

FDD's National Security Summit  
*Closing Remarks by FDD's Senior Counselor John Hannah*

HANNAH: All right, great, thank you, Mark. That was really, really terrific. I can't do it justice. It was just such a tour de raison really impressive, both of our speakers today. I think we're—I'm certainly feeling very lucky that both of those men are in office today.

Good afternoon, everybody. As Mark said, I'm John Hannah, FDD's Senior Counselor. And it's fallen to me to close us out today in what I think has really been a remarkably informative program.

I've been around Washington for—let's just say a long time. And I can tell you that getting this amount of time to listen to just one of the nation's very top national security officials—hearing them do a deep dive on the major challenges of the day is a relatively rare and special treat. But getting two of them back to back like this has really been, I think quite an extraordinary day.

We hit the jackpot. So I again would—they're not here, but want to thank both of our guests today; CIA Director Pompeo and National Security Advisor McMaster, not only for really illuminating and insightful comments, I thought, but for their long and very distinguished careers in service to the wellbeing and security of the United States.

And I think it—I speak for everybody at FDD that it was a real honor to host both of them today.

While I'm at it, let me also thank, and ask you to join me in thanking, all the FDD staff who worked so tirelessly to make this event such a success. These sorts of things are always difficult to pull off—major logistical challenges with a lot of moving parts. And the staff at FDD do always seem to pull it off flawlessly and with great grace.

Let me also, finally, thank the FDD investors, who are here today again. But those who are with us, those who haven't been able to join us. But all of them make events like this one, and all the work and research that FDD does, possible.

Since I can't do justice to a full summary of what we heard today, let me just finish by making one observation that struck me, listening to both of our speakers. But it really does follow on from what the president said on Friday. It is a little bit hard for me to believe, and I'm sure there are historians in the audience who will prove me wrong.

But, when I think about it, this may be the first time, in the history of America's very troubled, very unhappy experience with the Islamic Republic of Iran, that a U.S. administration has actually invested the time, energy and attention to developing a comprehensive, holistic strategy toward Iran. That attempts to address the full multiplicity of threats that it poses to the interests of the United States.

Now, I worked in the government for, I don't know, the better part of two decades. And—both at the White House and at the State Department, under both political parties—and I can tell you with a fair degree of confidence that no such comprehensive strategy ever existed during my tenure in government. And I'm fairly confident that that statement probably is pretty accurate when applied to the entire 38-year history of America's relations with the Islamic Republic, at least until this past Friday.

So if I'm right, I think that's an extraordinary fact. Especially when you think about how severe and relentless the Iranian challenge has been to the United States, since those American hostages were first taken at our embassy in Tehran in 1979. The conflicts and confrontations with Iran have been virtually nonstop since then, as all of us know only too well.

And yet no administration—certainly none that I was ever privileged to be a part of—ever made it among the highest priorities of American policy, to develop a strategy to counter and confront Iran's malignant behavior across the full range of threats that it poses. Not just the nuclear program, not just terrorism, not just its malign activities to destroy the American project in Iraq, but across the full threat spectrum, comprehensively.

So I think, at least in my mind, having been a practitioner of American foreign policy for a long time, I think that's a pretty big deal. I think we've—we're in a big moment, something that's worth taking notice of and reflecting on. I think it could mark a real inflection point in the history of American policy toward Iran and I think the administration does deserve a lot of credit for that.

But, as General McMaster noted today, now the real challenge comes, executing an extremely ambitious strategy against a very lethal and very determined foe. We may not have had a strategy for 38 years, but I can tell you—and I would bet—that Qasem Soleimani and Iran does. And they've had one.

And, as we all know, if you're going to will the ends with respect to a tough national security challenge, you've got to be willing to will the means as well. And that takes resources, of course: diplomatic resources, presidential attention, sanctions, intelligence, allies, money.

And, unfortunately, while we can ask local partners to do an awful lot for us and an awful lot more for us, it will almost certainly also require a healthy dose of American military power, perhaps additional doses of American military power including, in certain circumstances, troops on the ground. ISIS may be gone in Iran and Syria, but the Iranian land bridge that stretches from Tehran to the Mediterranean and Israel's northern border, is rapidly heading toward a theater near you.

The question is: Are we ready? As the administration now goes about the very difficult—and I can tell you from firsthand experience, challenging task of turning this strategy into a diplomatic, economic and military reality on the ground where the rubber really does meet the road and the risks and costs of what it will take to confront and push back against the IRGC's hegemonic designs, when those become all too real, the president and the administration will

face absolutely daunting challenges and some very, very difficult decisions in the weeks and months ahead.

And, as they conduct that real gut-check moment and decide exactly what they and, maybe more importantly, the American people, are really prepared to do to neutralize the Islamic Republic's four-decade-old project to attack and undermine American interests across the Middle East, I, for one—and I think all of us—will all be watching very closely and wishing them well.

OK. With that, let me just close by, again, saying thank you to all of you who were able to join us today. Thank you to everybody who was able to tune in via live stream. Thanks for being here. We very much look forward to working with all of you on these important issues in the future. And, with that, we're adjourned. Thanks very much.

(APPLAUSE)

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