate, the requirement for a robust U.S. presence.

A fifth way would be to leverage Abraham Accords to offset the loss of European energy following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and strategically realign our partners and allies by breaking the dependency on adversary resources.

Without U.S. leadership, the historic agreements would not have been concluded. Absent sustained investment, they will fail to achieve their potential. Such a setback would constrain the region's economic recovery from the pandemic, erode support for counterterrorism cooperation, open a door to malign influence by Russia and China, compromise regional stability, disrupt global markets, dis-

courage essential cooperation, and provide an opportunity for resurgence of both ISIS and Al Qaeda.

But if we seize the opportunity this historic agreement offers, the inverse holds. We would build upon it to enhance regional stability, security, and trade. We could also seize the opportunity for a U.S. regional security architecture built to safeguard an economic foundation that can endure, while reducing our costs and constraining our adversaries.

The Abraham Accords, and the Institute which bears its name, hold the potential to serve as the foundation for an enduring peace in the Middle East by demonstrating the tangible benefits of interpersonal ties, trade, commerce, and mutual cooperation. It is vital we seize this historic opportunity, unleash the potential of our partners and allies in the Middle East and North Africa, keep America safe, and help the region turn the page on a generation of conflict and instability. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Greenway follows:]

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Manning, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the development of the historic Abraham Accords peace agreements, and the ways in which the United States can help ensure they reach their true transformative potential.

The Abraham Accords constitute the beginning of a transformation of a region that will continue to be a vital battleground astride the security and economic interests of world powers. American leadership was a necessary but alone insufficient condition to the emergence of this agreement. American leadership will remain essential to its growth and evolution.

The alignment of our regional partners and allies in both economic and security domains will ensure that the agreement endures. It will also incentivize others to join us in pooling critical capacities to advance and defend mutual interests. This transformation serves to constrain the malign influence of Iran and Russia, and predatory practices of China. If we fail to take advantage of the favorable shift in the region's security and economic architecture, such countries will continue to manufacture and exploit fissures among the U.S. and its regional partners.

On the other hand, appropriate support will enable the Abraham Accords to advance and secure America's interests with the use of significantly fewer resources, and with more capable partners integrated as never before.

The Abraham Accords Peace Institute, where I serve as President and Executive Director, is a non-partisan, non-profit U.S. organization dedicated to supporting the implementation and expansion of the Accords. We are the primary platform for disseminating Accords' progress, including through our monthly and annual reports, and we work with a broad range of actors abroad, as appropriate, to develop new opportunities in the fields of trade, investment, tourism, and people-to-people cooperation.

To give just a brief sense of the impact of the Accords to date- In 2022, trade between Israel and its regional peace partners reached \$3.47 Billion, up from \$1.905 Billion in 2021 and \$593 Million in 2019.

470,700 Israelis visited Abraham Accords countries in 2022, up from 39,300 in 2019. 17 new flight routes have been launched. Israeli companies have established fintech R&D centers in Abu Dhabi, experimental agricultural plots in Morocco, and have enhanced the water system in Bahrain. Israeli, Moroccan and Emirati entities are now exploring, with Sudanese partners and the World Food Programme, the possibility of carrying out a large-scale agricultural project in Sudan, which can help not only address food insecurity, but empower Sudan to become, once again, a global food exporter. Cooperation has flourished in a wide range of additional fields, from green hydrogen, drones and startup acceleration, to cardiology, youth leadership, and inter-religious dialogue.

Indeed, just this past month, we saw the opening of the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, a complex containing three magnificent houses of prayer- a synagogue, church and mosque- side by side, symbolizing the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect at the heart of the Abraham Accords.

There are of course areas where potential remains unrealized. We have seen relatively few incoming tourists from Abraham Accords countries to Israel, there are indications of a drop in public sentiment towards the Accords, and several bilateral government-to-government initiatives are progressing more slowly than we would have hoped. The Abraham Accords Peace Institute is working with numerous stakeholders and experts to identify solutions to these challenges.

However, while the deepening of bilateral relations is important, the true potential of the Accords lies in strategic multilateral cooperation among Accords member countries, and between Accords countries, the U.S., and our European and Asian allies. Such cooperation would leverage the unique capabilities, advantages and needs of each of our partners.

The U.S. can encourage and advance the historic agreements in myriad ways.

The first way would be for the U.S. to support and facilitate the establishment of an Abraham Accords Free Trade Area, that would ensure progress toward its members' aspirations, preserve the integrity and stability of global markets, provide a tangible alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative, and fuel growth by leveraging the matrix of free trade agreements already in place between the U.S. and Accords members, and between the Accords members themselves.

According to a [RAND analysis](#), the benefits of a multi-lateral FTA encompassing current signatories, could create more than 150,000 new jobs and new economic activity exceeding \$75 billion. A multi-lateral FTA among an expanded number of potential Accords signatories could create as many as 4 million new jobs and \$1 trillion in new economic activity.

A second avenue would be for the United States to ensure that resources dedicated to regional peace encompass areas and initiatives that support the Accords. In addition, the U.S. could work with Accords' members to reestablish the Abraham Fund, which could provide the financial and technical support necessary to reduce poverty, expand infrastructure, and help improve health and education, thereby reinforcing the Accords.

A third way would be to connect Accords members and other partners through the establishment of a new overland trade route from the Mediterranean to the Gulf. Such a route could revolutionize East-West trade by significantly decreasing transit times, costs, and risks, as compared to alternative sea and land routes. It would strengthen the resilience of global supply chains, while creating new jobs and investments in Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, the GCC and beyond, thereby contributing to regional prosperity and stability.

Establishing such a route would require both infrastructure development (e.g. border crossings, roads, transport facilities, train tracks), and overcoming geopolitical obstacles. The United States could play an important role in advancing such an initiative, including through public-private partnerships.

Number four would be to support and resource a new enduring regional security architecture in the Middle East, built on the Abraham Accords foundation, while accelerating projected security assistance to Accords member countries. Only by making our partners and allies more capable will we mitigate the spectrum of risks to our vital national interests and the global economy, and reduce the requirement for U.S. presence.

A fifth way would be to leverage the Abraham Accords to offset the loss of European energy following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and to strategically realign our partners and allies by breaking the dependency upon adversary resources. This could include both increasing the capacity to export Mediterranean natural gas to Europe through joint ventures to develop the necessary infrastructure, and the eventual production and transport of renewable energies in the Middle East for use in other parts of the world.

Without U.S. leadership, the historic agreements would not have been concluded; absent sustained investment they will fail to achieve their potential. Such a setback would constrain the region's economic recovery from the pandemic, erode support for counterterrorism cooperation, open a door to malign influence by Russia and China, compromise regional stability, disrupt global markets, discourage essential cooperation, and provide an opportunity for a resurgence of ISIS and al Qa'ida.

But if we seize the opportunity that these historic agreements offer, the inverse holds. We could build upon the Accords to enhance regional stability, security, and trade. We could also seize the opportunity for a U.S.-led regional security architecture built to safeguard an economic foundation that can endure, while reducing our costs and constraining our adversaries.

Active U.S. involvement will also be a critical component for expanding the Accords, whether in the GCC, or among African and Asian Muslim countries which do not currently have ties with Israel.

In 2023, the Abraham Accords will continue to make previously unimaginable cooperation a reality. With active U.S. involvement and investment, the Accords can contribute greatly to U.S. interests in the region, while shaping a more peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future for the Middle East.

The Accords constitute the beginning of a transformation within the region, but they must not be considered the culmination of the opportunity. These new relationships require American leadership to ensure growth and evolution. The Accords bring to fruition a critical advancement of America's interests, by reducing the burden on our resources, and integrating capable partners in new ways. Informed by the lessons learned in previous efforts to integrate

the region, guided by the progress it has made in recent decades, and driven by the aspirations of its people, the historic agreements provide an unprecedented opportunity to preserve the integrity of global markets, and constrain China's predatory trade practices.

The Abraham Accords, and the Institute which bears its name, hold the potential to serve as the foundation for a peace process in the Middle East by demonstrating the tangible benefits of interpersonal ties, trade, commerce, and cooperation. This new effort will help seize this historic opportunity to unleash the Middle East's potential, keep America safe, and enable the region to turn the page on a generation of conflict and instability.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, President Greenway.

And we now recognize General Votel for his opening statement. And, General, I want to congratulate you, 2016 to 1919, the achievement of you and your personnel. There was no terrorist attack against American people. And that to me is such an achievement. Please proceed.

**STATEMENT OF JOSEPH L. VOTEL, DISTINGUISHED FELLOW,
MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE**

Mr. VOTEL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon to you and to Representative Manning and to the distinguished members of the subcommittee.

I am pleased to join my fellow panelists, Ambassador Dan Shapiro and Mr. Rob Greenway, in this hearing on expanding the Abraham Accords. I am testifying today in my capacity as a former Commander of U.S. Central Command and as well as a Distinguished Fellow with the Middle East Institute right here in Washington, DC.

The Abraham Accords were signed after my retirement and departure from Command, as was the decision to include Israel in the U.S. Central Command's designated area of responsibilities. It was my view at the time and it remains so today that these Accords and the decision regarding Israel were timely and essential steps in promoting stability and security across the region. In both cases, these actions represented the maturing of the political and security situations across the area.

As noted in a recent report by the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, JINSA, the United States has a fundamental interest in strengthening the Accords and helping ensure they achieve their full political, economic, and security potential.

Less than 36 hours ago, I returned from my most recent travel to the Middle East. These trips have left me with three impressions that are germane to the issue we are discussing today.

The first impression is that U.S. leadership in the region remains critical. While our force posture has changed due to policy decisions, focusing our attention and resources toward the pace and challenge presented by China, the U.S. remains an indispensable partner across the Middle East. The region looks to us for our leadership, for our world-class capabilities, and our values-based approaches. Initiatives like expanding the Abraham Accords are clear examples of things we can and must do to promote stability in a critically important region where we retain enduring interests.

My second impression is the importance of continuous dialog. The Middle East is an area with deep underlying tensions which left unattended will work against the better interests of those who live in the region and those who retain vital national security interests there, including the United States.

It is an area prone to misperceptions and failed expectations. And the only way through this is by effective communication and relationship building. We must have open dialog and a framework to interact and operate that minimizes miscommunication, while at the same time promoting better interaction in areas of common interest. Therefore, we must promote better relationships and more

substantial cooperation and collaboration among our regional friends. The Abraham Accords are doing this today.

My third impression is the need for a sense of urgency to move forward in the region. Change is coming quick to the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is a good example. There is profound and palpable change due to its 2030 vision and strategy, change that can be seen and heard. It is accelerating on a day-to-day basis. We should be encouraging this.

Our adversaries and strategic competitors are operating with a sense of urgency as well. Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear capability and is doubling down on its malign influence activities across the region. Chinese influence is apparent across the region. And they continue to maneuver effectively into the spaces left behind by the U.S. to promote their economic and political objectives. These activities and others like them can undermine critical interests of the United States and our partners.

In an era of Great Power competition, the United States must play its role. Today, that role is unlikely to be manifested by large U.S. military formations and long-term deployment across regional military bases. It is, instead, more likely to be pursued through improved security cooperation efforts, partnership, shared awareness and responsibility, and greater resilience among our friends and partners in the region.

The best tool against these factors is not just better equipment and more U.S. troops on the ground. It is, in fact, strong relationships, effective communications, and trust. As a former boss reminded me often, you cannot surge trust in times of crisis. It must be nurtured and developed beforehand.

The Abraham Accords are an essential hedge platform to promote better understanding, shared interests and responsibilities, and common expectations that lead to better trust. We must seize the opportunity it presents.

There will be obstacles to expanding the Abraham Accords and pursuing meaningful progress under its rubric. Iran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon and continued efforts to sow instability and chaos across the region will continue to frustrate our efforts and pose real challenges, threats against our interests. Resolving the Palestinian situation remains essential for many in the region. This important issue will continue to resonate strongly in and out of the area.

And, of course, geopolitics will play a role as well. Our efforts and those of our allies to support Ukraine against unprovoked invasion by Russia, as well as China's posturing against Taiwan, will have impacts in the region that will challenge our goals and objectives.

The United States has a critical role in overcoming these and other obstacles. We must be willing to lead and use our inherent attributes to bring parties together to expand and truly operationalize the Accords in a way that allows for real change and progress. We can do this by being a good convener, bringing others together and helping work through the issues with candid communications and trustful dialog. And we must do this by recognizing the importance of acting now to strengthen and solidify emerging alignments and seize near-term opportunities.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with the subcommittee today. I look forward to joining my panel colleagues in answering your questions and bringing more attention and understanding to what I believe is one of the most significant opportunities to promote stability in this region, a region where we have made extraordinary sacrifices and expended significant national treasure and where we have and will continue to have enduring interests that are important to our security and prosperity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Votel follows:]

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GENERAL JOSEPH L. VOTEL, USA (RET.)
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUB-COMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND CENTRAL ASIA
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FOR

“Hearing on Growing the Abraham Accords”

March 9, 2023

Chairman Wilson, Representative Manning, and distinguished members of the House Sub-Committee on Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. Thank you for inviting me to submit this statement for the record of today’s hearing on growing the Abraham Accords. I am pleased to join my fellow panelists, Ambassador Daniel Shapiro and Mr. Rob Greenway, for this hearing on expanding the Abraham Accords. I am joining you today in my capacity as a former Commander of US Central Command and currently as a Distinguished Fellow with the Middle East Institute. MEI is the oldest think tank in the US, whose sole focus is promoting more robust relationships and understanding between the United States and the Middle East.

To be sure, the Abraham Accords were signed after my retirement and departure from command. As was the decision to include Israel in the US Central Command’s designated area of operations. It was my view at the time, and it remains so today, that these accords and the decision regarding Israel were timely and essential steps in promoting stability and security across the region. In both cases, these actions represented the maturing of the political and security situations in the area. I remain extraordinarily supportive of both of these initiatives and consider them to be platforms we should build on to protect our overall national security interests better – in the region and globally. As noted in a recent report by The Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA) – “the United States has a fundamental interest in strengthening the Accords and helping ensure they achieve their full political, economic, and security potential.”

Less than 36 hours ago, I returned from travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It was my second trip to the region since my retirement from active duty in March 2019. These trips have left me with three impressions which, in my view, are germane to the issue we are discussing today.

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The first impression is that US leadership in the region remains critical. While our force posture has changed due to policy decisions that have focused our attention and resources against the pacing challenge presented by China – the US remains an indispensable partner to nearly all of our friends in the region. They look to the United States for our leadership, world-class capabilities, and values-based approaches. Moreover, we are the preferred partner who shares long-term interests and a strong desire to promote prosperity and security. Initiatives like expanding the Abraham Accords are clear examples of things we can and must do to promote stability in a critically important region where we retain enduring interests. By “expanding” the accords, I mean not only adding new partners, such as Saudi Arabia, to the arrangement but also using this unique platform as a way to align interests and efforts for a more unified and coherent approach to our common adversaries and as a way to pursue and solidify fundamental changes in security, partnership, cooperation, and ultimately promoting prosperity across the region.

My second impression from the region is the importance of continuous dialogue. The Middle East is an area with deep, underlying tensions which, when left unattended, will work against the better interests of those who live in the region and those who retain vital National security Interests there – like the United States. It is an area prone to misperceptions and failed expectations, and the only way through this is by effective communication and relationship building. We should not strive for perfection; there is no such thing as a perfect relationship between partners. But what we must have is open dialogue and a framework to interact and operate that minimizes miscommunication while at the same time promoting better interaction in areas of common interest. While our American dependence on natural resources from the region is not the same as at the time of the Carter Doctrine, we retain solid interests. The area remains vital for global commerce. Therefore, we should promote better relationships and more substantial cooperation and collaboration among our regional friends. The Abraham Accords are doing this today with Bahrain and the UAE in the Gulf and with Sudan and Morocco in other areas. Not only do we see more vital interaction between Governments, but we are now also seeing more clearly where the opportunities lie for better cooperation in the security arena.

My third impression is the need for a sense of urgency to move forward in the region. Saudi Arabia is a good example. There is profound and palpable change due to its 2030 Strategy – one that I could see and hear. It is not only noticeable, but it is accelerating. We should be encouraging them. In addition, our adversaries and strategic competitors are operating with a sense of urgency. Iran continues its pursuit of nuclear capability and is doubling down on its malign influence activities across the region. Chinese influence is also apparent, and they continue to maneuver effectively in the spaces left behind by the US to promote their economic and political objectives. These activities and others like them can undermine critical interests of the United States and our partners – interests like the free flow of commerce, non-

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proliferation, stability, and favorable influence for the United States. In an era of rising Great Power competition, our partners seek the United States to play its role. Today, that role is unlikely to be manifested by large US military formations and long-term deployment across regional military bases. It is more likely to be pursued through improved security cooperation efforts, partnership, shared awareness and responsibility, and greater resilience among our friends and partners. The best tool against these factors is not just better equipment and more US troops on the ground – it is, in fact, strong relationships, effective communication, and trust. As a former boss of mine reminded us often – you cannot surge trust in times of crisis. It must be nurtured and developed beforehand. The Abraham Accords are an essential hedge platform to promote better understanding, shared interests and responsibilities, and common expectations that lead to better trust. But these are all things that we must pursue with a sense of urgency. Competing effectively against actors like China is not limited to our activities in the Indo-Pacific. Global competition means we must compete wherever our interests are at risk. It is time to get going in the Middle East, where a favorable balance of power supports our interests. The US-backed and brokered Abraham Accords are an essential tool that we must wield now to its fullest.

There will be obstacles to expanding the Abraham Accords and pursuing meaningful progress under its rubric – there always are in this region. Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapon and its continued efforts to sow instability and chaos across the region with its proxies and surrogates will continue to frustrate our efforts and pose real threats against our interests. In addition, resolving the Palestinian situation remains an essential bell weather for many in the region. As we have seen recently, it will continue to resonate strongly in and out of the area. And, of course, Geo-politics will play a role as well. Our efforts and those of our allies to support Ukraine against an unprovoked invasion by Russia as well as China’s posturing against Taiwan will have impacts in the region that will challenge our goals and objectives. These two actors will also look for ways to exert influence to support their objectives in the Middle East. Expansion of the Abraham Accords may take some time, particularly with countries like Saudi Arabia. Still, we must pursue these and other initiatives favorable to our interests with a sense of deliberateness and urgency.

The United States has a critical role in overcoming these and other obstacles. But, first, we must be willing to lead and use our inherent attributes to bring parties together to expand and truly operationalize the Accords in a way that allows for real change and progress. We can do this by being a leader and a convenor – bringing others together and helping work through the issues with candid communication and trustful dialogue. And finally – we must do this by recognizing the importance of acting now to strengthen and solidify emerging alignments and seize near-term opportunities.

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CONCLUSION

Once again – thank you for the opportunity to speak with the sub-committee today. I look forward to joining my panel colleagues in answering your questions and bringing more attention and understanding to what I believe is one of the most significant opportunities to promote stability in this region. A region where we have made extraordinary sacrifices and expended significant national treasure and where we have and will continue to have enduring interests that are important to our security and prosperity.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joseph L. Votel".

General Joseph L. Votel, USA (Ret.)

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, General Votel.

And now we are very grateful to have Ambassador Daniel Shapiro for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DANIEL B. SHAPIRO,
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW, ATLANTIC COUNCIL**

Mr. SHAPIRO. Mr. Chairman, Representative Manning, thank you and my thanks to Ranking Member Phillips for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee on expanding the Abraham Accords. Like my colleagues on the panel, Rob Greenway, who was involved in negotiating the Accords, and General Votel, who has done so much for regional security, it is a subject I am passionate about.

I direct the N7 Initiative, a partnership between the Atlantic Council and the Jeffrey M. Talpins Foundation, that convenes conferences of Israeli and Arab experts to generate multilateral policy and program ideas to bring the benefits of normalized relations to the citizens of those countries.

The past year has seen a great deal of progress in building on the Abraham Accords. Thanks in no small part to the commitment of the Biden Administration. I will not detail them all, but the Negev Summit, the Negev Forum, opening of air space, free trade, and expanded trade between the parties, cyber security cooperation are all ongoing examples.

And a number of challenges remain as well. The Negev Forum is a consensus organization. A consensus is sometimes hard to achieve. Jordan has not yet joined the group. There appears to be low and by some polling results declining public support for normalized relations with Israel, even in the UAE and Bahrain, and spiking Israeli-Palestinian tensions may weaken the popularity of the Abraham Accords.

But none of those challenges diminish the progress that has been made. And with the remainder of my time, I will outline a number of steps the United States should pursue to expand that progress that has been made to date.

First, our strategy should be to combine U.S.-led security coordination with regionally led, U.S.-supported integration in civilian fields. When it comes to building an integrated regional security architecture, there is no substitute for the United States, as the convener, sponsor, and enabler. Our unique capabilities, our enduring presence in the region, and the way each U.S. partner looks to us to shape the security environment and coordinate responses to key threats makes the U.S. role essential.

The Biden Administration and CENTCOM leadership have embraced this responsibility, sponsoring joint exercises that improve interoperability, facilitating high-level strategic discussions on addressing the full range of threats posed by Iran and its proxies, and initiating the gradual process of integrating air defenses across these U.S. partners. It is not likely to become a Middle East NATO. But it does not need to be NATO to be meaningfully beneficial for the security of all who participate. But what it does need like NATO is the energetic leadership of the United States.

Alongside the U.S.-led security architecture, we should support a regionally led web of non-defense integration. In parallel with the Negev Forum, there must be room for the emergence of a truly re-

gional organization, like the European Union or ASEAN, that weaves together multilateral cooperation at every level, in every area of governance, collaboration and integration of resources and capabilities, a regional free trade zone, and reinforcing linkages between private sectors, universities, professional organizations, religious communities, and other elements of civil society.

Let's call this hypothetical organization AMENA, A-M-E-N-A, the Association of the Middle East and North Africa. AMENA has the advantage that it means trustworthy or reliable in both Hebrew and Arabic. And it will signal with trilingual clarity that it represents a community of trust, reliability, common interests, and the common benefits of security and prosperity. And as the participating countries benefit from this association and as they forge a common regional identity, it will create incentives for other States to join, just as the EU and ASEAN expanded well beyond their original membership in their respective regions.

Second, we should draw on all resources and expertise of the U.S. Government and beyond to advance the U.S. interest in deep regional integration. At the Negev Summit working group meetings in January, over 40 U.S. Government personnel from some 9 government agencies took part. That is an excellent showing and something to build on.

While the State Department, Defense Department, military, U.S. military, USAID under the guidance of the National Security Council will always have the lead, nearly every cabinet department and Federal agency has an international affairs department, and most have resources and programs available to promote international cooperation that serves U.S. interests. The House and Senate Abraham Accords Caucuses are critical partners in this effort, able to use their diverse expertise and committees of jurisdiction to motivate and fund the work of the cabinet departments they oversee.

In this context, I want to take note of H.R. 1268, a thoughtful bill introduced by Representatives Torres and Lawler, to create a special envoy for the Abraham Accords. If Congress creates such a position, one of that official's most important duties might indeed be to serve as the traffic cop for an expansive and diverse set of U.S. Government and non-government programs that support integration in various fields.

Third, we must give special focus and priority to achieving Israeli-Saudi normalization, while recognizing that it will take time and may advance in phases. Clearly such an agreement would have many transformational effects, given Saudi Arabia's centrality and influence as a leading nation in the Arab and Islamic worlds. In some respects, we see it happening gradually. But I would caution against the narrative that Saudi Arabia is ready to normalize relations with Israel tomorrow as long as the United States provides the right quantities of weapons, security guarantees, or civil nuclear technology.

Saudi-Israeli normalization is certainly in the United States' interests. And we should be prepared to contribute as the United States has done in nearly all previous Arab-Israeli agreements. But it cannot be divorced from the U.S.-Saudi relationship, nor from other U.S. interests that we must protect.

If, in fact, the United States would be expected to provide a range of benefits to Saudi Arabia at the time normalization occurs, there will also be things the United States needs from the Saudis, such as their commitment to stable oil markets and not to act in ways that run counter to core U.S. interests regarding Russia and China.

A Saudi-Israeli deal is also unlikely to require nothing of Israel, especially in periods of heightened tensions with the Palestinians. And the U.S.-Israel dynamic will also be complicated. Israel may seek additional security assistance, which the United States has always provided, and the United States may seek from Israel steps to keep the two-State solution alive. Such an agreement would be a carefully balanced triangle. And it is worth pursuing with significant diplomatic resources. But it is far from automatic.

Finally, I will just endorse Congresswoman Manning's point that it is imperative and there is an opportunity to draw positive energy from the Abraham Accords into the deeply deteriorating Israeli-Palestinian arena. In short, no other regional development holds better prospects of breaking down Palestinian resistance to normalization with Israel or Israeli resistance to including Palestinians in the promise of a better region.

And Arab States as partners to both are uniquely positioned to positively influence the decisions and actions of both sides in ways that can improve conditions on the ground and keep a two-State solution alive for a future attempt to reach it through negotiations. The United States can play an important role in reinforcing these positive messages.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify. And I look forward to answering any questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Shapiro follows:]

Statement of Ambassador (ret.) Daniel B. Shapiro
Distinguished Fellow, Atlantic Council
House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and
Central Asia
March 9, 2023
“Expanding the Abraham Accords”

Mr. Chairman, Madam Ranking Member, thank you for the honor of inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee on the subject of Expanding the Abraham Accords. It is a subject I am passionate about. For the last year, I have directed the N7 Initiative, a partnership between the Atlantic Council and the Jeffrey M. Talpins Foundation.

Our name — N for Normalization, and 7 for Israel and the six Arab countries that have announced any form of normalization with it (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates) — is a reflection of our belief that the processes launched by the Abraham Accords and other agreements signed in 2020, building on the peace treaties between Israel and Egypt in 1979, and Israel and Jordan in 1994, hold immense promise and possibility for a better and more peaceful Middle East and North Africa region, to the great benefit of U.S. interests.

We convene multilateral conferences that bring together government and non-government experts from these and other Arab and Muslim countries to develop proposals for projects that can bring the maximum benefit of normalized relations to their citizens. In December, our N7 Conference on Education and Coexistence in Morocco was attended by some fifty education ministry officials, teachers, university administrators, and interfaith and coexistence NGOs from eight countries. We shared the proposals generated with the U.S. and regional governments, and will soon issue a published report. Our upcoming conference on Agriculture, Water, and Food Security will have an even more diverse list of attendees. Several additional conferences are planned in the months ahead.

When I last testified before the Subcommittee six months ago, I was able to cite significant progress in building on the Abraham Accords, thanks in no small part to the commitment of the Biden Administration to advancing them. Looking back over 2022 in its entirety, we can cite several examples: The Negev Summit, convened in Israel in March by then-Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, with Secretary of State Blinken and the foreign ministers of Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco and the UAE in attendance; the launch of the Negev Forum, a permanent grouping of those six states, at a steering committee meeting in June in Bahrain; visits by Israeli Prime Ministers Bennett and Lapid, President Herzog, the IDF Chief of Staff, and numerous other Israeli ministers to the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco; a five-day visit to Israel by UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed; and, the opening of Saudi airspace to civilian flights to and from Israel, including by Israeli airlines, during President Biden’s visit to the region last summer.

In addition, the UAE and Israel signed a free trade agreement, and trade soared between them in 2022 to \$2.56 billion, more than double the previous year, making the UAE Israel's 16th largest trading partner. And under CENTCOM's sponsorship, joint military exercises and liaison meetings between Israeli and Arab militaries are becoming routine, and tentative steps toward an integrated regional air defense architecture fueled by shared intelligence, early warning, and missile and drone defense technologies, are underway. All of these steps are indicative of these nations desire for deeper coordination with each other and with the United States to address their shared threats, particularly those posed by Iran and its proxies.

The progress has continued apace into 2023 with the convening of the six Negev Forum working groups, with over 150 participants from the six countries — the largest multilateral gathering of Israelis and Arabs in some thirty years — in Abu Dhabi in January; the announcement of a cybersecurity cooperation agreement between Bahrain, Israel, Morocco, the UAE, and the United States later that month; and last month's opening of Omani airspace to flights to and from Israel, significantly shortening air routes between Israel and destinations in Asia.

I want to offer a few extra words about about the Negev Forum, and the major opportunities it presents. The fact that four Arab countries agreed to join Israel and the United States in a standing organization, named after a region in Israel, and committed to regular engagement of its senior leaders is remarkable. The six working groups — in security, education and coexistence, health, energy, water and food security, and tourism — all represent areas where there are significant needs shared by all the regional players, and significant opportunities for projects that will drive the ability of average citizens to discern benefits they accrue from the normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states. The experience of such benefits creates space for deeper support for integration from the publics, which in turn creates more freedom of action for leaders to take further steps.

The Atlantic Council's N7 Initiative has chosen to plug into the Negev Forum process. In consultation with the State Department and the regional governments, we aim to generate proposals for programs and policies that can be absorbed into the agendas of the working groups. For example, the report we generated following our N7 Conference on Education and Coexistence in Morocco in December was sent to the Moroccan and Israeli co-chairs, and other members (including the U.S. representatives), of the Education and Coexistence working group before it convened in January. Our detailed proposals included:

- 1) an N7 university consortium, designed to link academic institutions across the region with collaborative and bureaucratically simplified undergraduate study abroad programs; graduate and post-doctoral exchanges; a shared library network for digital holdings; a STEM education innovation center; a multinational student organization hub; and more.
- 2) an Abraham Open Academy, providing a dedicated online technical training platform through Massive Open Online Courses; expanding the skilled workforce in such fields as computer programming, data science, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and video game design; and generating online and in-person internship and job opportunities with

sponsoring companies to prepare the region's younger generation with the skills and experience required to compete in an information-driven economy.

- 3) Educational and entertaining reality-based television shows that promote tolerance and coexistence by highlighting the common religious and cultural roots of Arabs and Israelis, including life-cycle events, education, faith-based rites, arts, music, and cuisine.
- 4) Shared multicultural learning experiences for small groups of young Arabs and Israelis, with opportunities to travel and study together at key institutions that promote tolerance and coexistence and at historical sites of genocide and ethnic violence.

By the accounts of several of the participants of this working group, the N7 ideas featured prominently in the meetings and are part of the discussion of ideas that may receive ministerial endorsement for implementation by the Negev Forum governments. Our intention is to continue to funnel the ideas and proposals that emerge from N7 conferences to help put meat on the bones of multilateral regional cooperation as represented by the promise of the Negev Forum.

With all the progress one can rightfully point to, several real challenges remain to fully capture the opportunities at stake. The Negev Forum itself has certain built-in limitations. It is a consensus organization, meaning project and policy ideas are only endorsed if all six governments agree — and full consensus can be slow to emerge. There is even an argument that the United States' membership in the organization, while crucial for its launch and critical for the generation of ideas, also creates incentives for regional members to bargain with the United States on unrelated issues, which can hold up progress on regional integration steps themselves. In addition, a critical country with fully normalized relations with Israel — Jordan — has not yet joined the group. Significant efforts are underway to bring Jordan into the fold, which may also include adding a seventh working group in an area that needs significant multilateral work: trade. The UAE-Israel free trade agreement, and FTA negotiations between Bahrain and Israel only hint at what should be possible — a free trade zone of all the member states of the Negev Forum, and perhaps beyond. It may take years to complete, as such agreements often do, but discussions should commence now, as they will at an upcoming N7 conference on possible pathways to such a free trade zone.

Other challenges include the relatively low — and, by some polling results, declining — public support for normalized relations with Israel, even in the UAE and Bahrain, the most forward-leaning governments in building their bilateral relationships. It is difficult to know for sure, but it seems logical that spiking Israeli-Palestinian tensions and the calls by some Israeli officials to take steps that may amount to de facto annexation of the West Bank or to challenge the status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites weaken the popularity of the Abraham Accords. In recent weeks, the UAE and Bahrain have voiced criticism of Israeli actions, with the UAE going so far as to raise them for condemnation in the United Nations Security Council. And the next Negev Forum ministerial, which was expected to take place this month in Morocco, now seems likely to be pushed back until after Ramadan and Passover, which many worry could be a season of tensions between Israelis and Palestinians. (Unfortunately, these governments have not always found the same voice to consistently condemn Palestinian terrorist attacks that result in Israeli deaths.)

But even with these challenges, the Abraham Accords remain the most positive, most hopeful thing to happen in the Middle East in years. It still bears reminding that some of the diplomatic meetings, business deals, full tourist flights, security coordination, educational changes, and shifts in public rhetoric that now seem routine could scarcely have been imagined just a few years ago. And at the same time, they only scratch the surface of what is possible. With the remainder of my testimony, I would like to outline a number of steps that I believe hold the most promise for significant expansion of what has been achieved to date.

First, our strategy should be to combine U.S.-led security coordination with regionally-led, U.S.-supported integration in civilian fields.

We need to understand the interplay between the security cooperation made possible by normalization, and the wider range of non-security activities that can be undertaken. When it comes to building an integrated regional security architecture, there is no substitute for the United States as the convener, sponsor, and enabler. Our unique capabilities, our enduring presence in the region, and the way each U.S. partner looks to us to shape the security environment and coordinate responses to key threats make the U.S. role essential. Fortunately, the Biden Administration and the CENTCOM leadership have embraced this responsibility, sponsoring joint exercises that improve interoperability, facilitating high-level strategic discussions on addressing the full range of threats posed by Iran and its proxies, and initiating the gradual process of integrating air defenses across these U.S. partners. It is a long way from NATO, and it is not likely to become a Middle East NATO. Neither the United States nor our regional partners are likely to make an Article 5-like joint mutual defense commitment to one another. But it does not need to be NATO to be meaningfully beneficial for the security of all who participate. But what it does need, like NATO, is the energetic leadership of the United States.

Alongside the U.S.-led security architecture should develop a regionally-led web of non-defense integration. That is not to say the Negev Forum should be sidelined. It could only have been launched with the United States as a key player, and it will likely have an important role to play for many years. But at some stage, and sooner than later, there must be room for the emergence of a truly regional organization that weaves together: multilateral cooperation at every level and in every area of governance; collaboration and integration of resources and capabilities in energy, water, transportation, health, agriculture, and education; a regional free trade zone; and, reinforcing linkages between the private sectors, universities, professional organizations, religious communities, and other elements of civil society.

When this kind of organization emerges, the United States can, and must, be a key partner, hopefully *the* key partner. It can even assist, behind the scenes, in its creation. But it should not be a member. Just as the European Union and ASEAN have facilitated deep regional integration and the emergence of, respectively, a European and a Southeast Asian identity among diverse countries and societies, so should be the goal in the Middle East and North Africa. Let's call this

hypothetical organization AMENA, the Association of Middle East and North Africa. AMENA, which means “trustworthy” or “reliable” in both Hebrew and Arabic, will instantly signal, with trilingual clarity, that it represents a community of trust, reliability, common interests, and the common benefits of security and prosperity.

The advantage of this kind of regional integration is that it provides diverse ways for different countries to plug in, and maximizes the benefits they can draw out of it. It creates opportunities for the region to negotiate as a bloc with other powers and regional blocs — and again, the United States, the region’s key security partner, should be first in line — but without any outside actor becoming the pole around which organic regional integration activity revolves. As the participating countries benefit from this association, it will create incentives for other states to join, just as the EU and ASEAN expanded well beyond their original membership.

Second, we should draw on all resources and expertise of the U.S. government, and beyond, to advance the U.S. interest in deep regional integration.

There are, of course, many competing priorities for U.S. foreign policy attention. But for a relatively modest investment, there are broad resources available across the government to make the United States an even more influential actor in promoting regional integration. At the Negev Summit working group meetings in January, over 40 U.S. government personnel from some nine government agencies took part. That is a hopeful sign, and can be the beginning of a whole-of-government approach to advancing this mission.

While the State Department’s diplomatic role, the Defense Department and U.S. military’s security coordination, and USAID’s development expertise, under the guidance of the National Security Council, will always have the lead, every cabinet department has an international affairs department and most have resources and programs available to promote international cooperation that serves U.S. interests. The Department of Energy, USDA, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, the U.S. Forest Service, the EPA, the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Department of Commerce, and more are all agencies that have contributed to advancing Middle East integration, or could be called upon to do so. The House and Senate Abraham Accords Caucuses are critical partners in this effort, able to use their diverse expertise and committees of jurisdiction to motivate and fund the work of the cabinet departments they oversee.

A number of proposals have emerged regarding a special envoy to advance the Abraham Accords, most recently in H.R. 1268, a thoughtful bill introduced by Representatives Torres and Lawler. There are arguments for and against such a position. As a diplomat, I am always inclined toward big diplomatic efforts, so I am sympathetic to this proposal, even as diplomacy is already being led by extremely capable professionals at the State Department and the NSC. Many of these talks must be conducted in secret until the governments involved are ready to reveal them. If Congress would create such a position to coordinate U.S. activity on advancing normalization in the Middle East, one of that official’s most important duties might indeed be to serve as the

traffic cop for an expansive and diverse set of U.S. government programs that support integration in various fields. This official might also partner with universities, the private sector, religious leaders and other Americans able and willing to lend their knowledge, expertise, and resources to supporting this mission. The mandate might also include recruiting additional US partners, like European governments, Canada, Japan, South Korea, and Australia to involve themselves in efforts to build on the Abraham Accords, as India has already done in the I2U2 format.

Third, we must give special focus and priority to achieving Israeli-Saudi normalization, while recognizing that it will take time and may advance in phases.

There is no question that such an agreement would have transformational effects, given Saudi Arabia's centrality and influence as a leading nation in the Arab and Islamic worlds. In some respects, we see it happening gradually. Saudi leaders now speak openly of Israel as a potential partner. During President Biden's visit to the region last summer, the Kingdom authorized flights to and from Israel through its airspace. Israeli businesspeople with second passports travel easily and openly to Saudi Arabia, doing deals. And there have been discussions around direct flights for Israeli and Palestinian Muslims from Israel to Saudi Arabia for this year's Hajj.

At the same time, Saudi leaders may believe they are already getting most of what they want from Israel — intelligence cooperation and technology — and they must modulate the pace of change amidst a flurry of reforms, which, while generally popular, occur against the backdrop of what has long been a very conservative society.

In part for these reasons, I would caution against the narrative one hears at times that Saudi Arabia is ready to normalize relations with Israel tomorrow, and all that needs to happen is that the United States must pay. In various accounts, if the United States provides enough weapons, security guarantees, civil nuclear technology, or relief for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman from opprobrium following the death of Jamal Khashoggi, the deal is as good as done.

Saudi-Israeli normalization is certainly in the United States' interests, and we should be prepared to contribute, as the United States has done in nearly all previous Arab-Israeli agreements. But it cannot be divorced from the U.S.-Saudi relationship, nor from other U.S. interests that we must protect. If, in fact, the United States would be expected to provide a range of benefits to Saudi Arabia at the time normalization occurs, there will also be things the United States needs from the Saudis, such as confidence they will work to maintain a stable oil market, and will not act in ways that run counter to core U.S. interests, such as ensuring Russia is isolated over its unjustified invasion of Ukraine or preventing increased Chinese military presence in the Middle East.

A Saudi-Israeli deal is also unlikely to require nothing of Israel. Especially at a time when members of the Israeli government seek to make a Palestinian state and a two-state solution impossible, the Palestinian issue is unlikely to be something the Saudis will ignore. And the U.S.-Israel dynamic will also be complicated. There will be things Israel seeks, such as

additional security assistance, and things the United States may seek from Israel, such as steps to keep a two-state solution alive, or at least to prevent it from dying. Such an agreement would be a carefully balanced triangle. It is worth pursuing with significant diplomatic resources, but it is far from automatic.

In the meantime, additional ground work to prepare the Saudi public for this major change would be valuable. University exchanges between Israeli and Saudi academics, conferences hosted in third countries in which public encounters can occur, and more positive introductions of Israeli officials, history, themes, and culture in Saudi media would all shorten the path to the eventual destination.

Fourth, even while pursuing the big prize of Israeli-Saudi relations, we should not neglect smaller, but still meaningful opportunities.

Oman, Qatar, and Mauritania are all Arab countries that previously maintained some level of official ties — short of full normalization, but openly conducted — with Israel. The formula for the renewal of such ties, and following the lead of the Abraham Accords countries, will be different in each case, but steady diplomatic efforts should be conducted to create such openings, examining both what the United States and Israel can contribute, and demonstrating what the benefits will be of participating in broader regional integration. The recent opening of Omani airspace to flights to and from Israel is a welcome step which the Biden Administration worked hard to achieve. Sudan represents a significant opportunity to conclude a partially completed normalization agreement, but the United States should only give its endorsement when a civilian government has been restored to power, reversing the 2021 coup. To do otherwise would be to poison feelings about normalized relations among the Sudanese people, who otherwise generally support it or have no objections. And countries outside the region, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Somalia, and Niger, should be offered opportunities for gradual, low-level, business and people-to-people engagements with Israel, which, over time, can grow and lower the barriers to more official exchanges and normalized ties.

Fifth, we should work to ensure that Israel's two original peace partners, Egypt and Jordan, are included to the maximum extent in regional projects and integration efforts, from which they can benefit.

Egypt's participation in the Negev Forum has been welcome, but its level of enthusiasm for major undertakings — including those from which Egypt could benefit, like greater access to water recycling and conservation technologies, and expanded technical training for its younger generation — appears limited. Jordan has been active in water and energy projects, including the UAE-financed Prosperity Blue and Prosperity Green solar-energy-for-desalinated-water exchange with Israel, but it has yet to join the Negev Forum. In both cases, their publics have scarcely been educated for peaceful relations with Israel, even long after their peace treaties were signed, and, it must be acknowledged, they are sensitive to deteriorations in the Israeli-Palestinian arena.

Efforts to persuade Egyptian and Jordanian leaders to engage in greater participation in regional exchanges must continue, but there is also no substitute for them allowing a different narrative about Israel to be heard in their media and taught in their schools. Abraham Accords countries are now well ahead of Egypt and Jordan in reforming their textbooks to excise excessively negative narratives about Israel and Jews, and, more generally, to prepare their young generation for a modern, integrated, regional economy. They can be models and advisors to Egypt and Jordan as they go down the same path.

Sixth, we should find ways to integrate the Abraham Accords with the Israeli-Palestinian track.

We cannot ignore that the Israeli-Palestinian arena has reached a nadir in belief on either side that a resolution of the conflict is possible, or even desirable. Palestinian terrorist murders of Israelis, the significant expansion of Israeli settlements and legalization of illegal outposts, the revenge attacks in Huwarra, and the continued payment of salaries to Palestinian terrorists all signify a conflict that is not just stuck but getting worse.

This depressing reality and the complete lack of trust between Israeli and Palestinian leaders may be arguments not to pursue final status negotiations for now, and to focus instead on stabilization measures and improved economic and security conditions. But this unfortunate situation is not immune to all positive influence. In fact, if there is one potential source of positive energy in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, it is the Abraham Accords.

In conversations with younger Palestinians and those in the business community, they do not outright reject engaging in dialogue and even cooperation with Israelis and those Arabs who have normalized relations with Israel, as their political leadership seems to do reflexively. Regional gatherings of all kinds, from the Negev Forum to N7 Conferences, should make clear that Palestinians who want to engage constructively are welcome to come, to participate, to contribute, and to benefit. Under the sponsorship and leadership of the United States and Abraham Accords countries, Palestinians and Israelis may find their first opportunity for dialogue in years. That alone can create new avenues of communication and the beginnings of a reduction of suspicion. Palestinians may also be exposed to training and business opportunities they would otherwise miss. And, as partners to both Israel and Palestinians, and as supporters of a two-state solution, Arab states could be uniquely positioned to provide friendly, if occasionally tough-minded, advice to both sides about the steps they can take to ease temperatures and the things they must avoid doing in order to keep a two-state solution alive for a future attempt to reach it through negotiations. The United States can play an important role in reinforcing these positive messages.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee, and I look forward to continuing to work with its Members on advancing our shared goal of a more peaceful, integrated Middle East and North Africa.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Ambassador. And, indeed, each of you are so important for the American people to promote the developments and stability in the Middle East by your input.

And additionally, again, one of the highlights in my service was to be present at the White House in September 2020 when the president signed the agreements, the Abraham Accords. And it was just such a positive experience and a dream come true to see stability so beneficial to all the countries involved in the Middle East.

And with that, President Greenway, stability and shared security interests in the historically volatile region is just one of the many ways the Abraham Accords has benefited our partners in the region and by extension the United States. The Abraham Accords' countries have made significant commitments in trade, tourism, energy, and infrastructure investments.

With U.S. leadership, expansion of the Accords would mean our allies working together in the interests of their countries to the detriment of the predatory Chinese Communist Party and Putin presence in the region. The Chinese Communist Party and Putin engaged in debt trapping and expansionism disguised as diplomatic investment and posed a serious threat to the sovereignty and security of the countries that enter into the agreements.

With that, President Greenway, what is your view of the strategic impact the United States and our allies under the Abraham Accords working together to facilitate investment and trade rather than the Chinese Communist Party and Putin?

Mr. GREENWAY. Thank you, Chairman Wilson, an excellent question, perhaps among the most vital.

As I alluded to in my opening remarks, there is an opportunity to take advantage of this constellation of U.S. aligned partners and allies. And it is, in fact, at the expense of inroads that China is actively building within the region. And so it is to a certain extent a binary question.

I would also I think remind all of us that the benefit derived from the Middle East has always been principally economic, whereas the evolution of the Carter Doctrine in 1979 made the region important because of the necessity of U.S. imports of oil and gas from the region. Now I would argue it is the criticality of those resources to support the global economy, not necessarily the United States. In either case, it is in our best interests to do so.

Second, it is China's devoted interest to ensure they have adequate access to energy to sustain their economy and hypothetically would sustain any military excursion or operations. They are now dependent upon the Middle East for oil and gas. And that dependency creates a strategic imperative for them to maintain relationships. And so they have prioritized that. And most recently, President Xi managed to convene and hold quite an assemblage of regional heads of State in Riyadh during his recent visit.

I would argue that if we do not prioritize our engagement we would cede natural partners and allies and a critical strategic objective of our own and allow the Chinese to benefit greatly from it. The inverse I think is also true in that we do require stability of the global energy markets. Our partners and allies are well situated to help us do that.

Second, important to look at the region as a transit point for all goods and services moving between Europe and Asia and a good bit of it moving elsewhere. And that includes information and the global information network which also transits the region.

And so it is critical I think for us to safeguard both and to build on the partners and allies of which many are Abraham Accords' member countries in order to safeguard our own interests, advance our own economic prosperity, and at the same time create constraints for China's advance in the region.

It is an unnatural place for the Chinese to operate. We have been there for decades, generations to build, as General Votel referenced, the trust required to do business and to gain I think progress in the region. The Chinese do not have that advantage. And so I think it is our advantage certainly, and I think it is in our best interests to do so. The Chinese recognize it.

Most importantly, our partners and allies in the region eagerly want the United States to play this role as we once had. And so I think they would welcome our efforts on their behalf to integrate the region more effectively. And it would serve our interests and theirs.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much. And, General Votel, in November 2021 the U.S. faithfully coordinated the first joint military exercise between Bahrain, UAE, and Israel in the Red Sea. And President Greenway is actually correct. The United States has had such an association, an affection for the people of the Persian Gulf, actually with the Kingdom of Bahrain, developing the first schools and hospitals there in 1895 and then in 1948, the location of the U.S. naval base, which was critical in the victory in the cold war by having such a presence in Bahrain.

And then flash forward, in South Carolina tomorrow, even Congresswoman Manning will be surprised, we are celebrating the delivery of F-16 Block 70's to the Kingdom of Bahrain by Lockheed Martin in Greenville, South Carolina, not the other one. And so we are—and how important that is to see this relationship and how it can come together within the next 24 hours.

With that, what shared security concerns in the Red Sea, General, help drive the cooperation between Israel and, hey, our long-time and treasured ally of Saudi Arabia?

Mr. VOTEL. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is an excellent question.

And my response to you would be the proliferation of autonomous systems is a particular concern of our partners in the region. As many of you will recall, there was a very devastating attack on Abqaiq, you know, the Saudi Aramco facility here a number of months ago. And that was devastating to the economic prowess of this. And that attack continues to resonate, not just in Saudi Arabia, really across the region.

So it is effectively addressing the proliferation of autonomous systems in the Gulf that is I think of primary concern, not just to the United States but certainly to our partners. And addressing this I think would be a good way to bring, to build trust in the relationship, while also effectively addressing what is a rapidly growing and changing threat to not just Saudi Arabia but others.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much. And I regret my time is up. But, Ambassador, I would love to get your input later in regard to expanding Abraham Accords.

Now we proceed to Congresswoman Kathy Manning of North Carolina.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, indeed, both of our Greenvilles are lovely places.

Thank you to our witnesses for your work and for sharing your expertise.

General Votel, I want to thank you for sharing the impressions arising from your recent trip to the region. I am sure, as former Commander of CENTCOM, you have particular insights into the region and the changes taking place. And I appreciate your emphasis on the urgency of moving forward to build on these transformative Accords. I wonder if you could give us your thoughts about the most significant barriers to moving these Accords forward and expanding on the work that is already being done.

Mr. VOTEL. Thank you. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I think, as I mentioned in my comments, I think there is really three that stand out. And then there are several others.

Certainly, Iran and our policy toward Iran or our approach toward Iran continues to be a topic that resonates with our partners in the region. They are looking for a clear articulation of what it is that we are trying to do with Iran and how we are going to bring them to a position where they are not a threat to their partners in the region. So I think Iran is a big one.

I do think the Palestinian situation still does resonate in many of these countries, as you are well aware. This is a particular challenge in Saudi Arabia I believe because of their role as the custodian of the holy sites. And so this is more delicate for them. And as a result, it will take more time and more effort to work through that particular issue with the Saudis. And I think that that will be a big piece.

I also think areas that, just in my most recent visit there, areas where we could move forward and which I think present some current obstacles right now, particular with Saudi Arabia, is in investments, particularly investments in renewable energies and some of the other technologies that they are attempting to develop under kind of their diversification plan here. They are looking for the U.S. and other Western partners to come in and invest in these areas. And I do not think that that has manifested itself in the way that they had hoped that it would at this particular time.

So my point is that I think anything we can do to promote investments in the business community through our capital markets and other things I think is important to demonstrate resolve there.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. So, with regard to Iran, is it fair to say that you think those countries are looking to us, to the U.S., for our long-term strategy on dealing with Iran?

Mr. VOTEL. I think they are. I think they are looking for that. They are looking for the long-term strategy of how the United States continues to pursue its interests more broadly across the Middle East. And it is really important to do that. The narrative that many of them repeat back to me is they hear about our shift to the Pacific and our focus on China. But what they do not hear

as well is what we are doing to continue to preserve the interests that we retain in this region.

So, again, in this matter, articulation, clear articulation of our policies, of our approaches, of things we are going to do and things we probably will not do are really important for our partners in the region.

Ms. MANNING. And with regard to your second point about the Israeli-Palestinian issues, is there a way that you think we can use the positive energy of these Accords to encourage the Abraham Accord countries to have a positive impact on improving relationships between the Israelis and the Palestinians?

Mr. VOTEL. Well, I absolutely believe that to be true. I think doing—progress in one area I think gives way to progress in other areas. And I think it is important for people in the region to see the definitive progress and improvements that are being made as a result of the Abraham Accord process and the arrangements that are in place, because they give indications of areas where we can do this, where we can make progress in other areas.

I do not know that it can directly address that issue. But the important part of the Abraham Accords is the fact that it provides a platform for dialog. It provides a platform for interaction. It provides a way for these countries of the Gulf and Israel to have candid discussions and to move forward in critical areas that are of mutual interest.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you so much. I have about 12 more questions. But in fairness, I will yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congresswoman Kathy Manning.

And, indeed, we are so fortunate with scheduling on the first person who came to the Middle East Subcommittee meeting for 2023 was Congressman Brian Mast. He was here first. And so, he gets all that credit, except for one thing, we are all balancing different meetings, so he had to go to another meeting, too. But he should be remembered as No. 1 to be here.

And so, but then that shifts all the weight from Florida to Indiana, of all things, Congressman Jim Baird.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I would just say that most of my questions have been answered, one of which was the Palestinian-Israeli relationship. And I think you have discussed that.

So, I will pass, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. WILSON. Well, thank you very much, Congressman Baird.

And we now proceed immediately to Congressman Brad Sherman of California.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. As to an opening comment, I do not think any of us trust the Iranian regime, but I do think we have to negotiate with them just as Roosevelt negotiated with Stalin, and Nixon negotiated with Mao.

We are embracing the Abrahamic Accords, but we should remember that as to real diplomatic relations it remains somewhat stalled, both as a result as regards Sudan and Morocco.

It looks like the Saudis and Ambassador are pushing for U.S. co-operation with their supposedly peaceful nuclear program. As I

have pointed out to some friends of Israel, just because the Saudis are not Shi'ites does not mean that they are Zionists.

And I saw a close relationship the United States had with the Shah, and every weapon the Shah had was then in the hands of the ayatollahs. So, we do not want to see Saudi, we do not particularly want to see a nuclear-armed Saudi Arabia.

The UAE entered the gold standard level of assurance that they wouldn't be using their peaceful program for military purposes. The Saudis seem very reluctant to do that. And, of course, bin Salman has, you know, hinted, well, if the Iranians have a nuclear weapon then we ought to have a nuclear weapon.

Does Saudi Arabia want cooperation with a peaceful program with all the safeguards, or do they just want to be able to respond to the Iranian nuclear weapons program?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Thank you, Congressman. I think the Saudis, obviously, have made clear in every forum that they view Iran as their most significant threat. It is not only the nuclear program of Iran; it is also the proxies in Yemen and elsewhere who have attacked Saudi Arabia. General Votel mentioned the attack on Abqaiq. And so, they are rightfully concerned, and rightfully seek the kind of assurances from the United States, as their key security partner, that would help themselves.

Mr. SHERMAN. Why are they reluctant to sign the safeguards their close neighbor has signed?

Mr. SHAPIRO. First of all, there is some rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. I think that is actually increasing over time. And it may—there may be a factor of what the UAE wants, the Saudis want, and plus a little bit more.

But it is also, I think, what one would expect almost at the beginning of any negotiation. The gold standard 123 Agreement achieved with the United Arab Emirates took many years to negotiate. And so, if the Saudis are serious about wanting U.S. civil nuclear technology cooperation as a part of a settlement, they would need to come to a serious negotiation about that.

Mr. SHERMAN. I would just say that diplomatic relations and niceties can be reversed, governments can be overthrown, but nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons technology stays where it is. And, thank God, while we did a lot to the military of the Shah, none of it was in the nuclear area.

The Ambassador of the UAE has Stated the truth of the Abraham Accords was about preventing annexation. The reason it happened, the way it happened, at the time it happened was all to prevent annexation. To what extent does some of the comments made more recently by the Netanyahu regime—government about annexing parts of the West Bank conflict with either the letter or the spirit of the Abrahamic Accords?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Well, it is true that at the time that the Abraham Accords were signed the Emirates did make clear that they expected the what was then being discussed as Israel, which was a partial annexation of the West Bank, to be shelved. And there was such a commitment by Israel.

So, to have some Israeli, members of the Israeli Government speak about de facto annexation, or to take actions that might be

consistent with de facto annexation, even if it is called something else, obviously raises question about whether that is upheld.

But I think more concerning is whether, of course, it also could mean the death of any possibility of the two-State solution. But how that development would influence and impact the possibility of future expansion of the Abraham Accords.

The Saudis may not prioritize the Palestinian issue as their No. 1 priority in this, nor may other Arab States looking at this and, yet, the polling we have seen about the relatively low popularity of the Accords suggest the Palestinian issue is at least part of the reason for that.

And if we see two-States receding over the cliff and annexation pushing it there, I think that will make it harder to achieve the goal we are all here to discuss.

Mr. SHERMAN. And, finally, I will just point out that in addition to the Abrahamic Accords, the Biden Administration's brokerage of an agreement with Lebanon on maritime and exploitation of the natural gas resources, and their negotiation with regard to Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, and Israel over the islets of the Gulf, mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, they may not be Abrahamic but they are important.

Thanks.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Sherman.

And I am happy you brought up about the Biden Administration's success for the drilling in the Mediterranean, how important that is going to be for the economy of Lebanon, how beneficial it is for Israel, and to show how things connect. And that is that he did not brag about it enough.

The oil that is achieved by Israel is sent to Egypt, of all things, to be refined, to be sent to Italy to reduce any dependency on Putin. And so that was a tremendous achievement of offshore drilling in the Mediterranean.

With that in mind, indeed, the very first person to be here for the very first Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia Subcommittee is here, Congressman Brian Mast.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Chairman. I appreciate it.

I want to start with just giving my own personal analysis on the last comments that you made about two-State. You mentioned it briefly, so I am just going to mention my opinions on it.

I think two-State should be left dead. In my opinion it makes no sense to me that the United States of America work to make a State out of an entity that would have to immediately be labeled as a terrorist State, and a State that we would immediately in Congress begin coming up with sanctions for.

So, personally, that is my analysis of the situation.

My question goes to you, General, and it is about what was spoken about, the communication that is taking place, and the diplomacy that is taking place, and stability that can take place between different entities. But I want to ask if the Abraham Accords are leading to communication in another place?

We have the Abraham Accords taking place. We have a de facto separation between Gaza and the West Bank for two decades, let's say. It is well-assumed by many that if there were to be a real elec-

tion held, that Hamas would win a popular election across those, those two de facto areas.

Are the Abraham Accords resulting in an increased communication between Gaza and the West Bank to one way or another change that relationship from de facto separation to officially separated, or somehow united under the PA, or united under Hamas, or in some other ways has it resulted in that over there?

Mr. VOTEL. Congressman, to be very truthful, I am not sure I can make a conclusion one way or the other on that. Some of the other panelists may be in a better position to comment on that.

I think, tangentially, it could have some influence, frankly, in terms of, in terms of, you know, uniting some folks in those, in those particular areas around, around certain issues. So, I think there may be some tangential issues. But in terms of something more substantive and influencing, I am not sure. I haven't seen that. And I may not be the best person to conclude that.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, General. And I do not know that we would necessarily see it, or that it would be evident to us. But I would certainly welcome the opinions from both of you as well about if you are seeing that. That is something I am just particularly curious about because I think it is whatever, wherever people stand on wanting to see two-State or not two-State, or however they see peace, long lasting peace and stability in that region taking place, that is something that has to be addressed is that separation of those two entities. And I do not see it being looked at a lot, so I would be curious to know you all's analysis as well.

Mr. GREENWAY. Thanks, Congressman.

I would say that the direct answer to your question is I do not think that is the case now.

I think the perspective of the Accords members before and after the agreement was that they could better contribute to setting conditions for an eventual brokered settlement, whatever that might be, by being a member of the Accords and having normalized diplomatic relations with Israel. And they point to both Egypt and Jordan as examples of this, where their influence over Israel, positive and negative, would contribute to an ultimate resolution, one that they would frankly admit is not currently within sight.

And I think there is merit to that argument.

Second is I think there is a material way for them to contribute to the conversation and to set conditions. And I think that that has probably not been exploited to the degree to which it could. And one of the ways which I mentioned up front in my opening remarks, and one of the ways we established early on with the Accords was a fund to allow Accord member countries to contribute to infrastructure investment within the territories. That was both acceptable to Israel and to the Palestinians, and to the benefit of both.

And I think there is ample opportunity for that to continue to occur while we are waiting for the resolution of a more difficult political question.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, sir.

Mr. SHAPIRO. Congressman, I think the attitude of the Palestinian Authority to the Abraham Accords was very disappointing. They, of course, have called it a betrayal and essentially boycotted

it. Of course, Hamas, Gaza's terrorist organization that rejects Israel's existence, are obviously not going to be a party.

I do think there are different views among the Palestinian people, the younger generation, businesspeople, people who are open to the idea, that Palestinians could benefit and contribute if they were participating in these dialogs.

What I hope is that we will see—we try to do this in our programs—but I think the Arab States that have normalized with Israel—the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, in particular are well positioned to be convenors in forums where both Israelis and Palestinians participate, look for ways to cooperate, develop some personal relationships, lower suspicion.

That may not get us to the resolution that I would like to see, the two-State solution, or any resolution of the conflict, but it would certainly lower the barriers to an eventual resumption of negotiations and some kind of resolution by developing this.

I think these Arab States have more influence in that arena than they may realize they do, and that we should encourage them to use it.

Mr. MAST. I appreciate you all taking the time to testify today. And I yield no time back because I have no time left.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congressman Brian Mast. And we now proceed to former chairman David Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I congratulate you on your first hearing as chair, chairman of this important committee. And thank the witnesses for being with us today and for your testimony.

I think we all recognize that the Abraham Accords is really an important and historic breakthrough on building and maintaining peace in the Middle East through new and extended regional cooperation. And as we acknowledge the successes of these agreements I am optimistic about the opportunity that lies ahead to build on these historic achievements.

Additional engagement and partnerships will allow for cooperation on key issues, which you have discussed. And I, you know, of course am looking forward to ways in which Congress can help support efforts to deepen and broaden the Abraham Accords in a better future for all in the region.

As you mentioned, Ambassador Shapiro, one of the main impedimenta to expanding the Abraham Accords has been the Israeli-Palestinian issue. And Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Oman have all indicated, to various extents, their interest in stabilizing relations with Israel, but not without significant steps toward peace.

And so what I am wondering is if you have recommendations on the kinds of things that we might be suggesting to our State Department in these conversations that would provide some engagement to Palestinians, some benefits so they would see the Abraham Accords is not only bringing more peace and stability to the region but actual benefits to them?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Sure. Thank you, Congressman.

The kinds of projects that have already been announced, for example the Prosperity Green and Prosperity Blue solar energy for desalinated water exchange between Jordan and Israel, financed by the United Arab Emirates, is a very good example of a project that

could have and should, I think, include the Palestinians. They are, obviously, in the same geographic area. They have similar needs for energy and water. They could be a contributor but also a beneficiary of that and ten other joint projects like it.

I discussed the idea that the UAE can be a convenor of the kinds of exchanges where Israelis and Palestinians outside their own immediate environment can actually meet with their mutual Arab partners to do business deals, to do development projects, do education initiatives. And just by doing that, it shows that there is something to be gained by Palestinians by contributing.

It is not going to answer all of their immediate needs. It is not going to start a negotiation tomorrow. And, certainly, the lack of trust, almost total lack of trust between Israeli and Palestinian leaders is a big barrier. We are not going to overcome that tomorrow.

But I do think those parties, with U.S. sponsorship and organization, can draw Palestinians into these dialogs with Israelis and with their other Arab partners and change that dynamic rather than dramatically.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

And, you know, I think we all recognize this past year has been one of the deadliest periods of violence in the West Bank in nearly two decades. And I am wondering whether you, General, or you Mr. or President Greenway, have thoughts on whether or not the parties to the Abraham Accords have been helpful and can they be helpful in terms of assisting and responding to some of the violence and brokering some kinds of agreements because of their new positions as members of the Abraham Accords?

Has that proved useful or has that not really spilled over into some of these issues with respect to settlement expansion?

Mr. SHAPIRO. OK. You know, the UAE is struggling with this. They are a member of the U.N. Security Council. They have several times in the last 2 or 3 months brought complaints on behalf of other Arab countries to the U.N. Security Council about statements or actions by Israel in the West Bank.

I do not think they have been as consistently critical as I think they should be of Palestinian terrorist attacks that take the lives of Israelis or, indeed, of Palestinian Authority salaries paid to terrorists.

But, again, it is a demonstration that they are, they are positioned to play a role as both a supporter of both. They are now friends with Israel, and nobody would want them to withhold any of that, but also friends and partners to the Palestinians. They can be supporters. They can be coaches. They can put some positive pressure on each side to avoid the things that make it harder, or keep the situation on the ground very tense, or make it harder to resume negotiations.

I would like to see them step more into that role. Obviously, that should be done in coordination with the United States.

Mr. VOTEL. Congressman, I completely agree with the Ambassador. I think that, I think the key point here is that the maturing of the Abraham Accords relationships will really give the opportunity for trustful communication between the partners in the arrangement. That does take time, frankly. I think we are seeing

some of that. People are treading lightly, but over time continuing investments I think does provide a good platform of addressing really sensitive issues like, like you raised.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you so much.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Cicilline.

We now proceed to Congressman Rich McCormick of Georgia.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to make this quick because each one of you brings such a wealth of knowledge, I am really excited about this.

I am going to start with the general, if you do not mind.

I2U2, are you familiar with I2U2?

Mr. VOTEL. I am not sure that I am.

Mr. MCCORMICK. With India, Israel, United States, and UAE, the partnership they have, sharing information, sharing economy, and just kind of thinking outside the box with what we have with the Abraham, and thinking outside even the regional benefit of the Abraham.

As we tie in other places you have a big country like Indonesia, which is primarily Muslim, and who also has a potential to come in and be a part of this greater peace process. What do you think about expanding this outside of the direct region?

Mr. VOTEL. I think it is extraordinarily important, in my view. Again, I think the benefit of these types of accords, these types of arrangements, is they promote dialog and they promote communication between partners. And I think whenever you are doing that you are reducing risk for things happening. So, I am very, very supportive.

I understand Indonesia is one of the countries that has been most engaged to date in some of the expansion. So, I think that is a, I think that is a positive, positive thing.

That said, the priority needs to remain in the Middle East.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Absolutely.

Mr. VOTEL. That is where the original problem really exists.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Perfect. And I agree with you, power in numbers, especially with such a large population of the Muslim community coming on board in that peace process.

Honorable Mr. Greenway—by the way, thank you for both of your services, too, by the way, as fellow military brothers in arms. When we talk about the second largest Shi'a population in the world, next to Iran, being in Azerbaijan, and having Russia distracted with a war where they have basically withdrawn from the Armenian region, provides a real needed opportunity, I think, to kind of go in there and establish this presence. What are the hold-ups, or what are the pros and cons do you think to including Azerbaijan? And how can we get them pulled in quickly while Russia is distracted?

Mr. GREENWAY. Thank you, Congressman. Excellent question. And your preceding one was I think as well.

I think that, well, first, Azerbaijan already has a strong relationship with Israel. And so membership in the Accords would be more formal and symbolic than substantive because of the relationship they already enjoy.

To your broader point on whether there is room for us to pull Azerbaijan out of the other Central Asian States more closely within the fold, at the expense of Russia and China, which I think would be their strong preference, I think there is in fact an opportunity for us to do exactly that. And I think the time is certainly right for it.

And we would, I think, increase our flexibility, and also economic prosperity for ourselves, and also for the region. The benefit of looking outside the Middle East, particularly, the Middle East, North Africa, to Asia and to the Central Asian States is the economic benefit that ties them together, increases the bond, the bond that endures.

So, I think any effort we can make along those lines would be beneficial.

Mr. McCORMICK. That's perfect. And I always stress that economic tie, which kind of goes to I2U2, and with the other, especially you mentioned Azerbaijan's strong economic ties to Israel, especially with energy, so that is what I am looking for.

Ambassador, I am going to shift back to more local concerns. You mentioned in your opening remarks the deteriorating relationship between Israel and Palestine. I have been in the military for over 30 years, or around the military for over 30 years, it always seemed bad to me. I do not see how we can deteriorate from bad to bad. I am just curious what you mean by that.

I mean, it always seems like we kind of vacillate but we never really get good. So, I do not understand what you mean by deteriorating. What specifically do you mean?

I mean, is there a path forward? It seems like there is a vested interest since a certain guy came along to divide us, people actually make a profit off of dividing us. And I do not know how we overcome that other than to tie them in somehow economically. At one time it seemed like they were kind of blue color workers, they had a pretty good relationship, pretty economically sound model for those particular, that particular demographic to succeed. And now that has kind of gone by the wayside.

Mr. SHAPIRO. Congressman, it is obviously a situation that does go through ups and downs and various cycles. I do not think anyone would dispute that the recent months has seen a spike in violence and number of terrorist, deadly terrorist attacks by Palestinian terrorists against Israeli citizens. A number of operations the Israeli military has undertaken to go after those who are responsible for those attacks. And sometimes civilians are wounded in those or killed in those operations.

Mr. McCORMICK. I get your point.

I am sorry, I am almost out of time.

Just what do you think, if we, once again I think Iran is, if you take away the big brother, the person who is kind of supplying the motivation, the arms behind it, is there a way to divide them from that and cutoff that supply that would benefit this process?

Mr. SHAPIRO. I think the best opportunity, and I am not saying anybody can promise that this is a guarantee of success, but to get Palestinians who have been drawn toward violent extremism, drawn toward the sponsors who are the providers of that kind of weaponry—and I do not mean Hamas, who are ideologically com-

mitted to Israel's destruction—I mean other Palestinians who have in the past at least considered what would it look like to live alongside Israel in the two-State solution, would be to, first of all, show some improved conditions on the ground via economic and security upgrades and, second of all, to show that there is a horizon, a path, a diplomatic pathway that could get back to that outcome if they are willing and, obviously, if Israel is also willing to engage in that diplomatic process.

As long as it looks absolutely hopeless from the Palestinian perspective that there will ever be any end, then I suspect it will be harder for us to steer more Palestinians away from that path as we absolutely should be trying to do.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Apologize for going over time.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you very much, Congressman Rich Burchett. We now proceed to Congressman—Excuse me, to Rich McCormick.

We now have Congressman Tim Burchett of Tennessee.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Shapiro, you know, we are quick to be critical of anti-Semitism overseas. And we should; we have got it here. But, of course, overseas it has been thousands of years before we were even a country. I am wondering what can the Abraham Accords do to help put a stop to some of it?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Thank you, Congressman. It is an excellent question, and something I am quite excited about.

In December, our N7 Initiative hosted a conference in Morocco on education and coexistence. And we brought together from eight countries, Israel and seven Arab countries, educators of NGO's involved in coexistence, interfaith work, including a number of Arab activists in Morocco, and in the UAE, and in Bahrain who are working to educate their own populations against anti-Semitic narratives that have been present in their societies or their education systems for far too long, for understanding the common roots of Judaism and Islam, and the times during history when Jews and Muslims have lived peacefully alongside each other.

There is a lot of pride in that, particularly in Morocco where the Jewish community has been a major part of Moroccan society of centuries.

And so, I think there are initiatives underway. There is Holocaust education now being brought into their school systems, at least the UAE and Morocco, for the first time. So there is significant progress. And all of this is made possible by the dialogs and the cross-pollination discussions that were only really started after the Abraham Accords came into being.

Mr. BURCHETT. Would you say that leadership sometimes I find that they want to stay in power? And that seems to be the key. And as long as Jews, and Muslims, and Christians are all fighting it keeps the same old bunch of dirtbags in power? And would you say that is a safe assumption?

Mr. SHAPIRO. I think there are many examples of that dynamic throughout history.

Mr. BURCHETT. "Dirtbags" is probably not in you diplomatic dossier, but it is in mine, so.

Mr. SHAPIRO. I think, Congressman, you can find many examples of that dynamic throughout history.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. I will take that as a yes.

Mr. Greenway, Saudi Arabia's interest to engage publicly with Israel affects other countries. And I would be interested in do you feel like they are interested in normalizing those relations?

Mr. GREENWAY. Thanks for the question, Congressman.

We had a number of conversations with our Saudi partners while we were negotiating the Abraham Accords, before and since. I would say, first, that public discussions about negotiations tend to increase negotiating leverage of one or more parties. Usually it become detrimental.

It is why the Accords themselves were never disclosed or announced before they were concluded. So, I think any public discussion usually has a less-than-productive impact on it.

My private and conversations, and what has been, I think, disclosed publicly generally comports with the conclusion that this is really about the Riyadh-Washington relationship and has very—has a lot less to do with the relationship with Israel. And on sound footing I think there is room to proceed.

I think, ultimately, it is in our interests, the United States' best interests. I think it is certainly within Israel's best interests. I think it is also within the Kingdom's best interests. But I do think that we would have to repair the relationship and build on a sounder footing in order to proceed.

Ultimately, I do think it is about integrating our partners and allies in the region, which I think they desperately want. And I do think that there is certainly room to address legitimate security concerns.

And the previous comments about the Saudi discussion and potential requirement to pursue civil deeper cooperation, I think the general point there is they do not want to see a standard upheld by the United States that is one way for Tehran and another way for partners and allies in the region. And I think they would be comfortable with the gold standard 123 Agreement that saw the construction of Barakah and the UAE ultimately, provided that the United States did not enable a wholesale civil and military nuclear program in Tehran.

Mr. BURCHETT. Do you think there is any additional measures that need to be taken to support peace besides those that you mentioned?

Mr. GREENWAY. Well, I think there certainly are. And, again, I think providing for our security and stability in the region, and our partners' and allies', would demonstrate exactly that level of commitment.

I think the right approach on Tehran, as the shared-upon and the agreed-upon principal threat to peace and stability in the region, would go a long way toward doing that. So, I think if we make movement in that direction, I think we will find partners moving with us.

Mr. BURCHETT. What do you think America sees by expanding these Accords, what benefits? Quickly.

Mr. GREENWAY. The first is to constrain China's ambitions globally.

The second is to secure global markets upon which we are dependent and the principal beneficiary.

And the third would be to see stability in the region that all too often has required a huge expenditure for the United States to redress.

Mr. BURCHETT. Those are three good things.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the remaining 8 seconds.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you, Congressman Tim Burchett. And we appreciate your very accurate terminology, whatever you use. So, this is correct.

With this, we are very fortunate to have Congressman Michael Lawler from New York.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all of you for testifying today.

Ambassador Shapiro, you made note in your remarks of the legislation that Congressman Torres and I have introduced to create a special envoy specifically for the Abraham Accords. Why do you believe that would be an effective tool, if you will, to help ensure the stability and long-term success of the Abraham Accords?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Thank you, Congressman.

I think when Administrations elevate their focus on particular areas and appointments of that nature, special envoy, they can have other titles, can help do that, it demonstrates a very significant commitment that gets the attention of our foreign partners, obviously those in the region, those who have already made their decision to normalize with Israel, and the additional steps that we seek to have them deepen those conversations. Those States that have not yet normalized relations, and there is a focal point for discussions with those countries. And even for external partners.

Mr. McCormick mentioned the I2U2 Initiative that India has constructively contributed to, while we have a lot of other U.S. partners in Europe, in Asia, that also could be contributors. But somebody needs to sort of corral that. Somebody needs to organize that. Somebody needs to be the focal point.

And then within our own Government, I mentioned it is not just the State Department, it is not just the Defense Department that has to do this. There are numerous other cabinet departments that have something to contribute.

But, again, having a focal point for organizing all of that effort, and even the effort of external non-government entities that want to contribute, I think is made easier when you have that sort of focal point.

Mr. LAWLER. So, obviously in 2020 the Abraham Accords were entered into with the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco. They have somewhat, I do not want to say stalled, but obviously I think, you know, there was obviously a change in Administration here, and there are other, other events that have happened in the world, obviously the Russian invasion of Ukraine being one of them. It is your belief that whether it is a special envoy or some sort of heightened position, that would help maybe continue to push this forward toward success?

I mean, we are seeing, you know, other countries allowing Israeli airlines to operate and come into their airspace which, certainly, I think is a positive step toward more normalized relations. But you

agree that ultimately having this type of position, or something similar, would help advance the ball here?

Mr. SHAPIRO. I do.

I want to give full credit to the Biden Administration. I think they have invested in this. I think the Negev Summit and the resulting Negev Forum and the working groups that have met, as you've mentioned, the opening of airspace first in Saudi Arabia, now in Oman, that facilitates much shorter flights between Israel and the Far East, some of the other visits, and the I2U2, and some of the other engagements that the United States has helped sponsor, all result from good work, good diplomatic work.

But, again, you can do even more when you have a high level focal point without our own Government and dealing with foreign governments.

Mr. LAWLER. What additional countries would you, and just if you could name them, just in the interests of time, but what additional countries would you like to see ideally enter into the Abraham Accords?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Of course Saudi Arabia is the biggest prize but probably one of the most difficult. I think Oman, Mauritania, Qatar, and Kuwait are all possibilities. Next, outside of the region, Indonesia, Somalia, Niger, and Malaysia are also legitimate candidates.

Mr. LAWLER. OK. Last, and you are somewhat uniquely positioned on this, given both your role as former Ambassador to Israel, but also your work as a consultant with respect to Iran, how do you think the Administration's approach toward Iran, and their efforts as recently as last year to restart the Iran Nuclear Deal, impacts the Abraham Accords and the potential of other countries, like Saudi Arabia, to really engage with Israel?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Well, you know, one thing Israel and a number of these Arab partners, those that have normalized this, have not agreed on is that they disagree with the United States. They disagreed at the time the JCPOA was signed, and they disagree with the Biden Administration's approach. But I think that—to try to reenter it.

But I think that ship has largely sailed. I do not see an opportunity to go back into that deal. Things that were possible or necessary in order to do it I do not think are possible anymore in light of Iran's oppression of its own people, and the protests, and arming of Russia in the war in Ukraine. So, I think we are in a new phase.

Mr. LAWLER. Just so I am clear, is it your position that the United States should not try to restart?

Mr. SHAPIRO. I do not think it is even an option at this point.

Mr. LAWLER. OK.

Mr. SHAPIRO. I think we are in a new phase where deterrence, and that is something that the United States, Israel, and a lot of these Arab partners can agree on is going to be a central portion, a central component of a new Iran policy, obviously drawing certain lines about things that Iran might do, hopefully will not do, but if they would do would draw a response of one kind or another from one or a coalition of these partners.

So, I think there is actually a new opportunity, mostly because of Iran's behavior and Iran's refusal to try to return to that agree-

ment, and then do all of these other destabilizing things, to coalesce a more unified U.S. and regional policy to deal with Iran.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the additional time.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you very much, Congressman Michael Lawler.

And, also, I am really grateful that we have the co-chairman of the Bulgaria Caucus here, Congressman Brad Schneider.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to personally thank you for allowing me to join the committee hearing this morning.

I want to thank our witnesses first and foremost for your service to our Nation, all three of you in different ways. We are grateful to you as a country, and for your time here, and for your commitment to the Abraham Accords.

I have the privilege of being one of the co-founders and co-chairs of the bipartisan, bicameral Abraham Accords Caucus. And I think that is a reflection of what we do, what you do in this fundamental belief that the Abraham Accords Caucus are one of the most bright things we see coming out of the Middle East. It is something that we, as a Nation, should be extraordinarily proud of, being the facilitator of this accords a couple of years ago, and something that we need to be completely committed to.

As you have touched on, we need to make sure that we are deepening the roots of the Accords in the countries that have signed the Accords today, while at the same time I would argue working to help it branch out, branch out in two ways that you have touched on:

One, bring more countries in. Saudi Arabia obviously would be very welcome. But, Ambassador Shapiro, as you touched on, reaching out to Europe, building relationships with Asia, and making sure that this becomes a centerpiece of diplomacy and opportunity.

In that vein, I think one of the challenges we face is demonstrating the value of the Abraham Accords, first to the decision-makers in the region and around but, also, critically, to the people living in these countries, that they see the benefits of the Accords, and to demonstrate U.S. commitment to the region, and through that commitment to the Accords.

So, I will start with you, Ambassador Shapiro.

How do we work to make sure that the people living in the region see the value of the Accords, and that they see the U.S. commitment to the region and to the Abraham Accords itself?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Sure. Thank you, Congressman.

The Negev Forum, obviously, is one effort to try to come up with projects and proposals that will go beyond the leadership level, but show benefit to the public in the different sectors, energy, health, water, and food, et cetera.

The problem is the Negev Forum is a consensus organization and moves very slowly. It takes time for the ministers to meet again and ratify the work done at the working level. And so, there are a lot of proposals but very little has actually been implemented.

Those things that have been implemented haven't been region-wide, they have been sort of between individual countries: the

UAE-Israel Food Trade Agreement; I mentioned the Prosperity Green and Blue; Israel-Jordan-UAE Agreement.

We are, as I said, at the Atlantic Council trying the N7 Initiative to bring together a Track 2 or Track 1.5 component to run parallel to the Negev Forum so that a broader community of experts can build a network, develop ideas for projects that really are focused precisely on that. How does a citizen of one of these countries feel that they have a new educational opportunity, new better health care, better access to water and food security than they did before, and because of these agreements?

So, there is a number of ways. It requires a lot of investment by expertise. It requires money, of course, some from governments, some from private or foundation or philanthropic entities. But that really needs to be the focus going forward.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. General Votel, let me turn to you. And just to refresh, sir, we actually spoke about a year-and-a-half ago with a mutual friend Al Goldstein. So, it is good to see you here. But I would love to have your thoughts on this as well.

Mr. VOTEL. Absolutely.

So, just to build a little bit on that, I think one of the most important things that could take place is the promotion of people-to-people exchanges in contact between countries. Obviously, tourism provides an opportunity for this, but so does exchanges for education purposes, for business purposes, for health care, for technology exchanges. I think these are extraordinarily important. And people in each of the countries who are parties to the agreement will begin to see this. And so, I think this idea of promoting people-to-people exchanges.

Certainly there is a series of exercises and other things that are taking place in the Gulf, and in the air over the Gulf, and in a variety of areas. A demonstration of, you know, an effective defense against the threat certainly will, I think, is something that needs to be emphasized in the region. And, again, people will begin to see that.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

And, Mr. Greenway, give you the last word.

Mr. GREENWAY. I appreciate it, Congressman. Excellent question.

I think we spend a lot of our time on implementation. There have been over 260 agreements between the Accord member countries. And we spend most of our time connecting ministries, departments, agencies, public and private institutions, to execute these:

Academic exchanges, including scholars and fellows programs; athletic events which will encompass some of the first international Abraham Accords-based international athletic events this year; an agriculture initiative between the Accord member countries actually putting shovels in the ground in Sudan this year; expanding cross-border trade by expanding infrastructure; and, as you mentioned earlier, bringing external support to this.

We have worked hard to build caucuses in the U.K., in France, in Germany, in Brussels, in Hungary just this past week, and soon we hope in other countries as well, and in Asia in order to leverage that support.

So, implementation and follow-through on agreements that have already been achieved I think will go a long way toward cementing

the ties, demonstrating the benefit to people, and encouraging others to join.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. Thank you.

And let me just emphasize, I agree with everything you said.

General Votel, you have talked about people-to-people. We have had the chance here with the caucus to meet with the Ambassadors of the Abraham Accords countries, Israel, UAE, Bahrain, Morocco. It is very important.

And if I can, Mr. Chairman, we are working to try to get a trip to the Abraham Accords countries, and would love to try to work with you on that as well.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. And thank you, Chairman, co-chair of the Abraham Accords Caucus, for your—you have had so many chairmanships it is hard to keep them straight. But I just want to say that is terrific. In fact, you are doing so good we are going to have a second round. And when we have such distinguished individuals here. And so we would like to proceed, including Chairman Schneider.

So, at this time, Ambassador Shapiro, the normalization of relations between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan have been an historic accomplishment during the Trump Administration, benefiting all of the Abraham Accords countries and the United States. At this point, what roadblocks might be stopping more Arab countries from joining the Abraham Accords?

And if you could review again the benefits that signatories have made since normalizing relations?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The benefits, I think, are flowing on a regular basis. There are already people-to-people exchanges, as General Votel mentioned, although room for vast expansion of those. There are the beginnings of educational exchanges, Israeli students studying at Arab universities and vice versa. There is room to dramatically expand that as well.

There is a free trade agreement between the UAE and Israel, and a dramatic increase in bilateral trade between them, and negotiations on an Israel-Bahrain agreement.

And then, of course, there are the various things that those governments sought from the United States, again something that the United States has always done in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, which is make a contribution. The UAE sought a particular weapons system. It hasn't actually followed through on that, but that was part of that agreement.

And Morocco got the recognition of Western Sahara.

So, they of course seek something in their own interests in addition to what they get out of the relationship with Israel.

I think other countries, of course, look at some of those negotiations and they look for the right moment. They look for the question of whether they, too, would be in a bargaining situation with the United States. I think we need to expect that with any country that comes forward.

They also, I think, look for the moment when they would find this to be something they could most easily absorb in their own political systems. That is where the tensions between Israelis and

Palestinians that have increased have also, I think, been a—have the potential to slow additional countries from coming into the fold.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much.

And indeed, President Greenway, it has just been awesome to see the agreement between Lebanon and Israel. I just I cannot even visualize how important that is for the offshore drilling of oil and natural gas, environmentally sound. How important it is to back up a country that should be great, but it is not, as Lebanon. It has been great in terms of economic opportunity and achievement. But the economic stability that can be achieved by the sale of oil and gas.

And then how extraordinary to put together the benefit to Israel and then the thought that this would tie directly to Egypt for the refining, and then tie to Italy for the export. And also to have an impact on war criminal Putin.

And so, again, the offshore drilling I was hoping to get more attention what an achievement that is, because what you have Lebanon wins, Israel wins, Egypt wins, Italy wins, war criminal Putin loses.

Are there any other initiatives that you see that—I think it would be hard to replicate that—but are there any other economic achievements that could be achieved between the countries of the Middle East?

Mr. GREENWAY. Well, you bring up, I think, one of the most important areas, Chairman, and that is energy cooperation. And I think we haven't yet seen the full potential of this.

And so, while cooperation between parties we have already mentioned, chiefly Israel and Egypt in this case, but others within the Mediterranean can, I think, offset and replace the loss of Russian gas. Some 43 percent of Europe's energy requirements were met previously by Russia. That loss has not been replaced.

There isn't yet infrastructure plans in place to offset it completely. The United States, Norway, and others I think have taken steps, but there is not yet a mid-to long-term plan in place. This is where we judge the Abraham Accords countries, including Israel, Egypt, and other partners could, in fact, offset, if not replace the loss of Russian gas to Europe. And I think the U.S. can play a critical role in doing it.

The plans previously existed but the business model to require the infrastructure investment did not until Russia invaded Ukraine. And at that point it then becomes perfectly reasonable. But it will take time, effort to do. It will be an enormous revenue generator for the participant countries. It will also, again, strategically align our partners to one another and not dependent upon an adversary.

So, we cannot emphasize the enormous potential of this too much, but there is a lot of work to be done.

Mr. WILSON. Well, it is just exciting to see the offshore drilling, the consequence. That could be expanded to pipelines to Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, to the Western Balkans, all to provide the energy independence for that region of Southeastern Europe.

And so, I yield back.

And now we have Congresswoman Kathy Manning.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you again to our witnesses for sharing your time and your expertise.

So, there are two other countries in the immediate region that we have barely mentioned. And Mr. Chairman just mentioned Lebanon which, sadly, is on the verge of becoming a failed State. We haven't even talked about Syria, which is the source of countless problems in the region.

So, I am wondering is there any way that the Abraham Accords countries working together could have any positive impact on either of those countries?

I saw a smile on Ambassador Shapiro's face. I do not know if that meant you were hoping someone else would answer the question or you would like to take it on?

Mr. VOTEL. Well, I think it is an excellent question, Congresswoman.

I think the defense, security and defense cooperation between Israel and other countries in the region, particularly those that are involved in this, I think does increase the opportunity to emplace measures that can have an impact on Iran's ability to move their lethal resources closer to Israel.

That is very indirect right now. But I think when we, when we look at some of the initiatives that are being undertaken right now by U.S. Central Command with a very excellent commander trying to, you know, create a series of sensors, and drones, and all backed by artificial intelligence, to really understand what is happening in the Gulf, that gives us the opportunity to better control the maritime movement of lethal, lethal aid.

The same thing could apply to the air. These things, I think are, they are indirect at this point, but they could have the opportunity to have an impact on that.

I think, you know, what is most important I think what I am trying to emphasize to you is that showing a united front and then demonstrating coherent approaches to security and defense in the region can have a—can address that situation and particularly with respect to some of the Iranian malign influence that plays out in Syria, and affects Israel, and others in the region as well.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

So, let me ask this question: what can we be doing in Congress to support and foster the expansion of the Abraham Accords? You have talked about so many ways these Accords and the interaction of these countries is transformative and can be even more transformative for the region, what can we in Congress be doing to be supportive?

And I would actually ask each of you to answer that. Ambassador Shapiro, would you mind starting?

Mr. SHAPIRO. Sure. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I think, first of all, the establishment of the Abraham Accords Caucuses in and of itself demonstrates that this is a cause that deserves bipartisan sustained investment and support rather than being the province of one party or one Administration. And I think that is very, very important.

The visits that a number of members have already made, and Congressman Schneider referenced additional visits that will come, are an opportunity to go and talk directly to those leaders and peo-

ple, and explain why it is that the United States sees its own interests and the interests of its partners served by doing this.

And then as I also indicated, there are, there is more than just the negotiations that the State Department sponsors, more than just the security cooperation that the Defense Department and the military lead on. Almost every department of the U.S. Government has an international affairs program, has something to bring to it: things as diverse as USTR's expertise on trade negotiations; the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's ability to bring curriculum on Holocaust education; the U.S., the Center for Disease Control's ability to share, provide information, and networks for sharing about future pandemics. These are just a few examples.

But every Member of Congress sits on a committee and has oversight over, has jurisdiction over a department that could be encouraged, and maybe even more than encouraged and impounded to participate in this. And kind of this whole government approach I think would be the right way to think about how the Congress can make its biggest contribution.

Ms. MANNING. Wonderful. Mr. Schneider, you have your charge. And, Mr. Greenway, would you add to that?

Mr. GREENWAY. Yes, Congresswoman, happy to.

It already mentioned energy cooperation in the free trade area and, like Ambassador Shapiro, would allow the formation of a caucus in both House and Senate. I would say that we, the United States, allocates a fair amount of money toward Middle East peace more broadly, and has for many decades.

And I would say no need to look at additional preparations, but perhaps ensuring those that currently exist could encompass the Abraham Accords. So, we spend a lot of money on supporting programs that nominally support peace between Israel and Palestine, and Israel and its neighbors, but we do not allocate resources toward it. So, perhaps looking at existing legislation, modifying it to encompass the Accords so that we could encourage and support the actual piece that is manifested in front of us

Second is, I think, providing capabilities to our partners. It enables them, one, to defend themselves more appropriately, and reduces the burden on us. So, ultimately, I think we need to get to a point where we are more comfortable with accelerating the provision of capabilities to our partners. And it will send exactly the right message to them.

But I would emphasize that trade, and energy, and the economic argument does provide for a strong rationale. If we want them to get along, they are going to have to trade with each other to the point where they will defend that trade relationship.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Congresswoman Manning.

And I want to thank you for raising, indeed, there are so many countries that need to be addressed, and Lebanon, Syria. As we are thinking of the tremendous success, the Kingdom of Jordan. And then our hopes for the people of Iran, our appreciation of the women of Iran. And then West Balkans, when you think of countries that have come to life: Albania, North Macedonia. And then

you go to Serbia, what a great opportunity for civility in a region that was unimaginable.

And so, with that I want to proceed. And our last questioner will be, of course, someone extremely important because he is the Abraham Accords Co-Chairman Brad Schneider.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, General Votel, let me go back to what you put in your opening remarks about the importance of U.S. leadership, and the question I asked earlier, the demonstration of U.S. commitment to the region. I can start with you, but I will ask the whole panel what should we be doing to demonstrate our commitment and leadership in the region?

And I will give one leading aspect to it, the idea of coordinated defense, sharing of information, collaboration across systems.

Mr. GREENWAY. Thank you, Congressman, or Mr. Chairman.

These are areas in which we have extraordinary expertise within our military and across, across all services. And so, I know in helping our partners develop better shared awareness systems, you know, to share information among themselves as we have been able to do very effectively, I think is one of the ways that we can, we can help, help our partners become more resilient and more self-reliant in looking after their own defense.

So, you know, sharing our lessons learned, sharing our practices, putting our leaders into a place where they can advocate for these types of approaches I think are really, are really important.

I also think an area where we could provide some additional help is in the area of security cooperation. Candid discussions with our partners about the capabilities that they need and should be acquiring I think are extraordinarily important. And this, I think, has been a longtime challenge in the region. And so, this is an area where we can actually demonstrate some leadership.

And then, finally, just the ability for us to bring people together, to be a convenor. We do not have to drive the whole conversation, but the fact of the matter is in the Middle East when the United States speaks it carries weight. And our leaders, like the CENTCOM commander, or our various Ambassadors, or others, really do have that level of credibility that they can bring people together to talk about, talk about the difficult challenges.

So, this idea of a convenor I think is a really important way for us to demonstrate our leadership.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Great. Thank you.

Mr. Greenway?

Mr. GREENWAY. Thank you, Congressman.

I would say first, it has come up before, that if we do not, I think, have some common agreement on how to approach the threat from Iran, it is going to be difficult to make progress across a number of other fronts, including security cooperation.

We have talked about a number of issues today. But I cannot overemphasize the fact that this is the most pressing threat to all of them. What happens in the Israel-Palestine conflict matters to them, but not nearly to the point in which the immediate threat to their very survival coming from Tehran today is, and the desperate need for U.S. leadership in the response to that threat. That is a huge opportunity.

And I agree with Ambassador Shapiro that it seems the ship has sailed. It is an opportunity, then, for us, I think, to stake a claim in partnership with our allies in the region. And that would allow us to convene from a position of strength, which I think they all and we want.

Second, I would say our support for Israel is critically important during this time. The rest of the region watches us incredibly closely. They cannot be more pro-Israel than we are. That does not mean unequivocal or without conditions. It does mean if there is daylight between the capitals, there will be huge daylight between their capitals.

Second, I would say that building support abroad, which we have talked about actually matters a great deal, and adds additional leverage and other partners in this expanding and supporting the Accords.

And, last, I would say they always ask this question. We ask them to commit resources toward each other and toward the region. They ask us what have we committed to the Abraham Accords? And the answer to that question is we really haven't at all.

And I think that there is room for us to do it. And I'm not saying that we need to find resources. I am saying we could look at existing resources and apply them more effectively to support the Accords. And that to date has not yet occurred.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. OK, thank you.

I will give you the last word, Ambassador Shapiro. Before I give it to you I do want to go back to a conversation earlier where you were asked about two States. And I do not think anyone is talking about a two-State solution on the horizon. It is not going to be a second State where it is a terrorist State. That is a non-starter.

And as you said, Mr. Greenway, the greatest threat, the existential threat is a nuclear Iran. And I agree that the ship has sailed on past agreement. We need to make sure that Iran understands that we are looking forward and will never allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. But we are also looking at a place where we are pursuing peace in the region.

So Ambassador Shapiro, I give you the last word.

Mr. SHAPIRO. Thank you, Congressman.

I think the narrative that sometimes pervades in the region of a U.S. withdrawal, or a U.S. absence, or the U.S. pivoting to other regions is rather exaggerated. It is true, of course, that three consecutive presidents of very different characters and Administrations have all demonstrated different ways. The American people are not looking for new major military entanglements in the region, but we are still there. CENTCOM is still the main convenor and still the main partner for all these countries as we are now involved in it.

I think President Biden made a very courageous decision and the right decision to travel to the region last summer, knowing he would get some criticism for going and meeting with the Saudis, but as a way of indicating to all of these countries that we may have had some disagreements, and we may have, at times, different views about what the right approach is on a given problem, but the United States is committed to that partnership, is com-

mitted to ensuring that the partners have the ability to defend themselves but, also, that we are there as an ultimate backstop.

But then, of course, we also have expectations that they will act in ways that are consistent with core U.S. interests when it comes to China, when it comes to Russia, when it comes to oil markets.

So, being a good, faithful partner that expects the flow of that partnership to go in both directions I think is critically important.

And, finally, I would just add that I do think that when you get to moments like the current one where there is a deterioration between Israelis and Palestinians, that can be destabilizing for Jordan, that can be difficult to Egypt, that can be a source of tension between Israel and new partners, and prevent progress between Israel and partners that haven't yet joined with them.

And there, too, showing that the United States is invested in that, cares, tries to improve the situation long before it is possible to actually negotiate it toward a solution so that Israelis and Palestinians, but also everyone in that circle, broader circle that is affected by those events, sees some U.S. commitment and investment trying to improve the situation also adds to our leadership capability in the region.

Mr. WILSON. And, again, thank you, Congressman Brad Schneider, for your vision to create the bipartisan Abraham Accords Caucus.

And another point that you just made is so important, and that is that it is bipartisan, that there be every effort, any effort, every effort that could possibly be made for Iran not to achieve nuclear weapons. What a threat that would be to world stability. And, so, it is bipartisan truly here in support of every effort to block the ability of Iran to have nuclear weapons.

With that, I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the members for their questions. The members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for the witnesses. And we will ask you to respond to those in writing.

And with this, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:57 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

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

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

March 2, 2023

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia in Room 210 of the House Visitor's Center at 2:00 p.m. on March 9, 2023. The hearing will be available by live webcast on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>.

DATE: Thursday, March 9, 2023

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Expanding the Abraham Accords

WITNESSES: Mr. Robert Greenway
President and Executive Director
Abraham Accords Peace Institute
Adjunct Fellow
Hudson Institute
(Former Deputy Assistant to the President and Senior Director of Middle East North Africa, National Security Council)

General Joseph L. Votel, U.S. Army (Retired)
Distinguished Fellow
Middle East Institute
(Former Commander, U.S. Central Command)

The Honorable Daniel B. Shapiro
Distinguished Fellow
Atlantic Council
(Former United States Ambassador to Israel)

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chairman

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

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

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Meeting on: Expanding the Abraham Accords

Date: March 9, 2023

Convened: 2:10pm

Adjourned:

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

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Note: Red boxes with red type will NOT print.

Day Thursday Date March 9, 2023 Room HVC-210

Starting Time 2:00pm Ending Time 4:00pm

Recesses (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Joe Wilson

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

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

TITLE OF HEARING:

Expanding the Abraham Accords

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Wilson, Mr. Mast, Mr. Burchett, Mr. Baird, Mr. Lawler, Mr. McCormick, Mr. Sherman, Mr. Cicilline, Ms. Manning, Mr. Schneider

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

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

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

Statement by Sen. Lankford

Statement by Rep. Wagner

Statement by Rep. Connolly

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED _____

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

Clear Form

Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD SUBMITTED FROM
REPRESENTATIVE CONNOLLY**

**“Expanding the Abraham Accords”
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia
2:00 PM, Thursday, March 9, 2023
Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

In the summer of 2020, Israel, with the help of the United States, reached a negotiated agreement to normalize diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, the first in a string of dominoes that fell in a warming of ties between Israel and the Arab world. By 2021, Israel had agreed to normalize relations with Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. As a part of these agreements, the United States provided security, diplomatic, or economic incentives for the countries that established ties with Israel.

On October 11, 2022, Israel, Lebanon and the United States announced that they had reached an agreement to settle a long-standing Israel-Lebanon maritime boundary dispute. The agreement has paved the way for both countries to eventually increase offshore gas production. It is incumbent on the United States and our allies to support these negotiated agreements as an avenue to entrench Israel’s economic, political and cultural ties to the Arab world and vice versa.

I have worked on issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for over four decades since I began as a staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1979. Israel, led by leaders like Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan, was David fighting Goliath – a young, bold democracy under threats from every direction. Israel has long been America’s strongest ally, and our support for Israel’s democracy, economic stability, and defense is ironclad.

But we have reached an inflection point in the U.S.-Israel relationship. For 70 years we have found common cause with Israel because they have been the only democracy in the Middle East where peoples’ rights are protected. For the first time in our history, an Israeli Prime Minister has put bipartisan support for Israel in jeopardy by exploiting partisan fissures within the United States, rejecting the notion of a two-state solution and opting to advance his own right-wing political agenda. Netanyahu’s cabinet of right-wing extremists has put the very rights and political inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals, women, secular Jews, Palestinians, and Arabs alike in peril. As the United States continues to play a crucial role in supporting Israel, on a bipartisan basis, we must be clear that an aggressive anti-democratic tilt in Israel threatens our strong, longstanding partnership based on shared democratic values.

The achievement of normalization between Israel and Arab nations presents both an opportunity and a challenge. I remain hopeful that wisdom will prevail, and that Israel’s normalization of diplomatic, economic, and security ties with Bahrain, Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, and the UAE will serve as a bridge for the Israeli Government and Palestinian representatives to begin the process for a negotiated two-state solution.

But with violence on the rise in the West Bank, the newly inaugurated Israeli government and a few of its far-right ministers have themselves debilitated the prospects for expansion of the Abraham Accords. When Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich made comments on March 3, 2023, suggesting Palestinian city Huwara “needs to be wiped out, but the State of Israel needs to do it,” Arab nations involved in the Abraham Accords immediately condemned this abhorrent incitement of violence. To be

clear, the actions of Ministers Ben Gvir and Smotrich to bless settler violence, incite violence against Palestinians, and threaten annexation of large portions of the West Bank imperil the Abraham Accords themselves, let alone the prospects for expansion to other Arab nations.

As a strong supporter of the Abraham Accords, it is my hope that they will serve as an opportunity for Israel to leverage the diplomatic normalization agreements for progress towards a two-state solution. For years, countries in the MENA region have hinged warming of relations with Israel on the Palestinian question. The Abraham Accords, supported by a bipartisan U.S.-Israel partnership, present an opportunity to finally integrate America's strongest ally in the region with its neighbors, secure regional reconciliation, and a lasting, negotiated two state-solution.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

HFAC – MENACA Subcommittee Hearing: Expanding the Abraham AccordsQFR for Mr. Greenway from Rep. Ronny Jackson:

1. The normalization of relations between Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco was a historic accomplishment which significantly benefits all involved. While progress has been made by this administration in acknowledging the Abraham Accords for what they are, I believe they need to be given greater prioritization. Throughout my conversations with each of the signatories, one of their chief concerns has been that they don't have a single point of contact for our government. Mr. Greenway, who in the United States government should be responsible for leading efforts to facilitate the expansion of the Abraham Accords, and what role should the U.S. play in facilitating cooperation and coordination between Israel and countries not yet part of the Accords?

Responsibility for the coordination of U.S. government policy and its implementation to strengthen and expand the Abraham Accords should rest within the Executive Office of the President (EOP). This is because the scope of the Accords exceeds that of any individual department or agency. The Accords were negotiated by Presidential and National Security Council staff in collaboration with the leadership of several departments and agencies.

The lack of dedicated and resourced staff in the U.S. government and among Accords members, responsible for monitoring, assessing, guiding, strengthening, and expanding the Accords, has impeded their progress and contributed to the loss of momentum since their conclusion in the fall of 2020. To regain momentum, ensure the Accords fulfill the vision of its members, and successfully safeguard vital U.S. national security interests, a single individual should be selected to assume responsibility which encompasses the appropriate elements of national power. Additionally, a clearly articulated strategy to sustain and expand the Accords should be put in place.

I would recommend a Special Presidential Envoy within the EOP, supported by the National Security Council's Middle East & North African Affairs and other relevant Directorates as appropriate, in collaboration with the Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, Commerce, Homeland Security, United States Trade Representative, and others as required.

An alternative option would be to place responsibility primarily within an individual department such as State. In such a case, the relevant official would require support and assistance from the whole of our government, encompassing the diplomatic, economic, and security elements distributed across the executive branch which impact *and are impacted by* myriad policies. An individual or office would require sufficient standing and rank to coordinate such policy and could be an Ambassador and Special Presidential Envoy, or Assistant Secretary or equivalent, supported by the requisite bureaus or directorates within relevant departments and agencies, and the EOP if outside its scope.

A Presidentially Appointed and Senate Confirmed position would afford the opportunity to secure and demonstrate the bipartisan support which the Abraham Accords enjoy and will require in order to continue to grow.

It is important that the responsible parties are guided by a comprehensive strategy to strengthen and expand the Accords, achieve its goals and support the vital national interests of the United States. Potential conflicts between relevant policies should be identified and addressed to prevent failure. No delineation of responsibilities can overcome a deficiency or absence of clear goals and objectives, or internal conflict among them. The existing policy formulation and implementation process administered by the National Security Council Staff can serve to ensure this. Regular engagement with Congress should be an integral component of the administration's efforts to sustain the support required. This could include the submission of periodic reports identifying the progress made, challenges identified, and resources required to achieve the Accords' goals and realize their full potential.

While assigning overall responsibility for the strengthening and expansion of the Accords to an individual is important, it is alone insufficient. The inherent complexity and interdependent functions within the U.S. government, and those of our partners and allies, require a clearly articulated strategy to guide and

inform whoever is selected. To this end, efforts should be made to establish counterparts within the Accords members who also lack individuals within their governments responsible for the administration of the historic agreements. The Negev Working Groups could evolve to serve as a coordinating body incorporating relevant individuals and offices responsible as a *de facto* secretariat, as originally envisioned when the Accords were concluded.

As the scope of the Accords encompass both public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations should be enlisted to compliment the efforts taken by U.S. and Accords member countries. Corresponding resources, including those currently appropriated to support Middle East Peace, should be employed to support and sustain both government and complimentary private efforts.

The Abraham Accords Peace Institute where I serve as President and Executive Director, is currently the only organization and staff dedicated exclusively to the strengthening and expansion of the historic agreements, and to the monitoring and reporting of all activities associated with them. We would welcome the opportunity to support and assist whoever is selected.

QFRs for Ambassador Shapiro from Rep. Ronny Jackson:

1. Mr. Shapiro, when you appeared before this subcommittee in September 2022, in response to questions that I asked regarding your reasons for leaving the State Department's Iran negotiating team after only six months, you clarified that the job was a "consultancy." Please explain the process through which the State Department negotiated its contract with you for this consultancy, and would you be willing to provide the committee with all documents pertaining to your hiring in that capacity?

My use of the term "consultancy" was a colloquial description of my appointment. The Department of State hired me as a Special Government Employee (SGE), a part-time, non-permanent position, to provide advice and analysis to the Special Envoy for Iran. The hiring arrangements were managed by the Office of the Secretary/Executive Secretary - Executive Office, Human Resources (S/EX-ES).

2. Axios reported at the time that your consultancy was a "part-time" job: <https://www.axios.com/2021/08/29/scoop-former-israel-ambassador-joins-us-iran-team>. Is that accurate? If so, approximately how many hours per week did you actually perform work for the State Department's Iran' team under that consultancy?

The maximum allowable days an SGE can work is 130 days in a calendar year. I served as an SGE from August 2021 to March 2022 and I worked on a part-time basis, consistent with the requirements for SGEs, during that period.

3. What were you paid for this consultancy? Was it an hourly or other basis and how was the pay scale determined?

My compensation was based on a GS-15, step 10 salary, paid on a prorated basis for the number of days I worked.

4. To the best of your knowledge, were you the only person interviewed to join the team as a consultant? Was there a competitive process to ensure that your consulting contract was negotiated fairly?

I believe the Department also spoke to other potential SGEs, but I do not know the outcome of those discussions or the overall process that was used.

5. In the years prior to your Iran team consultancy, you worked at WestExec, a consulting firm run by former Obama administration officials whose client list remains unknown. Did you have to disclose your client list to the State Department before starting your “consultancy” on the Iran team? If so, would you be willing to provide that list to the committee?

I was subject to the standard ethics review in connection with being hired as an SGE, and I made all required disclosures to the State Department as part of that process.

6. While you were serving as a consultant to the Iran negotiating team, were you permitted to do other paid work? Did you perform any other paid work? If so, please provide a complete list of the paid work you did while serving in this capacity.

SGEs are permitted to do non-government paid work while serving as SGEs. I sought and received guidance from the State Department Office of the Legal Adviser before and during my service to ensure that all my non-government paid work was permissible under applicable rules and disclosed as required.

7. On your Truth in Testimony disclosure from the March 9, 2023 hearing, you answered “no” to the question “Since January 1, 2013, have you or your organization(s) received any Federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) related to the subject of the hearing or your representational capacity at the

hearing.” However, the fact that you served as a paid consultant to the State Department’s Iran team under the current administration suggests that this is untrue. Can you please clarify your omission on this form?

The subject of the March 9, 2023 hearing was “Expanding the Abraham Accords”. I have done no work for the State Department and received no Federal grants or contracts related to that subject. My work as an SGE dealt solely with the work of the Special Envoy for Iran.

QFR for General Votel from Rep. Ronny Jackson:

1. In 2021 we saw Fifth Fleet coordinate the first joint military exercise between Bahrain, UAE, and Israel in the Red Sea. The shared security concerns from Iran and other terrorist organizations are means for us to work to increase cooperation with Saudi Arabia, who has been a reliable security partner for the United States. General Votel, how can we enhance security cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia in the region and what are the potential positive impacts from a security perspective to including Saudi Arabia in the Abraham Accords?

The most important thing we can do is be a good and reliable security partner for Saudi Arabia. We can do this by acting as a convener to bring the Saudis and Israelis together around shared issues of concern. First among these should be a defense against autonomous systems, but more broadly, we should cooperate toward an integrated regional air defense capability. With an Israeli partnership – Saudi Arabia could become the leading Gulf State to pursue, operationalize and scale this long-desired capability for all the Gulf States. The benefits of this are immense. It would create more trust between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Israel and show the United States as an indispensable partner in the region with the ability to bring together essential partners and solve pressing security problems. Cooperation and success in countering autonomous systems and integrated air defense would provide a good model for collaboration in other areas – including maritime security, counter-trafficking, counter-terrorism, and other issues affecting regional stability. While it is unnecessary to have an Abraham Accords agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel to get started with the proposals – success in these areas will breed the trust and confidence to conclude an agreement.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

Statement for the Record from Senator James Lankford (OK)

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia

Hearing: "Expanding the Abraham Accords"

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing focused on the historic Abraham Accords. For decades, the United States has promoted Israel's acceptance among Arab states. Congress, in particular, has played a key role in promoting peace between Israel and its neighbors. That work must continue in the days ahead as we seek to strengthen and expand the Abraham Accords.

The Abraham Accords resulted in peace and normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab nations—the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco—transforming the region, enhancing Israel's security, creating economic opportunities for Arab states, and advancing vital U.S. national security interests. These normalization agreements build on the success of Israel's prior peace treaties with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

In order to secure a warm and lasting peace in the Middle East, the United States must continue to lead in this area by strengthening ties among these seven countries while also working to expand the Accords to include new nations.

To strengthen the Accords, the United States must recognize areas of common concern among regional allies and leverage that concern into meaningful cooperation. The leading such concern is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Earlier this year, I led a delegation of seven Senators to the Middle East, where we visited senior leaders from Morocco, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. In every meeting, there was one common theme: Iran is the leading destabilizing force. In order to address this threat, the United States must align and integrate our defense relationships with Israel and Arab partners in a manner that restores deterrence vis-à-vis Iran. Congress has already taken action to do just that in the area of missile defense, and we must take further steps to do this in the maritime and cyber domains.

There are also areas of common interest among these nations. Food security, water infrastructure, biomedicine, emerging technologies, supply chains, agricultural innovation, and market access are all areas where Israel brings an impressive level of expertise that can improve quality of life for everyday citizens of Arab states. The United States can support and incentivize these economic partnerships by expanding the scope of existing bilateral programs to facilitate the involvement of Arab states, and by expanding the use of Foreign Trade Zones and Qualified Industrial Zones that remove barriers to trade and investment throughout the region.

The Abraham Accords can also function as a forum to promote human rights, including the freedom of religion. All people have the inherent right to have a faith, change their faith, or have no faith at all. As religious tensions rise throughout the Middle East, the Abraham Accords and

forums such as the Negev Summit provide an opportunity for U.S. leadership to encourage respect for the right of people of all backgrounds to practice their faith.

These areas of accomplishment will strengthen the durability of the Abraham Accords for future generations. Additionally, these partnerships will showcase the benefits of making peace with Israel that the rest of the world will not be able to ignore. The most meaningful way to expand the Abraham Accords to new nations is to strengthen the Abraham Accords for the current nations.

I do not believe we need a designated diplomat whose sole task is to promote the Abraham Accords. Rather, I believe we need a comprehensive strategy on normalization that is integrated throughout the diplomatic corps and across the interagency. If normalization is truly a priority of U.S. foreign policy, we must equip our federal workforce to promote normalization in their respective contexts – from cabinet secretaries to civil servants.

There are still dozens of nations who have yet to normalize with Israel – from long-time U.S. partners in the Gulf region to growing nations in southeast Asia to African countries who are members of the Arab League. Each nation would benefit from normalization with Israel in their own unique way. Our task as the United States is to promote those benefits and facilitate that dialogue which leads to peace and prosperity.

As Co-Chair of the Senate Abraham Accords Caucus, I am focused on advancing this objective alongside my colleagues in the House and Senate. I look forward to working with members of this Committee on legislative ideas to strengthen and expand the Abraham Accords in the days ahead.

On behalf of myself and Representative Schneider, as founding co-chairs of the bipartisan, bicameral Abraham Accords Caucus, we thank Chairman Wilson and Ranking Member Phillips for holding the first Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia Subcommittee hearing of the 118th Congress on “Expanding the Abraham Accords.” We also thank Representative Manning for her strong leadership on this issue. We are encouraged that strengthening these transformational agreements will be a top priority of the subcommittee. The Abraham Accords offer a generational opportunity to secure a peaceful and prosperous future in the region, and we are committed to working with you to ensure the U.S. Department of State is actively working to implement these agreements and bring new partners into the fold.

In the 117th Congress, the Abraham Accords Caucus led the way in enacting the Israel Relations Normalization Act and the DEFEND Act. These pieces of legislation direct the United States to create a comprehensive framework for cooperation between the United States, Israel, and its Arab neighbors in the security, economic, social, cultural, scientific, technical, educational, and health fields.

In the years since the Accords were first signed, we have been delighted to work with the citizens, entrepreneurs, and innovators of Abraham Accords countries as they establish relationships of trust and appreciation, grow each other’s economies, and lay the foundations for a prosperous future.

We must all, however, be frank in recognizing the immense security challenges facing Abraham Accords countries. Iran is closer than ever before to joining the ranks of nuclear powers—a terrifying prospect for us all, but especially so for Israel and its neighbors. We remain confident that the Abraham Accords will transform Middle Eastern security, at last enabling responsible states to work together to keep each other safe from Iran’s destabilizing and violent agenda. But we have to begin collaborating in earnest to develop a new security architecture for Abraham Accords partners.

These efforts must include real and sustained progress on eliminating anti-Semitism, an abhorrent ideology that continues to impede expansion of the Accords. Antisemitism precludes true peace in the Middle East, and we are calling on the United Nations to root out the deep biases that poison its institutions.

Our challenges are many, but we are grateful that so many of our colleagues are eager to back up the promise of the Abraham Accords with action. We again thank the Subcommittee for its commitment to innovation, prosperity, and the advancement of peaceful relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and their partners and neighbors. We look forward to working together in the 118th Congress.