

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM

SUBJECT: SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM OF SOUTH CAROLINA, A CANDIDATE FOR THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, WILL SPEAK ABOUT THE IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT.

MODERATOR: JOHN HUGHES, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 8TH, 2015

JOHN HUGHES: Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is John Hughes. I'm an editor for Bloomberg First Word, that's Bloomberg's breaking news desk here in Washington, and I'm also the President of the National Press Club. Our guest today is Republican Presidential candidate and South Carolina Senator, Lindsey Graham who will discuss the Iran nuclear deal. But first I want to introduce our distinguished head table. This table includes club members and guests of the speaker. From the audience's right, Rachel Oswald, online reporter for CQ Rollcall, she covers foreign policy, Rosie Gray who covers politics and foreign policy for BuzzFeed, Richard Perry, he is Senator Graham's Chief of Staff, Carl Leubsdorf, Washington columnist for the *Dallas Morning News*, Jennifer Ruben, opinion writer for *The Washington Post*, Jerry Zremski, Washington Bureau Chief for *The Buffalo News*, a past President of the National Press Club, and the Chairman of the club's Speakers Committee. Speaking over our speaker for a moment, Danny Selnick, Senior Vice President for *Business Wire's* Public Policy Wire, and he is the member who organized today's luncheon. Thank you, Danny. Christian Ferry, Senator Graham's Campaign Manager, Jen Judson, land warfare reporter at *Defense News*, Garance Franke-Ruta, Editor in Chief for Yahoo Politics, Steve Taylor, reporter for Fox News Radio.

[Applause]

In addition to those in the room today, I want to welcome our CSPAN and public radio audiences. You can follow the action on Twitter. Use the hashtag NPCLIVE. That's NPCLIVE. Well, the agreement the U.S. and several nations struck which is supposed to prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons is one of the most important defense and foreign policy issues of the day. Senator Graham will tell us why he thinks the deal is bad and how he as President could negotiate a better one. Defense is a favorite topic of Senator Graham's. He spent six years on active duty as an Air Force attorney. He served more than a quarter century in the Air Force Reserves, retiring as a Colonel. He has been a strong voice in his caucus on foreign policy during his eight years in the House of Representatives and 13 years in the Senate.

While his Presidential campaign has yet to catch fire in the polls, Senator Graham has stood out for his criticisms of GOP frontrunner Donald Trump. He has called Trump "a fraud" and said his plan to combat ISIS is "insanely dangerous." And those were some of the tamer comments he made. [Laughter] Trump for his part announced Graham's cell phone number on national television. Long before a life in politics, Graham grew up in a one room apartment behind his parents' liquor store. When both of his parents died at a young age he became the

head of the family at 21, legally adopting his 13 year old sister. He earned undergraduate and law degrees from the University of South Carolina and he launched a political career that brings him here today. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Senator Lindsey Graham.

[Applause]

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Thank you all very much. My new phone. [Laughter] Yeah, I went with the iPhone, so I'm sure their stock will, the number is not part of the speech. To the Press Club, thanks a ton. A real in-depth analysis of [00:04:40] will be had tomorrow on the steps of the capitol when Trump and Cruz speak, but I'll bore you between now and then with what I think. I think I am lucky to be here to talk about something so important to so many distinguished people who jealously guard the First Amendment. It is in your care. Use it wisely. And I don't give many written speeches, but this is too important. I can't think of a thing I am, that I have done in the Senate more important than what this week and maybe next will behold.

President Obama's deal with Iran could only be reached through a long series of mistakes and miscalculation. His biggest mistake of all was disassociate Iran's destabilizing behavior from their nuclear ambitions. By separating the two Obama opened up funding for the war machine of the world's greatest sponsor of terror. This was a strategic blunder for the ages. As to Israel, this deal empowers their chief antagonist with more money, more weapons, and a pathway to a bomb. To my Democratic colleagues who say this agreement saves Israel and secures its future I could not disagree more strongly. Every single major political party in Israel, not just Likud, opposes this deal because they know it gives the Ayatollah the ability to make his chants of death to Israel a reality. If this agreement does not dramatically change it could very well become a death sentence for the state of Israel.

I believe the Ayatollah is compelled by its religious beliefs to do three things: Purify its religion, destroy the one and only Jewish state, and attack democracies like ours. There is no place in the Ayatollah's world for religious tolerance, peaceful dissent, or the selection of leaders by the people. Some of the collateral damage from Obama's fixation with the deal, with an Iranian deal at any cost has been the unchecked provocations of Russia and China. In the face of Russian intervention in Ukraine and its support for Assad or China's aggression against its neighbors President Obama has refused to push back, because he needs Moscow and Beijing in order to reach a deal with Iran. As a result, the losers of this deal include American businesses and government officials who have been cyberattacked by China, the good people of Ukraine, the overwhelming majority of Syrians who have had to suffer under Assad's oppression, all because Obama has been unwilling to counter these provocations in a forceful manner for fear of jeopardizing his agreement. The biggest losers of all are the Iranian people themselves, those who yearn for freedom and to see the end of oppression by the Ayatollah and his henchmen. This agreement empowers the Ayatollah, makes it far more difficult for the Iranian people to unshackle themselves from this oppressive religious theocracy.

When the history of these times has been written unfortunately I believe it will be said that President Obama was a weak opponent of evil and a poor champion of freedom. His nuclear deal with Iran is the great miscalculation of his Presidency. In an administration marked by

failing policies here at home and around the world, this deal will prove to be his most consequential failure. He went to the negotiating table without understanding who he was dealing with and he went to the table as a weakened President who has long been broadcasting to our enemies and the world at large that they will not be confronted. Having disastrously and permanently withdrawn from Iraq, drawing red lines in Syria and then backing down, and making it crystal clear that a military option was not really on the table, he set the stage for negotiation with Iran that could only go one way. Just as Obama's position of weakness was crystal clear, it should also have been very clear in what kind of adversary we were dealing with.

Iran has been run by a radical, fanatical regime for over three and a half decades. Their nuclear ambitions, their hatred for the U.S. and Israel, their support for terror, their religious fanaticism are all well-known. Even if President Obama entered office without understanding this regime, history had given him a crash course in 2009. Two years before the Arab Spring broke out the people of Iran began to revolt against their tyrannical government. The Ayatollah had rigged the Presidential election and the people of Iran knew it. Within hours of the announcement of the stolen election hundreds of thousands of Iranians poured into the streets, demanding nothing more than their democratic rights. This green revolution, as it was called, made up of political and religious moderates, young, women, workers, and anyone who wanted a better life all stood up to peacefully but forcefully demand a new kind of Iran. The reaction of the Ayatollah was swift, barbaric. Dozens were killed in cold blood and hundreds more were jailed, many of whom were tortured and tried in sham trials. At this point Iran had reached a crossroads. Either this green revolution would succeed in bringing about real change in Tehran or the radical Islamic government would succeed in squashing this movement.

The United States was at a crossroads too. President Obama had a clear choice, stand with the people of Iran or remain on the sidelines during the brutal crackdown. At this pivotal moment President Obama chose to remain on the sidelines. The religious Nazis running Iran faced no consequences for their actions. The people of Iran received no support. Without the support of the world's greatest democracy their effort was doomed. The Ayatollah and his henchman, the Revolutionary Guard, killed, jailed, or terrified into silence every Iranian moderate. In the six years since there has been no sign of that resistance. Their crackdown was complete. The cost of protest clearly too high.

What happened in 2009 helped sharpen the world's focus on this fanatical regime. In the years following those of us who had long understood the threat from Iran redoubled our efforts to step up the pressure. The U.S. Congress put the screws to the Iranian government, cutting off access to global markets, especially Western financial institutions. Our allies followed our lead. We painstakingly built an international consensus on Iran. I helped to lead this effort because I believed then and I believe now that the single greatest threat to our security as a nation is the prospect of a nuclear Iran.

Iran in turn felt the deep pain inflicted by the united approach to sanctions and agreed to come to the negotiating table. This was a critical moment. We had backed Iran into a corner. What we needed then more than ever was a tough American President, someone who wanted a deal but not so badly they would take a bad one, a President who credibly put all options on the table so that Iran knew we meant business, a President who laid out negotiating objectives and

stuck to them, a President who without a shred of doubt would do whatever it took to defend America. But that is not the President we had. We had a President who projected weakness and clearly didn't understand who he was dealing with, but believe me they knew exactly who they were dealing with. They saw President Obama's weakness and they took every possible advantage of it.

While John Kerry was giving away the farm at the negotiating table his own State Department was writing report detailing Iran's terror campaign throughout the Mideast. This report outlined very clearly the money, arms, and training Iran was providing to terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas who attacked the state of Israel. In the case of Hezbollah holds the government in Lebanon hostage. While the Obama administration was giving away our ability to dismantle Iran's nuclear program Iran was propping up Bashar Al-Assad, prolonging the Syrian conflict, giving rise to ISIL, the world's most devastating humanitarian crisis unfolds before our eyes. While our negotiators were giving up on any time anywhere inspections Iran was destabilizing Iraq, reviving sectarian tensions with a Shiite militia, paving the way for ISIL to move in and undo the gains made by American troops. While President Obama was backing down from every single negotiating objective he had laid out Iran was taking down the government of Yemen through their proxies the Hudis. They toppled this pro-U.S. government and crippled our ability to monitor Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. In short, Iran set the entire Middle East on fire, taking over four Arab capitals and creating conditions for the most devastating and sophisticated attacks against our homeland, all while negotiating with the Obama administration.

And what did they get at the end of that negotiation? A deal that gives them a nuclear bomb, a missile to deliver it, and the money to pay for it. The disastrous failings of this agreement are well known by now. It gives the Ayatollah immediate cash infusion of 100 billion dollars without any requirement that changes behavior. It allows the Iranians, even if they abide by the agreement, to arrive at a threshold of being a nuclear arms state in just a few short years. And of course we now all know they will not abide by this agreement. They have constantly lied and cheated from day one about their nuclear weapons program and at the end of the day the verification systems in this agreement are little more than a joke.

This agreement lifts bans on ballistic missiles and conventional weapons and the launch of this deal hinges on a secret deal between the IAEA and Iran regarding the possible military dimensions of their program. So far Congress and the American people have been barred from seeing this agreement, but we know at the very least, thanks to the press, it leaves inspections in the hands of the Iranians themselves. Today the Senate begins its debate on this deal. I have spent every day since this deal analyzing it, talking with experts in the region, and trying to make the case to the American people as to why this is so dangerous. I will continue making the case on the Senate floor, encouraging my Democratic colleagues to put our security above politics. Regardless how the vote goes, the fight for a better deal will not end. I am leading the effort to impose additional sanctions on the Iranian regime until all of our hostages are released, including Jason. [Applause] I will support re-imposing the current sanctions before they expire at the end of 2016. I will also block funding for the IAEA until they come clean about their side deal with Iran. I will not let up until we change course, force Iran back to the table, and get a better deal.

President Obama says that our choice is between this deal and war. He says that there is no better deal to be had. He is half right. There is no better deal to be had from a President who negotiates from weakness, but the right President will get the right deal. As President I will say to the Iranians you can have a peaceful nuclear energy program, you can have sanctions relief, but first you will completely dismantle your nuclear weapons program, you will abandon your support for terror, you will submit to inspections any time anywhere so that we know you are not cheating, and you will not get a penny of sanctions relief or one more bullet until we know you have complied and you have changed your behavior. That is the deal. If you reject those terms and walk away that is your choice. If Iran tries to break out they will be stopped.

To achieve this better deal I will work with the Congress to impose new sanctions that will put off limits American banking system to any company that would do business with Iran. I believe having the choice between the Iranian economy and the American banking system would create tremendous leverage that I would use wisely. I am running for President because this is the deal we need. It is the only deal that will secure our nation, protect our closest allies like Israel, and assure our Arab allies that they do not need to pursue nuclear weapons on their own. President Obama can't get this deal. He has neither the will nor the understanding of the Mideast, but I do. I have spent months on the ground through dozens of trips to the region as a Senator and a member of the United States Air Force. I know the key players. More important, they know me. As President I will get us a better deal and do what it takes to make sure Iran never achieves the ability to hit us at home. Thank you very much. [Applause]

JOHN HUGHES: Thank you, Senator. I think you can stay right here, since there is not a lot of maneuverability, room to maneuver up here. So, can you tell us the latest on the state of play with the legislative situation? before you came here today you had some information about Senator Reed and maybe a simple majority. What is going on up on the hill? And you can just speak into that.

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Okay. Well, we have 58 no votes, all Republicans, which I am proud to say, and four Democrats who I appreciate their support and their political courage. We need 60 to proceed to, the bill a simple majority to get the bill to the President's desk. The motion to disapprove needs a simple majority. Once cloture is invoked the President can veto it. Then we will have to override. Obviously I don't think we have the votes to do that. The question is will two Democrats step forward who oppose the deal to allow the debate. I hope they will. I cannot believe that the United States Senate will not debate the most consequential foreign policy decision in my lifetime. If you like the deal tell us why, give me a chance to tell you why I don't in front of the American people. To deny discussion on this deal would be one of the low points in the history of the United States Senate. What the hell are we here for if not to talk about this? And here is their fear, that Obama will have to veto it. That's the price of being President.

JOHN HUGHES: In your seat on the Appropriations Committee you have some authority in overseeing State Department funding. You mentioned that you would block funding for the IAEA. Would you take steps in other ways to thwart this agreement by blocking any sorts of funding if the veto override is unsuccessful?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, as to the IAEA, we give them 88 million dollars of your money. I'm not going to give an organization funding until I see a component of the deal that I think is extremely important. The possible military dimensions of the program were one of the key objectives of this deal to find out how far they have gone in terms of developing a nuclear weapon. We know they have been testing detonators at Parchin. But as I understand this side deal, it really allows the Iranians to inspect themselves. And here is why I think we got there. When the Ayatollah drew a red line that you will not come on our military bases he basically won. So, Kerry and the P5+1 found a way to outsource this to the IAEA and gave basically Iran a veto. So, I am looking forward to the debate on the Senate floor as to whether or not we should fund the IAEA until we the Congress get a chance to see if the side agreement is as bad as I think it is.

As to other aspects in terms of how you implement this deal, I will do what I can to stop it, give the next President a chance to get a better deal, but I will say this: There is no way President Obama can ever get a better deal. He is too weak in the eyes of our adversaries. Everybody in this room could get a better deal. You know why? Because the Iranians don't know you like they know President Obama. They have sized him up and they have found him lacking in terms of being a forceful advocate for his position. When he drew the red line across Assad, Assad crossed it, Assad will be standing when Obama leaves, that set in motion bad behavior by Iran, by China, and by Russia. The only way to reset the table is to get a new President and whatever I can do to give leverage to that new President if I am not the new President I will do between now and January 2017.

JOHN HUGHES: Would that include the CR, would you be willing to risk a government shutdown over IAEA funding or funding for other parts to implement this plan?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: If my colleagues insist that we give money to the IAEA without looking at the deal that would be their decision to make. I will advocate to my leadership that the Congress should not buy into this concept. There have been other occasions where the IAEA shared agreements with the Congress. This is a moment of testing for the Congress. This should be something that is bipartisan in nature. To have something this important to the nuclear ambitions of the Iranians not understood by the American people is an affront to the Congress. I cannot believe that my colleagues would allow this to happen, that you're going to have a UN agency being able to negotiate one of the most difficult aspects of the past behavior of the Iranians without us understanding what the negotiations look like and what the outcome is like. So yes, I will dig in on this.

JOHN HUGHES: This questioner says, "By threatening to block funds for the IAEA don't you play into Iran's hands by undercutting the inspections required by the agreement?"

LINDSEY GRAHAM: I think I didn't play into Iran's hands at all. I think the Iranians have taken us to the cleaners and we will see what happens if Congress pushes back. At the end of the day we have some leverage in the Congress. This is one area of leverage. I hope I am making myself clear. I find it offensive that my government, this administration, my President would negotiate a deal with the United Nations and Iran that the Congress can't see or his own administration can't see, that that has consequences far beyond this deal.

JOHN HUGHES: This deal goes for 10 years, and of course it could be many years that we would see the effects of whatever happens. How soon do you think you will know if the deal goes through whether it's working or not and what are you going to be looking for to see whether it is working?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, I can tell you already you feel the effects of the deal. Everybody in the region is worried to death. Israel, regardless of party, is adamantly against this. I think you see Russia going in to help Assad, which is an affront to John Kerry and President Obama. I think what you see is a resetting of the region where Iran will be stronger, not weaker, where the opposition to Iran internally and externally will be much more difficult to garner. And I think one of the effects of this deal will be a further destabilizing of the Mideast. And let me just say this: If Assad is left in power you never fix Syria. To our European allies, please understand what is happening inside of Syria. The Syrian people want two things. They want ISIL destroyed, because they're not radical people, and they want Assad, their oppressor, out. So, what you see from this deal, the Russians sensed that we were weak with Iran, we certainly didn't do anything when Putin went into Crimea and now Eastern Ukraine, I think his effort to openly reinforce Assad is one of the first signs of how the Russians view this deal.

And if you had told me a year ago that part of the deal would include lifting the conventional arms embargo I thought you were crazy. What does that have to do with their nuclear program? You know why we got there? Because Russia sided with the Iranians and put it on the table in the last couple of weeks and we folded like a cheap suit. The one thing I can tell you, for a hundred billion dollars I could get four people out of jail. Isn't it stunning? [Applause]

JOHN HUGHES: McClatchy reported last month that "open secret for decades" is an Israeli stockpile of 80 to 100 nuclear warheads. What do you say about that supposed stockpile? And could it deter Iran from cheating on the agreement?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, if I were the Iranian Ayatollah I may not worry much about Obama, but I would worry a lot about Israel. And some people say, "Well, Israel is believed to have nuclear weapons. Why not the Iranians?" Well, I can give you 400 good reasons. The Iranian regime has American blood on its hands. Would Israel's ability to use nuclear weapons against Iran deter them? All I can say is why do they want a nuclear weapon? What are they up to? What is the difference between the Cold War and this war? What is the Ayatollah trying to accomplish? Is it merely regime survival, to be a stronger member of the family of nations, or does he have an agenda? I think it is pretty clear he has an agenda. I think he is driven by his faith to do several things, to purify the faith, the religion of Islam, to destroy Israel.

When you're dealing with somebody who embraces an end of days attitude toward life what makes you think death is a deterrent? All I can say, if I was in Israel I would be very worried that my chief antagonist on the planet now has the capability to do what they chant continuously. The one thing you can say about Chamberlain, at least Hitler lied, at least he told him, "This is all I want." You can't say that about this deal. The ink is not even dry yet, and they still chant death to America, death to Israel. So what I would suggest, ladies and gentlemen, that

if you're looking to Israel to defend us and create a deterrent for us you made a huge mistake. Why should we put that burden on our friend Israel? That is not the answer to this dilemma is to assume that Israel will deter Iran. The answer to this dilemma is to make sure that America reasserts herself at a time to set the world back in order before it gets completely out of hand.

One thing I can say about Israel and nuclear weapons, not one Arab state has felt the need to go down the nuclear road because of Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. Think about that. It is widely believed that Israel has a stockpile of nuclear weapons. Every Arab leader believes that. Not one Arab leader has felt the need to acquire a nuclear weapon to counter Israel. Why? Because they know Israel is not going to wake up one day and wipe them off the map. What do they think about the Ayatollah, that if he had it he would use it.

JOHN HUGHES: What specifics can you provide on increased security aid and assurances to Israel in light of the Iran deal?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: The fact that we are promising more weapons to everybody in the region tells you all you need to know about this deal. If it's such a good deal why do you have to replenish everybody's stockpile? If it's such a good deal why do you have to spend billions of dollars or give billions of dollars of weapons to the Arabs? All I could say is that there will be an effort by Republicans and Democrats to reinforce Israel's ability to defend herself.

Here is the one threat that the Jewish state cannot survive. They will beat every army in the region. They have a military superiority over all their conventional opponents. They can deal with every terrorist group in the region. The one thing they can't deal with effectively, in my opinion, is a radical Islamic region with a weapon of mass destruction. This is the game changer of all game changers. This is the marriage from Hell. This is what I fear the most, that the only reason 3,000 of us died on 9/11 and not three million is they couldn't get the weapons to kill three million of us. I think anything Iran develops now and in the future will be shared with terrorists. And as to Israel, she can't survive a nuclear armed Iran. Containment won't work. So Israel is going to be put in a bad spot. If there is any indication at all that Iran is going to break out Israel has to attack, because the idea of containing the Ayatollah after he gets a nuke is a nonstarter for people who have lived through the first Holocaust.

JOHN HUGHES: If you were President would you see war against Iran as an option?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: I would see Iran losing a war with the United States if they wanted one. And they would see it too. As I told you, I would try to have a leverage to get a better deal, starting with denying access to American financial institutions if you do business with Iran. And I would wait until the phone rings, and it would, a 450 billion dollar economy versus a 17 trillion dollar economy. To those who worry about isolating America, what are you thinking? How do you isolate us? So that kind of thinking led to this bad deal.

So, as to a war with Iran, nobody wants it, but if there is one I can tell you how it ends, we win, they lose, and in the process of trying to get a better deal I would give them what they claim they wanted, a peaceful nuclear power program. Canada and Mexico have power plants, but they don't enrich. How many of you here think that they have been trying to build a nuclear

weapons program, not a power plant? If you think they have been trying to build a nuclear power plant you shouldn't be allowed to drive home. [Laughter] These people are lying, so what would I do? I would take their nuclear ambitions and I would curtail them to the point they could have a power plant but no ability to make a bomb. If I had to make a list of all the people in the world I wouldn't trust with an enrichment program they would be on the top, because you can't put North Korea, because they have already got one. So I would change the whole construct of this deal and I wouldn't give them a penny or allow them to buy one more bullet until they stopped being the largest state sponsor of terrorism on the planet. And I would tell them there is a better way forward with the United States, but you have to choose it, you have to want it, and if you tried to break out I would stop you.

And if there is a military engagement it would be more than just a few bombs dropped on nuclear sites. I would go after their offensive capability. They have a small navy and an old air force. We would probably get hit in response to an altercation with Iran in the region. There are probably suicide cells all over the world that would be activated. They could do some mischief in the States of Harmuz, they could launch rockets against our installations and that of our allies in the region. They could do a lot of things for a short period of time. Then it would end. It would end on our terms.

JOHN HUGHES: As President, would you commit combat troops to fight ISIS or ISIL? And if so how many and for how long and how many American deaths would you consider justifiable in such a situation?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: As to defeating and destroying, or [00:36:50] and destroying ISIL, whatever it takes as long as it takes until they're destroyed, period. We have 3500 American forces on the ground. Apparently they're not wearing boots, but they're on the ground. We need about 10,000 according to people I trust, the people who formulated the surge that did work. What would that give you that you don't have today? A couple of aviation battalions where attack helicopters flown by American pilots could really do some damage to ISIL, forward air controllers so we could actually drop bombs. 75% come back with the bombs on the racks. Special forces that would not only hunt ISIL on occasion, their leadership, but morning, noon, and night. They wouldn't get on the phone, they wouldn't get in a car without risking being killed. And trainers and advisors at the battalion level so the Iraqi army would be less likely to cut and run.

If we don't destroy ISIL we're going to get hit and we're going to get hit hard, and the most likely launching pad for the next attack is in Syria. Ramadi and Mosul are two different military operations. To those who believe the Kurds are going to go solve every problem in the Mideast, you really don't understand the Kurds. They're fine fighters, but they're not an expeditionary force. The Kurds are not going to go to Ramadi or Anbar Province. You have to get the Sunni Arab tribes back on your side, like we once did, and more American troops on the ground would neutralize the Shiite militia advantage that they enjoy today and really hurt Iran's ambitions in Iraq. That is one reason I would have more American troops.

So I think the 10,000 would get you to where you need to go in Iraq, but if you need more we'll send more, because I think our national security interest is directly affected by what

happens in Iraq and Syria. As to Syria, the great disappointment in this debate, to me, is that no one on our side is addressing Syria in a coherent fashion. There is nobody left to destroy ISIL and push Assad out in Syria. The free Syrians army has been decimated. That window closed. Three years ago it really would have mattered if we had had a no fly zone and trained the free Syrian army. We spent 500 million dollars almost training 60 people. So how do you destroy ISIL without a ground component? In Iraq and eventually Syria. Who makes up the ground forces? There is nobody left in Syria with the ability to destroy ISIL and replace Assad and if you leave Assad in power the war in Syria never ends. He is a magnet for radical Islamic Sunni extremists and the Syrian people will not tolerate him being in power after he slaughtered their families. So I think that ground force comes from the region.

If I were President here is what I would do. I would go to the region and I would ask them to make up a very large army of which we will be a small part. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, those with military capability, form a regional force with two objectives, to destroy ISIL by going into Syria and pulling them up by the roots, destroying the headquarters and the caliphate in its capitol, holding the ground until Syria can repair itself and also pushing Assad out. You're probably looking at an 80,000 or 100,000 person army, because there are 30,000 or 40,000 ISIL fighters inside of Syria alone. If we're not about 10% of that regional force I worry we might lose. It may come apart. So it is in our national security interest to have this regional army succeed, and that means American boots on the ground intermingling with a regional force to accomplish goals that make us safer.

So if you can destroy ISIL without more American ground forces being part of a regional effort dramatically different than what we have going on today I am dying to hear how you would do it. And if you're not willing to say that, that we need more American ground forces as a part of a new regional strategy, then I don't think you're ready to be Commander in Chief. Doing what Obama is doing plus a little bit gets you nothing. We have to have a fundamentally different approach to degrading and destroying ISIL.

JOHN HUGHES: The world has been riveted in recent days with the images of thousands of Syrian refugees streaming into Europe and the photo of a dead three year old refugee boy who washed up on the shores of Turkey. Several European nations have agreed to take in tens of thousands of these refugees, but the U.S. has been largely silent. What should be the U.S. response to the refugee crisis?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: We should take our fair share. We are good people. I don't think the average American has any idea what it's like to live in the Mideast right now. The one thing that is missing with President Obama is a sense of us leading from the front. I said something that I thought was very compelling. President Obama has been a weak opponent of evil. Evil is doing very well on his watch and he has been a poor champion of freedom. If I am President it's not about accepting refugees it's about destroying the reason they leave. It's about sending them back to Syria with hope. It's about destroying a radical Islamic movement that would kill everybody in this room. This is 2015 and women are being raped and sold into slavery, used as sex slaves because of some twisted interpretation of the Koran, gay people are being thrown off roofs, Christians are being annihilated and decimated, and we're sitting around

and not doing a damn thing about it. This is a blight on our honor and to our European friends, up your game.

It wasn't that long ago that you needed somebody's help. The response I see in Europe is appalling. Democracies have become too comfortable with their own freedom. The French and the Germans are telling the Ukrainians, "Oh I'm sorry, don't bleed on the new carpet." All they ask is to be able to fight for their own freedom, and two great friends, France and Germany, have turned a blind eye. And the conversation in Europe is not about how many we'll take, but xenophobia. All I can say, folks, is that what you see happening in Syria, if it is left unattended, the worst is yet to come. The King of Jordan and Lebanon are hanging by a thread. If this war in Syria goes on as it is going today and Assad becomes stronger, not weaker, the King of Jordan is going to be in a very bad spot, and these refugees continue to flow. And yes, I understand that among them can be terrorists and we have to watch that, but the vast majority of little boys and little girls and good people who have been kicked out of their homes by the most radical movement since the Nazis, this is a big St. Louis where people are floating out into the ocean, trying to flee the Nazis, and 70 years later we're having the same response. We should take our fair share. But the goal is not to take refugees, it's to destroy the evil from which they flee.

JOHN HUGHES: What number would that fair share be?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Talk with the Department of Homeland Security and see what the numbers are and make sure that we're vetting people in a proper way, but I don't see how we can lead the free world and turn our back on people that are seeking it. We should take the Statue of Liberty and tear it down if this is our response as a nation, just tear it down, because we don't mean it anymore.

JOHN HUGHES: A colleague handed me a follow up question to your earlier answer on ISIS, ISIL. How do you persuade the other Gulf states to participate in the regional force you suggest? They have never been willing to do so in the past.

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, I just got back about three months ago, and the young leader of Ghadar said, "I'll pay for the war." One of the top officials in Saudi Arabia says, "You can have my army" to me and Senator McCain. It's not a lack of will. They're just not going to follow an uncertain trumpet. They're not going to go in Syria to destroy ISIL and leave Assad in power. The reason you can't get anybody to move more effectively is because Assad has to be part of the mix. No Arab army is going to go into Syria, destroy ISIL, and turn half the country over to the Iranians. It's not a question of will they go. It's the question will we lead. If we don't lead they're not going, and if part of the deal is that we have to leave Assad in power they're never going in.

This is one of the collateral damages not talked about enough of this obsession by Obama of a deal with Iran. He needed the Russians, he needed the Chinese to the point that they are getting away with almost everything. And the reason we're not going after Assad more aggressively is that he worried that the Ayatollah would walk away if we tried to do something about his puppet, Assad. So all I can say is that don't blame the Arabs. They're not the problem. The problem is Barack Obama.

JOHN HUGHES: I mentioned in the introduction you are running for President. A couple questioners asked why are you not doing better in the polls and why is your campaign going so badly? [Laughter]

LINDSEY GRAHAM: That was from my Campaign Manager. [Laughter] How many believe that the campaign is over? I think it's just starting. I am in the middle of this car wreck called 2016. It even amazes me and I've seen car wrecks. I used to be a lawyer. [Laughter] The bottom line is that I am confident over time that the Republican primary electorate is going to start looking at all of us, and I will be the first to say if it weren't for Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina I wouldn't have a snowball's chance in Hell, but these small states give you a chance to be known. National polling is being misused, and I blame the Republican National Committee for starting this whole process, or at least legitimizing it. What you're doing with national polls, you're rewarding celebrity people from big states, people who have run before.

The difference between third and last in Iowa, I think, is within the margin of error. So here is what I think will happen to my campaign. I'm going to work really hard. Ask me how well I'm doing in New Hampshire after the 50th town hall meeting. John McCain is coming up to campaign with me this weekend. We're going to be together a lot. John won New Hampshire by wide margins. He is a beloved figure there. He is going to tell people why he believes Lindsey Graham is not only his friend but the best qualified person to be Commander in Chief.

Here is what I think: Experience seems to be a detriment in September, but I think in a few months from now it's going to be an asset. What kind of experience? The experience that it takes to be a Commander in Chief on day one who understands our enemies and our friends, who is prepared to lead, who has a vision of America that the world desperately needs. I've been to Iraq and Afghanistan 35 times. I have learned from my mistakes, Bush's mistakes, and Obama's mistakes. It's not if you make mistakes. It's how you handle them. I think I have got the best case to be made to the Republican primary electorate that I am best qualified to be Commander in Chief in 2017 at a time we need somebody who knows what the hell they are doing, and I have earned the right to say that.

In terms of electability, I am called Lindsey Grahamnesty and Lindsey Gomez because I have worked with Democrats to try to solve a complicated emotional problem like immigration. There is two things I offer the Republican Party and the country, political courage, if there is such a thing left, to work with the other side on something that is hard, and an understanding of the national security interests of this country second to none. And when it comes to a debate between me and Hillary her definition of flat broke and mine are a bit different.

JOHN HUGHES: This questioner says, "You're a legislator with no management experience. Both Senators who became President, John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama, found the transition very difficult. Why wouldn't you have the same problem?"

LINDSEY GRAHAM: I think I just made the case that I am the most qualified to do the most important job of being President, which is being Commander in Chief. That's the most important job of being President of the United States, I think, particularly in 2017. So, I

think my background and experience from learning the hard way what works and what doesn't is exactly what the next President needs. To those who believe that they are all the same in the Mideast, you have no idea what you're talking about. I have been to Iraq and Afghanistan over 35 times, actually, I have worked with people on the rule of law who have been killed in the process of trying to change their countries, to only be replaced by somebody else. Here is what I have learned, that there are two things going on in the Mideast at the same time, and you better understand both, a fight for the heart and soul of Islam between a minority of radicals and most.

And here is the one thing I can assure you and the American people, that the average mom and dad in the Mideast does not want to turn their sons or daughters over to ISIL. To say that is true is an affront to them and stereotyping in the worst, most obscene way. Secondly, there is a fight for governance in the Mideast between young people, women, the disillusioned who no longer will grow up in a dictatorship for our convenience to those who long for Saddam and Gaddafi to come back. Live in their world and see what you would want. The military part of destroying radical Islam is actually a small part and my goal as your President would be to achieve victory in the war on terror, that we win, they lose, and we is just not the American people but humanity. If the American President, the next American President doesn't understand that this is a generational struggle the you're not ready for the job.

Here is what I've learned on my many travels, that building a small schoolhouse in a remote region for a young poor girl will do more damage to radical Islam than any bomb we could drop, giving her a say about her children is the ultimate antidote to radical Islam, creating economic opportunity over time, standing with young people who are asking for a better life, not abandoning them. The enemy offers a glorious death. Our goal in working with the region is to offer a better life. Here is my belief, that the hope of a better life trumps what the terrorists are selling, and that better life over there will make our lives better here.

The last time we ignored radical Islam to our detriment was in Afghanistan. On September the 11th, 2001 we didn't have one dollar of foreign aid going to Afghanistan, we didn't have an embassy or one soldier. To those who believe that ignoring them or leaving them alone will make us safe here, just remember 9/11. The one thing I have come to conclude, this is a religious war where the people who are motivated by a view of God, a teaching of their religion that doesn't have a place for the Christian, the Jew, the moderate Muslim, the vegetarian, the libertarian, and let me just say this. We're talking about a lot of things here at home, but here is the one thing I think we need to understand: radical Islam would kill the gay couple and the wedding cake baker just as quickly.

JOHN HUGHES: Before I ask the last question I have some housekeeping. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists and we fight for a free press worldwide. For more information on the club visit our website Press.org. To donate to our nonprofit journalism institute visit Press.org/Institute. I would also like to remind you about some upcoming programs. On Monday, September 14th we will have a live press conference from space. Astronaut Scott Kelley will answer questions via video link from the International Space Station while astronauts Mark Kelley and Terry Vertz take questions here in the club. That program will start at 9:00 AM on Monday the 14th. And at lunch on Monday, September 21st, Big 12 Commissioner Bob Bolsby will discuss college athletics and Jane Chew,

Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, will discuss new initiatives at a breakfast on September 28th. And I would now like to present our speaker with the National Press Club mug.

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Thank you. [Applause] To New Hampshire, Tom Brady was getting a raw deal. I'm glad that Judge-- [Laughter] I can pander with the best of them. Okay.

JOHN HUGHES: So final question. Donald Trump staked out a position on immigration early in the campaign and several of your fellow candidates for President followed suit. How difficult have the positions of some of these candidates made it for the GOP to attract Latino voters and how will you overcome that as you campaign?

LINDSEY GRAHAM: Well, number one, I think Mr. Trump's position on foreign policy is equally bizarre to me. I mean the idea that we would send American ground forces to Syria and Iraq to take their oil to pay for our wounded warriors, believing that destroys ISIL, is really bizarre. I don't think ISIL is destroyed in that construct. I think they are empowered. And I think every ally we have in the Mideast is at risk and everybody in the Mideast would turn against us.

So as to immigration, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that to get to 270 electoral votes we have to do better with Hispanics, and apparently you do have to be a rocket scientist to figure out what is going on in the Republican Party. All I can say is that if I were a Hispanic voter I would be attracted to the Republican Party of limited government, strong military, faith based values, but I would have a hard time getting there if I believed you were going to deport my mother. Let me tell you about life as it is. The 11 plus million illegal immigrants, many have been here for decades. One quick vignette. A young woman came 20 years ago with one child who is illegal, her and her husband are illegal, she has had two more since then. Both are legal under the 14th amendment. One has joined the Marine Corps. He has been to Iraq once, Afghanistan once, fighting for all of us. Mom and dad are very proud of him. They have lived in the shadows, but he doesn't have to. He comes home and says, "Hey, where is Mom?" "You haven't heard? She is walking back to Mexico." That's self-deportation. Do you think that young man is going to listen to our agenda?

And now in 2015 it's not enough to drive all of them out. We're also apparently, according to Mr. Trump, going to drive out their American citizen children who have the same legal standing as everybody in this room. To my party, we have an opportunity to win the White House and do much good for this country. To my party, you're driving away the fastest growing demographic in this country. As to me, when they write the history of these times, Lindsey Graham who is from the reddest of red states can say the following: I refuse to break up families for my political benefit, because I know what it is like to have your family destroyed. I hope the party wakes up and will have a more sensible approach to immigration. If we don't we will lose and we will deserve it.

JOHN HUGHES: How about a round of applause for our speaker? [Applause] Thank you for being here, Senator, and I hope you come back soon. I would also like to thank the National Press Club staff, including the Journalism Institute for organizing today's event. If you

would like a copy of today's program or to learn more about the club go to the website Press.org.
Thank you. We are adjourned.

END