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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Elliott Abrams;

HE Dorothy Shea;

Mr. Gurvan Le Bras;

MP Fouad Makhouzmi.

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rbxrr-Dqo88&t=11s>

**Raghida Dergham:** Good morning Washington DC, good afternoon Paris and good early evening in Beirut, where we have two guests joining us for the 24th e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. This is going to be a fantastic gathering, virtual gathering on the eve of Thanksgiving in the United States, happy Thanksgiving for those in the US watching us. And we have we have, of course you know the background of each of our distinguished guests, we have their Excellencies Elliott Abrams, Dorothy Shea, and Gurvan Le Bras, and of course Fouad Makhzoumi from Beirut.

As usual, I will do the four minutes to each of the participants, hopefully we will have the engaged conversation on all the points that will be laid by distinguished guests and then we will conclude with a minute or two so that we know what each wants us to walk away with. So, I’ll start with Elliott Abrams, please you have the four minutes to you, kindly.

**HE Elliott Abrams**: Thank you very much Raghida. It's great to be with you, I wish we were able to be doing this in person. Needless to say, we are on the verge of big political changes here in Washington and we're very concerned about the events of the last year and the coming year in the Middle East not least in Lebanon. And Lebanon has certainly attracted a lot of attention in the US, partly for the events that are, let us say in domestic politics in Lebanon, but also of course my own portfolio which is Iran. And our concern has been that Lebanese have not been able to make their own decisions about the future of their country because of the very heavy hand of Hezbollah and the heavy hand of Iran that we see.

Obviously, there's a lot of discussion of US policy toward Iran. I would say first we have one president at a time and our policy today will be exactly the same through January 20th. It is a policy of maxim pressure and I would announce today something that we will announce here in Washington later. We are sanctioning four entities today for their activities in promoting Iran's missile program. These are four entities in China and Russia for the transfer of technology to Iran to develop its missile program. Let's say one other thing about US policy toward Iran. There is a view, that a new administration can come in and turn a switch, like a light switch – no JCPOA, then we turn on the JCPOA. And I would say to you that that's not so simple. That for one thing there are a number of governments around the world, not just in Europe, but this time in the Middle East – certainly Israel, the Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia – that have a real concern about these negotiations with Iran and that are going to want to have their own say.

Things have changed since 2015 in the Middle East, in Lebanon and really in every country, certainly in Iran. For example, change in the Iranian nuclear program. They are now violating the JCPOA. Some of the sunsets, the first for five years, well we're past five years so that has to be negotiated as well. I don't think this idea that you flick a switch works. And my own view is that a real renegotiation – even if you wish to return to the JCPOA – will take many months. And I’ve noticed some comments by the French foreign minister to the effect that a kind of, what should we say, automatic return of the JCPOA is not right and that there are many other concerns that France and others in Europe have about, for example, Iran's role in the Middle East in support of Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, its role in Syria that definitely need to be discussed. So those who think this is a very simple bit ‘back to the JCPOA’ are going to, I think, be quite surprised. I may have used up by four minutes so let me just stop at that point.

**Raghida Dergham:** Let me do a quick follow-up with you though before I move on. The four entities, are they governmental entities? Can you tell us the names? And you said it related to transfer of technology. Go ahead give me the names first, Elliott Abrams.

**HE Elliott Abrams:** Chengdu Best New Materials Company and Zibo Elim Trade Company which are both in China the Nilco Group and Elecon which are in Russia transferring sensitive technology and items to Iran's missile program.

**Raghida Dergham:** Okay so but this is then, this is not related to the resumption of potentially, there is an assumption of selling arms to Iran meaning the Chinese and the Russians, because I understand that you have another set of sanctions ready for that, right? I just want to make sure that…

**HE Elliott Abrams:** We will have next week, and the week after and the week after, all through December and January, there will be sanctions that deal with arms, that deal with weapons of mass destruction, that deal with human rights, will have additional human rights sanctions. Yes, so this will continue on for another couple of months, right until the end.

**Raghida Dergham:** Okay Elliott Abrams, I suppose we will get back to you to see how much of that will be related to Iran, Hezbollah, because in Lebanon we care a lot about what happens to the sanctions from now to January 20th and that's where we're going to go to Dorothy Shea who is, your ambassador, US ambassador in Lebanon. Dorothy Shea, four minutes to you please.

**HE Dorothy Shea:** Thank you Raghida for the opportunity to participate in today's discussion. And it's an honor for me also to be on a panel with Elliott Abrams who was my former boss. The title of your session is very poignant right now for Lebanon and I'd like to drill down a bit to that aspect of the question. We are in the midst of a deepening economic crisis and I’ve actually noted before that maybe the word ‘crisis’ doesn't quite capture the gravity of the situation, so I don't know I'd like to have a discussion how we could better describe it, perhaps ‘catastrophe’ or something else but clearly we are in dire straits. And on top of that of course Lebanon is facing stalemate in the government formation process. Combine that with the COVID-19 pandemic and against the backdrop of the August 4th Beirut port explosion, we have I fear the makings of a toxic cocktail that will carry profound implications for individual Lebanese and their families, not to mention the economy and potentially beyond in the region. So, in your talk here about who authors the future, I'd like to underscore some of the issues that I believe will be essential to Lebanon's recovery as we try to reinforce US policy priorities here.

Now first and foremost Lebanon urgently needs reforms, and by that I mean implementation of serious and far-reaching reforms to get the economy back on track. This is imperative to restore the confidence first of all the Lebanese people in their own government and leaders, but also beyond internationally in the economy. Also, we really need this to restore investor confidence and unlock international assistance. But before these reforms can happen, Lebanon needs to have an empowered government so the stalled government formation process prevents the undertaking of real reforms, some of which would generate much needed revenues that are so desperately needed to meet the basic needs of Lebanon citizens. Now, three months into a caretaker government that lacks authority to take these decisions, I'm sorry to say I don't detect a sense of urgency on the part of Lebanon's political leaders, notwithstanding the efforts of the international community – whether the United States for our part, or France or others. And I hope you saw that the International Support Group for Lebanon is putting out a statement today that addresses these urgent needs for concrete action. So, the United States has made clear our steadfast commitment to Lebanon as the country faces these multifaceted challenges. And just to take off a couple statistics about our assistance, we put our money where our mouth is. In 2019 alone, the United States provided over 750 million dollars in assistance and that was some of its security assistance, economic assistance and humanitarian. This year 2020, we provided approximately 41 million dollars to help mitigate the spread of Covid-19 and about 31 million dollars to help meet immediate needs after the port explosion. At the same time, we've made clear our commitment to using policy tools and this gets to what Elliott Abrams was saying – including sanctions – and conditionality on assistance to the government to promote accountability and to make clear that there will be no bailouts. Business as usual must end. So the recent sanctioning under the global Magnitsky Act of Gebran Bassil represents just one example of how we are promoting accountability and more importantly standing with the Lebanese people against, you know I’ve heard the term used ‘merchant politicians’. I'm talking about leaders who betray the people they're supposed to be serving by engaging in corruption or enabling Hezbollah and its terrorist agenda. In this time especially when the country is an absolute crisis, it is unthinkable that politicians would put their own interests or those of their parties ahead of the country.

So, in my interaction with government with Lebanese of all stripes, I consistently hear people want a Lebanon that is sovereign, prosperous, enjoying peace in the region, that is the future they are trying to offer.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright thank you very much, but I need a couple of quick follow-ups. You mentioned the Gebran Bassil and the sanctions against Gebran Bassil, and you also sort of accused him of, you know, sort of running away from the truth, if not lying. You said that he was interested in breaking with Hezbollah, and sort of something has happened, you know some things obviously that we don't know. He says ‘prove it’ and he thinks that it's because of Hezbollah ties that you sanctioned him rather than because of corruption. So, what's going on? What happened between with you between you and Gebran Bassil? Why don't we know the whole story?

**HE Dorothy Shea:** Well typically, you know, we keep conversations that are held at a diplomatic level in confidence.

**Raghida Dergham:** But you didn't.

**HE Dorothy Shea:** I spoke out because he had mischaracterized several things, taken some of our conversations out of context, clearly in a self-serving way. Now the United States has made no secret that what our views are of Hezbollah as an organization, as a terrorist organization, as an organization that does not promote transparency or accountability. So, we've been very clear on that and we think this alliance between the FPM and Hezbollah has not served the people of Lebanon very well. I will make no secret about that either. All that being said, Gebran Bassil was sanctioned under authorities of the global Magnitsky Act. He might have been surprised by that, but the implication was somehow that I had a duty to tell him that ahead of time, which I did not. Did we have conversations about the relationship between the party he heads and Hezbollah? Yes. And was he close to the point where he was ready to throw in the towel? Yes. And as I said previously on the record, he even thanked me and the United States for making him confront those hard realities.

**Raghida Dergham:** We're going to discuss that further and I want to also ask you about something you mentioned twice when you spoke of the stalemate in the formation of the government. Actually, let me get that through because I don't want to lose sight of that. You seem to be blaming Saad El-Hariri, probably he is not going to be able to form a government without Hezbollah. So, is he next on your sanctions list? Is he… is it time that he steps out, especially that the 17th of October, people’s march didn't want him to come back? This is to both of you Elliott Abrams and Dorothy Shea, but Dorothy Shea first.

**HE Dorothy Shea:** The United States is not blaming any one person and we were never quite in the position of focusing on exact personalities and the composition of the future government. Rather, I think it's an indictment on the political class as a whole that we, I haven't detected as I said any sense of urgency. The country is in crisis, the country desperately needs a government that can start making these decisions and implementing them.

**Raghida Dergham:** So, should you (defer?) or step out like right away? Is there a timeline?

**HE Dorothy Shea:** No, we never put a deadline on them, but it needs to happen, and it needs to happen urgently. Now with regard to your question about sanctions, there's been a lot of speculation in the media about the United States having a sanctions list and there's 24 people on it or 22 and different accounts have different numbers. In fact, I have nothing to announce in that regard. There are a number of files that have been looked at in Washington that continue to be looked at by those who are specialists in reviewing the applicability of our sanctions’ authorities. And I can't preview who might be next. But there are files that are in preparation under authorities that have to do with counterterrorism and under the authorities that were used against Gibran Bassil against corruption.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright thank you very much. I will go over now to Gurvan Le Bras, and excuse me I made you wait too long. Four minutes to you please.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** No problem, thank you very much Raghida. Well since four minutes will be very short to enter into the details of each and every situation that that has been raised until now, let me start with more general considerations. And of course, as the deputy head of the French policy planning, I will not be able to offer you an official perspective, but rather give you a taste of how we perceive and discuss these issues in the ministry in Paris. So, our headline was Stability Redefined, I don't know if we need to redefine stability, but we sure need to achieve more stability in the region right now. So that's an important goal and that we all share, I think. But it's also a specific perspective for France and Europe, because it's our own security that is at stake, of course, not as much as it is for the very people of the region naturally, but a bit more maybe than other big powers that are also convened to contribute to the settlement of the crisis in the region. You only have to mention the fact that in the past years in Europe, as the instability in the region have provoked consequences on our soil, terrorism, migration, but also other threats namely a more maybe diffuse one, the threat of proliferation of mass destruction weapons and all of this of course having to do with a broader diagnosis of weakening of the states due to many many factors and I won't go into the detail of course because we don't have time.

Maybe just a few considerations. The reasons the root causes of this instability is we need to tackle them and that that is important to remember that we're not only dealing with the manifestation of crisis, but also have to deal with the root causes. There are strategic mutations in the region, there is there are change in the balance of force. Of course, there are many reasons for that. There is a changing profile of the US policy in the long run, in the past let's say 10 years. This has led to the rise of other actors that are more determined to make use of cursive action to pursue their objectives. In the face of this, we need to adapt our own ways of responding to these challenges. Arab springs happened 10 years ago, many of the root causes remain. The issue of Lebanon that has long that has been discussed among us a few minutes ago only is also a case in point in terms of social contracts and the limits of some development models. Dorothy mentioned corruption, this is very important to find responses for that. One word to say that I would completely share what she said about the fact that whether we are going to move ahead in Lebanon by identifying personal responsibilities. In fact, it's rather a collective responsibility and the more you enter into characterization of single responsibilities, the more you fuel the communitarian game in Lebanon, that's not what we want to do.

One word if I only have one [inaudible]

**Raghida Dergham:** Your sound is not… something went wrong with your sound.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** Oh I'm sorry.

**Raghida Dergham:** We lost you, we lost your sound, can you try to fix it and we'll get back to you. Can you, yeah can you say something now?

**Gurvan Le Bras:** Is it okay now?

**Raghida Dergham:** Yes it is okay but I want you, you have to wrap up because I need to…yeah.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** What I can do is only just one sentence.

**Raghida Dergham:** Yes.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** Well getting back to Elliott's on his mention of our diagnosis on the Iran threats. I think it's completely true that we should definitely share the same objectives as the US in terms of making sure that the different layers of the Iranian threat in the region, whether it be proliferation or regional behavior, needs to be tackled. But we definitely disagree on the way to achieve this and don't think that sanctions can achieve that objective in that specific context. I think it's rather a question of security architecture, that's something we can work on it. There are things. Things are moving in that perspective and you are completely right Excellency to mention the fact that if and when we move on to different dynamics with that regard, then we'll have to tackle the things with a much broader agenda.

**Raghida Dergham:** Okay I definitely want to discuss that when we go into the larger discussion specifically about, you know, how do you make sure that the mistake that was made by the Obama administration is not repeated by a Biden administration, which was a mistake from our point of view in this region that to let Iran get away with insisting on excluding the regional behavior from the nuclear negotiations. Hold that thought also Elliott Abrams because I want to get back to Gurvan Le Bras. He's trying to say that now they're going to have policy that I'm sure you're going to have to answer him on this during the exchange. But before we leave Lebanon on this one Gurvan Le Bras, didn't President Macron come and say and promise to have sanctions on the Lebanese who failed the initiative or who block it? And then there's been this walking back from that continuously by Paris. Is this still on the table? Is Paris at all interested in the sanctioning of people who are obstructing the initiative, as President Macron said

here in Lebanon? Or is this now a new game with the Biden administration coming in? Short answer please because I have to go to Mr. Makhzoumi.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** Yes of course, very short. I think the question is not whether we are still interested in sanctioning. The question is: are we still interested in trying to move ahead the issue? And I can confirm that, of course, there is still that notion that emergency is there and that it's possible for us, but of course not us alone, there needs to be commitment by the whole international community to make a difference in the current very very dire crisis that we have in Lebanon and which is multifaceted. So, we are going to maybe try to make the best use of that sense of trying to, like Dorothy said, trying to recreate at the international level a sense of urgency and a sense of vision.

**Raghida Dergham:** I still didn't get the answer to my question. You are still, the sanctions are still on the table, as promised by President Macron? Or this is off the table? Because I didn't understand.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** I think that the global approach that he proposed on the whole is all on the table. Thereby sanctions alone, it's just a general approach.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much. Fouad Makhzoumi, please, four minutes to you. And apologies for coming to you a bit late but we still have a lot of time four minutes to you.

And please work with me everybody, you know, that's when I signal with my hands, work with me a little bit on the timing. I would very much appreciate it. Thank you.

Fouad Makhzoumi, four minutes to you.

**MP Fouad Makhzoumi:** Thank you and happy Thanksgiving to all of our American friends. Really since the inception of Hezbollah in the 1980s, there has been an intention by Iran to control Lebanon, to have a coup d'état, and to have borders on the Mediterranean. It started with the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, they appointed at that point the speaker of the house then in 2010, they removed Hariri and they brought Najib Mikati, and they started controlling the Prime Ministership from 2011 to 2016. They got involved in every single appointment, judicial system, security forces and everything. 2016, they made sure they will get their own president. So, from that point onward really, it was a total coup d'état. And in order to legitimize this thing because especially after the sanctions started in 2015 2016, as Elliott Abrams said, definitely they wanted to have a law – which is 2017 election law – that gave him that legitimacy because they decided to appoint who is the prime minister, who is the speaker, who is the president, and really they thought life is fantastic, and they decided to create that famous formula that Ambassador Shea referred to in previous speech whereby she said there was the golden formula: The arms of Hezbollah, the corruption of Hezbollah versus the power given to the other, you know, safety network that was created by Hezbollah by having the strong Sunni Hariri, having the strong Shia which is Berri, having the strong Druze Walid Jumblatt, and Michel Aoun as the strong Maronite, in order to really control the country. 17 of October came and I agree with Ambassador Shea, because what she said is absolutely correct, because you know as much as they we all thought that this corrupted class should have at least a minimum human feeling for the people that that elected them and they have proven that really they don't give a damn for all of this. And what happened after that, they all retracted.

Now, where do we go from here? And I believe the sanctions that were put on Hezbollah within the package of against Iran is very important, it's very critical for the changes. But in order to move forward, Hezbollah, after the sanctions started being implemented against Iran and Hezbollah, they looked internally to try to generate the missing funding that was stopped by the sanctions. And this was the port, the airport, and the illegal points of entry between Lebanon and Syria. Unfortunately, the biggest crime that happened in Lebanon on 4th of August destroyed the port. But that means we still have to control the airport, we have still to control the borders with Syria, and this is where we propose that the international community through IATA starts putting the restrictions and to be really involved in the security of the airport of Beirut; this is one. Secondly, there was discussion that we expand the mandate for the uniform in order to control the borders with Syria. At the end of the day this claim that we are stopping the terrorists coming in, yes, but we want to make sure that we stop the terrorists coming into Lebanon, but at the same time we want to stop the illegal funding that comes into Lebanon that finances the situation where we are in that's undermining the institution of government. If we want to go further than that, we are a parliamentarian system. Parliamentarian system means we have to have control of the parliament. In 2018, everybody you know blessed Lebanon because it was a clear election. We all know it was fixed by Hezbollah and their allies and I'm one of the people that suffered, I lost too – twelve hours after the election. But at the end of the day, we need to have the control, we believe the people of the 17th of October are willing to go ahead, they are willing to make the change, and if we put the sanctions on all politicians before the elections, then the people would know exactly who stole the money and who destroyed their country. As far as the reference point of Ambassador Shea for the for the cabinet, I agree with her 100%, but my advice: let us not go back to the old corrupted class rebrand them in order to form reforms for the future.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much. I know and my follow-up to you is going to be actually taking a point that you made and taking it to the others. So there is a proposal, I mean you know the airport – is this a sort of thing Elliott Abrams that the US is thinking about, or how independent is the focus on sanctions against Iran, from sanctions against Hezbollah, from sanctions against the political leaders and the corrupt class? And I will combine that with a question I got from the audience, for the American speakers, so that goes to both Elliott Abrams and Dorothy Shea, it says ‘why is Gibran Bassil sanctioned by the US and not Saad El Hariri or Nabih Berri who are, from what they say, even more corrupt and also effective partners in power with Hezbollah? Is the US having the usual double standard at play again?’ Elliott Abrams, that's not my question, somebody who wants to know what you think about that.

**HE Elliott Abrams:** I think that the first thing to say is that Fouad Makhzoumi was exactly right in describing what happened here the United States put increasingly effective sanctions on Iran, so this means that they had less cash to give Hezbollah. What does Hezbollah do? It says, well first remember last year Nasrallah actually made a public appeal for donations to Hezbollah, but they also try to squeeze more money out of the areas they control and one of the critical areas they control is the port and the airport. Now what exactly are the effective ways of diminishing its control? That is a question I would actually turn to Ambassador Dorothy Shea because it's a hard question and it does require not that Saad El Hariri-act but that everybody-act, and this is a critical point. When people went to the streets of Lebanon, they were shouting enough is enough and they were talking about the whole political class. They were not selecting out one individual or another, they were looking at the political elites and saying ‘you have failed us.’ But this is clearly related to the US sanctions on Iran because they have squeezed a number of the groups that are receiving funds from Iran and they are receiving less. We can see the Iranian budget go down. But for more detailed answer on the port, I would turn to the Ambassador.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright go ahead Ambassador Dorothy Shea.

**HE Dorothy Shea:** Yes thank you for that. By our conservative estimate looking at government statistics, we believe the government is deprived of at least half a billion dollars a year in what should have been coming in as customs revenues, whether at the port or airport or in land borders. So that is money that's not going into government coffers and so no wonder the government is not able to provide and meet the needs of its citizens. So absolutely some cleaning up is an order and I have made the argument among colleagues here in Beirut and back in Washington and among my counterparts in the diplomatic community that as horrific as the port explosion was, it does potentially represent an opportunity to hit the reset button because we do not want to go back to the old corrupt ways of doing business at the port. And I believe some kind of formula of privatization will help clean up the act there. And I believe to get the support of the international community, it's going to need to be squeaky clean and I would apply that same standard, whether at the airport or at land borders as well.

**Raghida Dergham:** And do you care to answer the question that was put to you both from somebody from the audience about Mr. Saad El Hariri and Nabih Berri?

**HE Dorothy Shea:** Look I understand that people are frustrated with political leaders and some people rejoiced and some people were really angry when Gibran Bassil was designated and the same could be said for backers of politicians of all stripes I'm sure. You know, I'm not going to say who may or who may not be sanctioned, I don't know quite honestly, this all depends on evidentiary standards that people back in Washington review. But anyone who has been engaging in massive corruption, or anyone who aids and abets a terrorist organization, should review their actions and, you know, consider the implications.

**Raghida Dergham:** Gurban Le Bras, you don't think so. You think that we need to really separate these two things I mean the French policy is very different from the American policy in this regard that ‘no, we have to accommodate, we have to live with it, we have to make it work.’ But so far it has not really succeeded, unfortunately. We all were hoping that your initiative will succeed and we counted actually on the fact that there may be sanctions in order so that your initiative is taken seriously, your efforts are taken seriously. And here we are back to square one, and the country like Dorothy Shea said it's catastrophically in a catastrophe. Go ahead, please can you tell me what on earth are you waiting for, and is the sky the limit here? I mean how will how long do you wait?

**Gurvan Le Bras:** I think there are several questions in that. I think the first one is: do you achieve your results by, I mean, is it more efficient to achieve your objectives to use sanctions or to threaten sanctions? But if you keep on threatening sanctions but don't actually sanction, then of course the threat is losing leverage. So, we need to be careful on that. We don't think that for example sanctioning the actors right now would answer the different, I mean, would lead to some kind of a way forward in terms of, I mean, who's going to make a government if all our sanction, the fact that you have members of the government sanctioned by Washington for example hasn't really changed the course of action of the Lebanese political forces so far. So it's not just, maybe probably one single approach is going to fade but some an approach that is able to combine the different layers would work. And one note on the idea of fighting corruption, I think we can all agree on that, but the thing is what about the deepness, the depth of the confessional system in the society? If it's about sanctioning the way the system has been functioning in the past years, then who is going to escape the accusation of corruption?

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you.I'm going to take this a point to Fouad Makhzoumi, I'm sure he's got alot to say about that. Fouad Makhzoumi, please go ahead.

**MP Fouad Makhzoumi:** Well I have todisagree with ourFrench colleague because at the end ofthe day, this corrupted grouphas been around for 27 years**,** and they have been manipulating thegovernment, they have in control of everysingle level of the government**,** from government employees, to judicialsystem, to security forces. So, when the people went to the street onthe 17th of October objecting**,** they were shot at. Was there any kind ofsupport for the people that were shut upby the international community, ourjudicial system? Yes there was a lot of verbal talk, whichis fantastic, you know, but at the end ofthe daythis discouraged the people. When we tryto sayat the end of the day ‘we need to change**’**,and this peopleare controlling the parliament. Atthe end of the day, we all know anyparliamentarian system**,** if you do not have the majority to makechange, what is democracy? And what we have had today, adiscussion in the parliamentabout election laws, there is no way inhand, you know**,** Hezbollah and Haraket Amal, they are insisting on trying to have alaw that will weakenthe Christians in this country, they willbe in controland they would like to go for this. Sounless we have sanctionsin order to restrain these peoplefrom you abusing the system and to tryto ask them to step asidefor the youth to change, I would disagreewith our French colleague**,** because at the end of the day they willwin again, and again, and then all theso-called plans for reform will bedifficult. The other point where wedisagree**,** first of all, I appreciate very muchwhat president Macron has done becausereallythey were the first ones that stepped inafter the 4th of August to help us. But you cannot go back to the corruptedpeople thathave their people rejected them on 17thOctoberand ask them to rebrand themselves andto read the reform. If we are saying, we would like to have achange**,** yes let's have the change. What was wrong byhaving a cabinet that's totallyindependent**,** without Hezbollah, without Hariri, withoutBerri, without Aoun, and allow them for six months tonine months to make the change? Because if we are successful, theneverybody is successful, but you cannotchoose oneand tell the others you have to sitoutside because this is unfortunate**,** our bad system that we have to stick tofor the time being until we changethe parliament, and atthat point I agree with you, we need tomove to a civil societywhich is away from the sectarian divide.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank youFouad Makhzoumi,I need to move to a question fromsomeone who is listening to usand they are informing me that the Irancourtjust issued an execution orderof an EU citizen hostage,Ahmad Reza Jalali. Will the United States and the Europeanstake any action, any form of actiontoward putting anend to the Iranian hostage-takingforeign policy?This is a question that I just received**,** it goes to you Elliott Abrams.

**HE Elliott Abrams:** This is a terrible case, you know, ofJalali.And there have been appeals bygovernments in Europe, the Swedes in thiscase taking the lead**,** and you see the reaction you see thereaction of the regime, which isessentially to say **‘**shut up, go away.’ You know, my answer tothisis they don't listen tohumanitarian appeals, the only thing theyunderstandis pressure. And so, I would hope that theEuropeans wouldfrankly make them pay a price if they goahead with this. This follows by matter of weeks ofthe execution of Navid Afkari thewrestler,and there was a global effort, but itisn't enoughto say ‘oh, this is terrible.’ For example**,** in the case of Afkari,it should be followed by banning Iran'sparticipationin world sporting events, including theOlympics.In the case, Jalali, thequestion is, what will the Europeansdo? What we hear is a lot of criticism ofthe American sanctions**,** but I would argue that those sanctionsactually have an effect in Tehran**,** they care about that they know whatit's doing to their economy.So, words are great, they are a startand then action.

**Raghida Dergham:** Elliott Abrams stay withme on the issue of sanctions here. You have been leading the policy of theUS policy towards Iran and on Venezuela and you've been somehow**,** at least the way I read you and heardyou speak, you've been urging the Bidenadministrationto sort of build on the sanctions policythatthe Trump administration has pursued andyou're saying this is good for theUnited States of America, this is aboutnationalsecurity, this is about relationshipswith ourpartners in the region. Are youworried, are you that worried thatthey're going to just – the Biden team – isgoing to justjump back and say ‘we hate everythingthat Trump did, that Trump team did, and we're goingtoreverse its effect’? So, you look likeyou're in a hurry togive a lot of sanctions to theirability to jump back into the JCPOA**,** and whereas there are talks if you'veheardany such rumors or any such informationthat the Biden team has beennegotiating secretly with the Iraniansand that the Iranians are feeling prettygood about what's going on. Elliott Abrams.

**HE Elliott Abrams:** Thank you. I would say first that I don't thinkthey're negotiating with Iran**,** it's illegal actually under American lawfor them to be doing this**,** and I am really quite confident thatthey are not doing it. These are very sober andresponsible people.I think there are a lot of people whoclaim to speak for themwho, you know, former officials who say ‘I have the inside track believe me, I know this guy and I know that guy’, and it's very misleading. On the lifting of the sanctions, you know, there are processes take for example Gebran Bassil, this was Magnitsky Act, there is a process for lifting, you cannot just come in and say ‘I sign here, and this is gone’, it has to be reviewed. If you have counterterrorism sanctions, then you have to ask well is this person involved or not involved in terrorism? So, I do not think that they will lift the sanctions in one day, I tell you what I do fear, that people will expect this and will expect that the sanctions will not be enforced. And if people think they won't be enforced, then you begin to see a change in their willingness to abide by the sanctions, then you begin to see bankers, corporate executives, lawyers saying ‘well, maybe we don't have to abide by them if there will be no follow-up and no enforcement’, that I worry about.

**Raghida Dergham:** Again, I got lots ofquestions to you Elliott Abramsand basically, it's again the good oldthing**.** What prevents the United States fromdoing a dealwith Iran during the Bidenadministration? There's a lot of concernthat peopleaccording to this particular answer thatIranis giving the hints that there will be adealand basically what will not happenis to include in the new deal that Imentioned that I spoke about earlier andthat the Frenchpresidency supported in itsposition which is thatthat must be an inclusion of thebehavior, theregional behavior of Iran, in any newdeal. **Y**ou and I were in Washington Elliot**t** Abrams and yougave me the impression that should theygiven onthe ballistic missiles and on thenuclear issue**,** the regional behavior will drop. Gofor it.

**HE Elliott Abrams:** Yes, look I think, and I’ve said thisbefore Raghida, there will be a negotiation next year**,** there would be no matter who ispresident, we have a lot of leverageand I think there would have been anagreement under Trump and there will, I think, be an agreementunder Biden. The question is: what's inthe agreement**?** And what we need to do is to usethe leverage that has been built up overthese years of sanctions, use itto make sure that for example theseregional issues**,** the missile questions become part of theagreement.What I mean is if you lift all thesanctions to get back toa nuclear agreement only, then you haveeliminated your leverage**.** And then you go to Iran and say ‘now wewant to do a deal on missilesand on support for terrorist groups’, andthey will say ‘well**,** too bad we don't.’ Soit would be a mistake to discard thisleverageand not use it to insist, not only onmissiles,but regional conduct and of coursethe nuclear file**.**

**Raghida Dergham:** Okay, in one sentence only Elliott Abrams**,** are you confident with the new teamannounced by the Bidenadministration in control offoreign policy? Like for example, JakeSullivan was one of the people who didspeak**,** who was involved in the secret talkswith Iran during the time, the era ofPresident Obama which, you know, I meanlet's be practical about this. Go for it**.**

**HE Elliott Abrams:** Okay one sentence. I know Tony Blinken and Jake Sullivan**,** they're terrificpeople. The question is whether they havelearned**,** in my view, learned from the mistakesthat the Obama administration madein those negotiations with Iranand whether they realize that it is not2015**,** it will be 2021 and they have to buildon what we have learned since then**.**

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you, let me go to Dorothy Sheaand ask you what quick question butfor whatsomebody wanted to know if the sanctions reach a point where the US government might stop US Aid programs in Lebanon. That's like a very quick yes or no please because I have another question for you, Dorothy Shea.

**HE Dorothy Shea:** There are times when the US administration needs to defend our assistance programs for Lebanon, so it's not something that I take for granted. This is something that we have to be held accountable, for these are taxpayers’ dollars that we are spending here in the in the millions of dollars as I described earlier. But I'm very confident in my ability to work with our trusted partners, with whom we, you know, work very closely in carrying out our programs to defend Lebanon sovereignty to build the prospects for prosperity among the people here and I will continue to defend that in Washington as well.

**Raghida Dergham:** Dorothy Shea, about the demarcation and the talks with, you know, there are talks, technical talks or otherwise, between the Lebanese and the Israelis on the demarcation, what do you expect for those? Where are they? Are they going to be – some people say this is definitely going to be the gateway to normalization. What do you have on that, please?

**HE Dorothy Shea:** Well I do see it as a sign of hope, a glimmer of hope, let's say, that is out there. And I believe that both sides are motivated, there's a lot at stake here and we're prepared to do our part as mediators to help the sides get to the point where they can agree on a maritime demarcation. Now, both sides are going to have to demonstrate that seriousness if they're going to get there and it's not going to be easy there's going to have to be some give and take, and we're just going to have to watch and wait and see. But I firmly believe, and I heard it directly from people who got the instruction from on high on the Lebanese side, that their mandate was to get an agreement and to get it quickly. So I wish them success and we'll do our part as mediators.

**Raghida Dergham:** I'm going to go to Fouad Makhzoumi, and then to Gurvan Le Bras, because I want to go back to this issue of renegotiating the JCPOA and the regional behavior, I mean, whether there is any thinking or there must be a way to absolutely have it as part and parcel of a new agreement, the regional matter, the regional behavior of Iran, you know, including Syria, including Lebanon, Iraq and in Yemen. But let me go to Fouad Makhzoumi because I want to conclude on Lebanon with you Fouad Makhzoumi. Is this a lost case? I mean is the future of this country doomed? Is it over? what do we tell people who are watching us right now?

**MP Fouad Makhzoumi:** Lebanon has survived for thousands of years. As you know for the last 200 years, every 10-15 years we have a group, a sectarian group, that decides to take over the country and then at the end of the day, the others will go get the support from the region and then try to change it. Lebanon, it's the only country went to civil war and came back as one country, this is an opportunity that we can all work together in order to be part of the region and to live together. When the issue about what the Ambassador said we, irrespective whether we will do normalization now or in the future, we need to finish the demarcation for one simple reason: we need to take out any excuse for Hezbollah to claim that there is a reason why they should keep their arms. The sooner we can get this demarcation done, the sooner we can try to say this is done. If there is anything which is left, let's take it to the international court in order to solve it. This is one problem. The second problem: we cannot at all think that this this country is beyond redemption. We all the time went to civil war unfortunately, but we came out of it. My suggestion, we internally, we cannot do this this this change on our own, we need help. And when I see that the United States, the Gulf, France and all of them are showing the good will, then we are willing to work with them, but you cannot come back to us and telling us ‘guess what? Look, I don't care about, you know, sanctions what we will do, we will use the same people that have stored in your money, that corrupted your system, that refuse to reform, and we will try to work with them in order to make the change.’ My suggestion is that we are all work together to really open the door for the younger generation for the people of the 17th of October, in order to make the change. And the last point for our French colleague, the French initiative wanted Saad El Hariri to be the prime minister. Saad El Hariri is against forensic audit. Saad El Hariri does not want to touch the central bank. Saad El Hariri doesn't want to try to work with the banking center with the reforms because he owns a bank which was part of that corrupted system. My suggestion, my dear friend, we love France, we have very good historical relationship with you, we would like to develop a regional cooperation with you, but please try to see what the people want, not what you should be forced on the people that you're coming from outside.

**Raghida Dergham:** So, I need to absolutely go to go Gurvan Le Bras on this one. And please address the points made to you by Fouad Makhzoumi and also tell me if you know anything about the investigations regarding the explosion of the port, because between the FBI investigation and the French investigation, I don't think, you know, and with the corruption of everybody here in Lebanon including all the insurance companies and we have to have a case against them, a legal case against them because, you know, without closure of these investigations, we do not build our homes. So, Gurvan Le Bras.

**Raghida Dergham:** We have eight minutes left, that's including the wrap-up. So I'm going to let you wrap up with that please also.

**Gurvan Le Bras:** Sure, sure, no problem I can do that. Let me be clear to Excellency Fouad Makhzoumi, our goal is not choosing what government is needed for Lebanon. Our goal is to have a government in order to achieve reform because we think that we're not going to choose the way Lebanon is supposed to find the past it's supposed, to find to get out of the crisis but logically we see and we understand and been understanding for years that it would take a lot of reform and there is not just about us, it's also the IMF and so on. So that any government that would be able to do that is going to be fair enough, good enough for us. I mean we don't want to choose. So that's the first of course, the first indication and also respond to the question you made on Saad El Hariri. We don't see that one specific actor should be better than the other or less worse or whoever. I mean it's not for us to choose. Who are we going to put in place of those that actually running de facto the country, running the banks and so on, I don't know. Does it take to get that financial reform to replace all the current banks that detain assets for the Lebanese debt or to try to get them in the common solution for that and the new schedules? I don't know. I think there are different options, and we we're not going to choose the one option over the other because it's not a rule to do that. And the last point on that would be, I completely agree that most probably the convergence, not most probably, obviously, the convergence of our priority and our vision is greater with the movement of October than with the, I mean, the traditional forces and I think that the diagnosis of situation is the appropriate one. But it's not for us to tell to say what forces should drive the future of the country. I would be happy if it was those, but it's not for me to say.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much Gurvan Le Bras. Because my time is running out, I'm going to consider that as your closing statement. I'm going to go to Dorothy Shea for her closing statement and then I'm going to, I think, end with Elliott Abrams because I think we are short of time. Go ahead Dorothy Shea.

**HE Dorothy Shea**: Thank you Raghida. I would like to focus on something that we didn't talk about very much. We talked about the stick of sanctions a lot, but there are also carrots that are on offer and I want to remind everybody of that, not just from the United States, from other members of the international community donors. We stand ready to work with the people of Lebanon and a government of Lebanon that gets it together to the point that you are committed to, and able to and in the process of implementing reforms. That's what we need to see, and we desperately need that to start stop the bleeding out that we see of money just going into the Mediterranean basically, every day, flowing out of the country. So let's staunch the flow, and then stabilize the economy and get to the point where we can work together and really help rebuild. We want to be a part of the solution.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much, Dorothy Shea. Elliottt Abrams, with the Biden administration, if they drop the sanctions, what would happen? How would that affect – I know it's not fair, I'm asking too many points here – how would it affect not only the Lebanon policy, but also the Syria policy? And back to the issue of a new JCPOA, someone is asking me: should a new nuclear agreement also be accompanied by a parallel agreement on regional behavior and security? Could China and Russia be persuaded to be a part of that? I know this is asking too much in a minute, two minutes.

**HE Elliott Abrams:** I’ll try one minute, thank you Raghida. Look, we think the Biden administration has a great opportunity because there's so much leverage on Iran through the sanctions working together that is the US with France, Germany, the UK, the EU3. Working with our friends and partners in the region Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, we have an opportunity together to produce an agreement that actually addresses, yes, the missile question, the regional question because the problem of Lebanon is partly internal, but it is also the effort by Iran to dominate Lebanon and give itself a border on the Mediterranean and on Israel. If we work together, there is a real opportunity. If we discard the leverage we have, it would really be tragic and foolish. But if we use it, there is a chance I think for a constructive agreement that addresses all of these problems.

**Raghida Dergham:** Will you be playing a role and just let me ask you, are you guys going to help with the transition or not? I mean shouldn't you be putting an input in the transition, rather than saying ‘okay we're not going to recognize you’? What do you think?

**HE Elliott Abrams:** The transition mechanism began I think yesterday, there will be further steps because we have our holiday of Thanksgiving now, further steps next week and I look forward to engaging with the transition myself, it would be my third one.

**Raghida Dergham:** Who would be your counterparts, Elliott Abrams? Who would you be coordinating with?

**HE Elliott Abrams:** Not named and one of the questions that would be interesting to see, is there a special representative for Iran?

**Raghida Dergham:** If there isn't? What would that mean?

**HE Elliott Abrams:** It would mean that the assistant secretary for the near east or perhaps the secretary or under-secretary would take on this portfolio.

**Raghida Dergham:** With that, I'm going to have to thank you everybody, and I'm going to quickly announce who are our guests for next week. If we lose electricity, don't go away one second.

Our guest for the 25th e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. They are, Ambassador Tom Fletcher, he’s now the Principal of Hertford College at Oxford University. We have Vance Serchuk, I know you know him because you were together my guests at the first Summit in Abu Dhabi a long time ago 2015 I think it was, so he is now the Director of the KKR Global Institute. We have Karim Sadjapour, you all know him, he's an Iran expert and he's at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a very good observer of the US-Iranian relations and the reflection of what happened inside Iran on foreign policy and we have Asli Aydintasbas, I hope I'm saying that right she is Senior Policy Fellow with the Europe Programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations, her specialty is Turkey. I thank you, Fouad Makhzoumi one minute please.

**MP Fouad Makhzoumi:** So far, the sanctions have worked and I think we should continue. I think we should put all the possible opportunities to make sure that we reduce the financing for Hezbollah, I think if we can do that, then we will be weakening the political safety network that was created by Hezbollah after the 2018 elections. I think we will have a much better chance in order to move forward with the reforms.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you Fouad Makhzoumi, thank you Gurvan Le Bras, thank you Dorothy Shea and thank you Elliott Abrams. I am so grateful that you have honored me by being my guests and hope to see you at the real summit sometime in 2021. And thank you. You have a wonderful evening, morning and goodbye for now everyone.