BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS, POLITICAL ISLAM, AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

Doha, Qatar

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: Well, good evening. It's wonderful to see so many of you here. My name is -- for those of you who don't know me, my name is Salman Shaikh. I'm the director of the Brookings Doha Center. It's an immense pleasure on behalf of myself and my colleagues here at the Center to welcome our esteemed guest, Professor Gilles Kepel. Many of you know him and know his writings very, very well, but let me give you a very brief bio of him.

He's of course a professor at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris and a research director for the French National Center for Scientific Research, CNRS, in Paris. He's a prominent scholar and analyst of the Islamic and Arab world. He's the author of several books and articles -- famous and renowned articles such as, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam, The Revenge of God, Muslim Extremism in Egypt, Allah in the West,* and in his most recent book, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West.*

He is, of course, a graduate of Arabic and

Philosophy, with two doctorates in sociology and political sciences and has taught in numerous places, including of course New York University and Columbia University in the United States. He has also chaired the Phillippe Roman Chair of International Relations at the renowned London School of Economics, one of my alumnus.

It's wonderful to have you here, Professor Kepel, on the Arab Revolution's political Islam and democratic transitions. Without further ado, we look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

MR. KEPEL: Thank you very much, Dr. Salman. Thank you all for coming.

I'm feeling a little hesitant after this great introduction you make. I have to live up to the expectations you raised, and that may be some sort of disappointment but I'll try to cope.

Thank you so much for inviting me to discuss a matter that none of us self-proclaimed specialists of the Arab world had foreseen or even understands now. And so, that's going to be an exercise in the

absence of knowledge.

And in order to try to make up with it, most of us or many of my colleagues have started to sort of play a remake of Ibn Battuta's travels and go to place to place, hop from revolution to revolution our counter-revolution in order to try to map the scene and to sort of put in perspective what has happened since a year and a half now, approximately. And this will be my limited ambitions, as of tonight, in the 20-minute span of time that Dr. Salman generously granted to me. And I will try to devote half of that time to sort of mapping the revolutions from an Arab scope point of view. I mean, (inaudible), from the ocean to the Gulf, and see how in my view there are different zones or different regions or areas in the Arab world where different types of revolutions could or could not happen. That would be point one.

And point two, based on my personal experience and feelings -- and I was just in Libya and Tunisia last week. I came back to France for a couple of days and came here. And before that, I was in

Egypt, I was in Yemen. I went to Egypt two or three times since the revolution. I will try to sort of put in perspective the young history of those revolutions and try to find out what kind of phases we can single out in this young history.

So, as you've noticed the revolutions that succeeded in toppling the regimes all took place in the North African part of the Arab world. It started in Tunisia, then succeeded in Egypt, and then in Libya. You know, differently and with some common features and also some differences. And then, there was an attempt to have a revolution in neighboring countries starting with a B, which was put down, and in the same Arabian peninsula there is also a revolutionary process in the making in Yemen, which also has very distinct features from what happened in the first three countries where a revolution took place. And finally, there is a third area of the Muslim world where in light of a revolution we now have something that looks like civil war, and that is Syria.

So, let me try to see whether we could make differences between what I would facetiously call Zone A, Zone B, and Zone C -- not in Palestine parts, in the Arab world at large -- and try to see what's the differences between the three.

So Zone A, i.e. where revolutions took place or the first phase of the revolution went to fruition, i.e. ousting the incumbents. Took place in countries where domestic issues are more important than international issues. Even in a country like Egypt, which is part and parcel of the Arab-Israeli system of crisis and is -- or it was, this may be an opportunity to ask ourselves the question -- a battle field country. Change was perceived by the outside world and also by the major powers that be in the Arab sub-system, i.e. by powerful rulers in the Arabian peninsula as something that could be dealt with. Even though it was not welcome by some, nevertheless it could be dealt with.

And also those countries offer a fair degree of cohesion, national cohesion. This is something

which can be discussed and depending where we put the criterion of national cohesion or non-cohesion, but by Syrian standards, if you wish, there is a fair degree of cohesion in Egypt, even though you have Muslims and Copts. Nevertheless, everybody believes he is Egyptian.

In Tunisia also, there is a fair degree of cohesion, of national cohesion. In Libya, in spite of the fact that the country is fragmented in a number of tribes -- and this was visible throughout the revolution, and if you go to Libya today you'll see painted on the walls graffiti that carries the names of the different cities that waged their revolutions. The wars in -- the war Misrata, the war Benghazi, the war (inaudible), Tajura, the revolution raised from those different cities.

Nevertheless, the revolutionary process in itself managed to engineer some sort of cohesion, and there are -- even though there are differences between local interests, nevertheless you do not have the same sort of essential or ontological between the

components of what makes Libya. So, that is one thing.

And as I said, I believe that one of the reasons the revolution could take place was that change there was not perceived as threatening the global world order. It was even perceived as, you know, some sort of a betterment, not only from an ideological point of view because after all, democracy would spread in countries that had been dominated by authoritarian regimes and so on and so forth, but even from the vested interests of countries such as Europe XXXSICXXX where as you know we look at North Africa as a place where undocumented immigrants may come across the sea and invade our cities. This is something which is extremely pervasive in the extreme right propaganda and literature in Europe today. This idea that, you know, democratic countries in North Africa would build a system that would make their own citizens more comfortable with their own future was some sort of feeling that many people shared, for right or wrong, in Europe.

Zone B, as in B as in Bahrain or as in Betrol is a very different matter. It is a very different matter because whatever happens in the streets of Hormuz will compel -- if the streets of Hormuz are blocked, you and I -- not in Qatar, but in Europe -- to go to work on a bicycle. And this is, of course, something completely different from change of government in Tunis, right?

And for that matter, the regime change in the Gulf was perceived as far more complicated and far more dangerous. The revolution in Bahrain originally mimicked everything they saw in Cairo, and even Sahah Tullulu the Pearl Square was sort of an attempted remake of Tahrir Square, a liberation arena, whatever you translate "midan" with.

And then, as I mentioned, extra domestic issues immediately took over because the Bahrain was perceived as -- I mean, the Bahraini revolutionaries, even though they were very careful in the beginning not to use Shia language and to raise Bahraini flags and insist on their Bahraini identity, were singled

out by their Gulf environment neighbors as Shia and stooges of the Iranian Republic or the Islamic Republic of Iran. And therefore, as you know, the insurgency, as they say, was put down with the Hamlah, the expedition of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates on the 13th of March.

And so, no one really bothered about what happened. There were no remarks or there was not much fury overheard in the West or even in many Arab capitals. I remember being in Midan Tahrir in April and there was a big gathering and you had, you know, the children of (inaudible) who were siding with ultra-leftists in earnest, but the only place where there was tension was the place where a group of young Bahraini revolutionaries were shouting in favor of their own revolution, and then you had a number of Egyptian revolutionaries who were trying to silence them in saying it was not about revolution, it was about Iranian and Sharubia and what have you. So, that's one thing.

Then, another issue of course is Yemen.

Yemen -- and I was there in early January and I was struck by the fact that there, the country was on the verge of, should I say dissolution or something? In Aden you had the former flags of the southern Communist Republic of Yemen spray painted on the walls everywhere, and no state really visible, no Northern state visible. And a lot of people, some claiming that they wanted the independence of Aden but didn't care about (inaudible), others wanting to re-build South Yemen and so on and so forth, all possibilities.

In the North you have the Houthi insurgency, which is looked at with a lot of concern by Saudi Arabia and so on, so forth. And this situation where you have the city of Sana'a, which was divided between different factions. Some areas being under the control of the loyalist, Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was still around at the time, and others under the control of the opposition, and so on and so forth. And there, again, I believe that what is at stake is to keep Yemen under control so that social unrest in Yemen does not cross the border. And as of now, the only

thing which is still working in Yemen is the oil and gas industry, strangely enough. I mean, the supply of gas and oil to Baghlaf and other places has not been significantly interrupted. So, that's Zone B.

So, Zone C, as in Cham or as in Syria is even different. There, you have a different matter. You have societies which are very deeply divided. Where in (inaudible), where in the Levant -- i.e. as in the characters, in the Levant as opposed or compared to other parts of the Arab world. Lie in the fact that you have a lot of what you call in Arabic (speaking in Arabic). That is to say, confessionalism, sectarianism, a blend of minorities, majorities, Arabs, Kurds, Drus, Christians, Shia, Sunni, and what have you, who are to some extent mixed in some places but entrenched in some neighborhoods. And everybody of course in Syria remembers that in the two neighboring countries, Lebanon and Iraq, there had been terrible civil wars for, you know, the past decade as far as Iraq is concerned or past decades for Lebanon.

And also -- so the possibility of the downfall of Bashar al-Assad is measured against the fact that it might unleash a bloody civil war. And this is of course one of the main challenges of the opposition, i.e. would they be able in the possibility that Bashar is thrown out or ousted -- would they be able to deliver in terms of social peace? Or would that open the door to civil war?

And well, this is of course something on which the present Syrian regime is playing. He is playing on this fear, both internationally and nationally, and this is one of the reasons in my view why neither Aleppo nor Damascus -- neither the merchant or established bourgeoisie in Damascus or Aleppo have yet twisted away from the Bashar al-Assad regime.

And so, you have on the one hand this domestic issue which is due to the lack of cohesion of society, on the one hand. And you also have, of course, another big issue which has to do with the region itself because the Levant is also the part of

the Muslim world in which Israel is located. And it's not only Israel, but it's also Iran and it's also Turkey. And so, the explosion of Syria will of course change the balance of power. Syria to some extent is the lynchpin, if you wish, of the Middle East system, politically, as much as the Arabian peninsula is its lynchpin financially and economically.

And that would mean that, you know, Iran of course perceives Syria as its corridor towards the pressure it can put on Israel via Hezbollah, something which of course brings to the Iranians a significant level of political insurance, if I may say so. And of course, Israel would not be indifferent to change in Syria. Some contend that the Israelis would rather deal with the enemy you know, i.e. the Bashar system. Others believe that they are extremely fearful of whatever the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Syria of tomorrow might mean for them. But nevertheless -- I mean, this is a clear issue. So, Syria is also a battlefield on the Khaleeji Arab cause, vis-à-vis Iran and there is, I believe, no doubt about that.

But on the Arab scene, the Syrian revolution issue is rather blurred. I mean, I was amazed in Tunisia last week, I was in Tunisia on the day where there was the conference of the Friends of Syria. I was not there to attend the conference, I attended a Salafi demonstration against the Tunisian television -- I was watching it, I was not participating as a militant, of course. But I was there and what was striking was that the Salafi thing against the Tunisian TV was not the only demonstration on that day. The other one was a demonstration of Tunisians against the conference, considering that this, you know, the downing of the Bashar regime was a plot fermented by American imperialism, Zionism, and the help of some parties in the Arab world which were considered and described as stooges of America and Israel. So there again you had, you know -- and those people who did that, some of them had played a prominent part in the Tunisian revolution.

So there are things which are, you know, slightly changing. It's not as if we had a sort of

domino effect. Things are becoming more complex.

In the little minutes that remain to me, then I will try to explain that and put in perspective what happened since the revolutions. I would like to single out three different or successive phases.

A first phase -- and I'll interlock the starting points -- where you have (speaking Arabic) in Tunisia, the arrest of the lawyers in Benghazi, the (speaking Arabic) assassination in Egypt, the (speaking in Arabic) repression in Syria, and so on and so forth. Focal points that sort of crystallized, suddenly, tensions.

I mean, there had been such things in the past. I mean, a number of people in North Africa had set themselves ablaze in the past, before Mohamed -- who is actually called Tarek -- Bouazizi. But the reason why it's translated into revolt, it sort of crystallized revolt, was due to the fact that social conditions had significantly worsened. And I will not get into detail, but we can get back to that later during the Q and A session if you want. And

originally, those initial phases of revolt had very little to do politically with the Muslim Brothers or with the Islamists of any kind. Let's not even mention the Salafists.

When one looks closely at them -- and (speaking in Arabic) in particular) -- the local activists of the union workers in Tunisia were extremely important in order to organize the fist revolt and to mobilize so that it would finally reach out to other cities and to Tunis. And to coalesce in a revolutionary gathering which, to go beyond the revolt, to coalesce into a revolutionary gathering, which by the 8th or 10th of January -- 3 weeks after it started on the 17th of December in Sidi Bouzid -- managed to attract different social classes. You had the poor and the downtrodden from Sidi Bouzid and from the Tunisian hinterland who joined forces with parts of the Tunis-educated middle classes who had, to an extent, benefited from the Ben Ali system but who had been extorted so much at the end that they were sick and tired of it. And the coalition of both groups

created sort of a revolutionary conundrum that ousted the Ben Ali regime -- or the Ben Ali family at least -- with the help of the military top brass.

This phase led in Tunisia due to the role played by the Tunisian secular middle classes in the process to a revolution that did not translate into social upheaval, right? And in this you had an important role played by the high committee for the preservation of the revolution, headed by Professor Ayed Ben-Ashur. And it led to the elections, but during the elections the ones who reaped the benefits of the process, as you know, where the Ennahda people. Ennahda had played close to no role in the beginning of the revolution, in the interlock phase, but they were the best-organized and they would provide a political answer to the post-Ben Ali system. They were the (speaking in Arabic), the party of the prison people, just like the French Communist Party after World War II was the party of the fusilladed, if you want. They had the strong legitimacy because of what they had suffered under Ben Ali, they were the prime

target.

So then, you have Phase 2, which is the elections where in all countries where you have elections Islamists win. Mostly Muslim Brothers, but in a minute I will go to Egypt and see how and why Salafists also had a chunk there.

And now we're in Phase 3. Phase 3 is (speaking in Arabic) after the elections, where those who managed to make it at the ballots now have to deliver, and this is a different matter. Have to deliver socially and economically. Factories after factories closed down in Tunisia, unemployment skyrockets, salaries are blocked, and prices rise by the day. And when I was in Tunis on Thursday and Friday there was a garbage collector strike. Tunis was full of garbage bags -- nothing compared to Napoli or Southern Italy yet -- but nevertheless, you know. And there was a big tension in-between the unions, on the one hand, and the leadership on the other.

I saw Ghannouchi twice, once in October right after the elections where he was hilarious and

triumphant. I saw him last week. He was not in the same mood at all. Clearly, there is now something in the making, i.e. Ennahda and others may have reaped the political fruits of the revolution but they will have to deliver socially to those who really made the revolution, and this is a game which is not over yet.

Very briefly and I will just take Egypt as a matter for comparison. In Egypt as opposed to Tunisia where there is total freedom as of now -- and this is why Tunisia is swept over by preachers from the East. They had the benefit to listening to (speaking in Arabic) live over the last weeks, who extolled female circumcision, Hitam, and the like, and then they had (speaking in Arabic) and they had everyone targeting different audiences. But everybody can talk. I mean, there is no fear anymore in Tunisia, as opposed to what they have endured for so many years in Egypt. It's quite different.

In Egypt we had more or less comparable process, i.e. before Tahrir -- as was the case before Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia -- workers' movements, whether

it be Mahalla El-Kubra, Suez, and other places, as was the case in Gafsa in Tunisia.

And then Tahrir, which sort of crystallized and epitomized revolts, clothed it into a media-savvy product, something which was very important. And this is where people mentioned about the Facebook, the Twitter, the what-have-you revolution, which is true. It may have distorted slightly the balance of power, but more of that in the Q and A session, if you want. There again, the process that would lead to elections that, there again, was swept by the best-organized, the (speaking in Arabic/French) i.e. the Brothers.

Another feature compared to Tunisia. In Tunisia, the Salafis are on the rise but have not yet managed to organize significantly. In Egypt, strangely enough -- I met with a number of Salafi leaders in April and they would all tell me we're not entering into politics (speaking in French) and so on and so forth. And the same guys a few months later, as of July, would have their parties and go to the ballot boxes and, you know, reap something like a

little more than a quarter of the votes. Well, something which may have been palatable to some of the sponsors who hate the Muslim Brothers -- another matter. I don't know, I don't have the answers, but I noticed that there was a change before what was told in April and what was implemented later in the year.

The difference with Tunisia is that in Egypt, the army is still in charge. There is, in my view -- and I welcome any discussions on that -- but in my view there is no doubt about that, and you have a tripod of power in Egypt. You have the army engaged, you have the Parliament, and you have the Midan, Midan Tahrir. Not all retains the same power system, that the Midan has legitimacy for the revolution. It was hijacked, to some extent, by the Brothers who fared well in the polls, but who nevertheless have the sort of popular legitimacy of the ballots but who are not in a position to deliver anything for the time being because the army still controls the deep state, as they would say in Turkey.

And this is why I believe we see this sort

of chauvinism on the part of the staff people, the trials against the Americans, the NGOs, and so on and so forth. So that they can build a sort of nationalist legitimacy to themselves, something which will also probably build a blurred relation to Syria, because when you attack America as spying on you through its NGOs and then it's not -- you don't have much space to attack the American plots in Syria to favor imperialism or what have you, or Zionism. So this is an issue which I would be eager to discuss and to pick your brains on that, because I think this is still very, very unclear.

So there again, and in Egypt we are now entering Phase 3, i.e. they have to deliver economically and socially by, you know, conservative estimates of bankers and people who know the matter -- which I really don't. Egypt will be bankrupt in a matter of weeks. It will not be able to pay its debt, it will be in default, and who is going to pay? Who will have to pay?

Well, the more they put Americans on trial,

the less they are likely to have a lot of American aid in the future. This is something which is already debated in America. As of us, the European Union, we are broke, so no way. We can't pay our gas and oil, and so that leaves only one area of the world that will have to deliver: Here. And this is a matter of very, very big concern, particularly in the biggest country of the peninsula, Saudi Arabia, which is looking at what is happening in the Arab world with a lot of anxiety.

Fortunately, tensions with Iran are pushing oil prices to the top once again, and this is welcome news for a country like Saudi Arabia where the break-even price for the barrel is something like $90 nowadays to cover budget expenditures. So, as long as there is tension with Iran, in a way it's good for domestic policies of Saudi Arabia. But having to deal with the Egyptian financial crisis will be a major issue. Who is going to pay, how, to what extent, who will be the local recipients of the (speaking in Arabic)?

So, to end up with those remarks. I believe that, you know, the Arab revolutions are only beginning. I mean, we've not seen much yet and I don't know whether this is good news or bad news, but for the professional analyst of course it's good news because we'll still have a job in a few years, normally. Because we are always, threatened, you know. Whenever things go well in the Middle East you're useless.

So, I guess that the real issues are now coming. I mean, i.e. I would see two main issues for the very near future. One is the Gulf issue, and the whole Syrian issue is intimately linked to the Iranian issue. If the Syrian system disappears or falls down or melts down or whatever you call it, that means that Iran will clearly have far less leverage in the Levant and in the Arab world system. So, that may be perceived by some as an opportunity to strike. With what kind of consequences?

And B, the social issue. I mean, Arabs are just like the rest of us. They need to eat. Some in

the oil exporting areas may consider that this is not on the top of their priorities, others consider it is on the top of their priorities. And so, Tunisia and Egypt are already -- I mean, the countries where the revolution were supposedly the most successful are already feeling the pressure of the economy. And this will clearly be a litmus test for the very near future, and a harbinger of future tensions which may change the matter a lot.

So with this, I will have to apologize for having been far longer than expected. But as one of the former Presidents of France whose name I will not disclose but which rhymes with Iraq said, "Promises are binding only for those who receive them."

Thank you very much for listening and patience.

MR. SHAIKH: Well, thank you very much. (Applause) I think you deserve your glass of water, and I'm glad I gave you a couple minutes over the 20 minutes that I prescribed to you.

We'll do it this way. I'll ask a few

questions, if you don't mind. I know many of you have questions, I'm sure, and then we'll open up. But I will ask a few questions first.

Let me just ask a very basic question. In your Phase 1 you referred to Islamists doing very well. Some of the reasons you gave were, better organized, they had the best history and the best rhetoric to counter what had gone on before. But is there something not also about Arab societies currently that have voted in these Islamists? Something that can be inferred by the popularity that they seem to have got at the ballot box?

MR. KEPEL: Do you want me to answer that question first?

Well, sure. The reason they won politically also is due to the fact that since the mid-1970s with the demise of Arab nationalism and its shortcomings, Islamist movements have built -- everybody knows that -- a very strong constituency in their societies. I mean, I did not insist on the way those revolutions happened, if we put it in the sort of history of the

last 30 years.

My understanding of Islamist movements -- which I've tried to explain in one of my books, *Jihad,* which was published in 2000, a year before 2001 -- was that the Islamist movement was deeply fragmented. This is why we called it -- you know, mentioned that there would be a demise of Islamism as such.

On the one hand, you had the radical movements who already in the 1990s had started to -- after their victory in Afghanistan had started to consider that they could engineer political revolutions via armed vanguards, as happened in Algeria, in Egypt, in Bosnia, in Chechnia, and they all failed. They did not manage.

On the other hand you had the core groups of Islamist movements who had started to be more and more imbued with something that was totally alien to them originally when the movement was created in the late '30s and throughout the 1960s and early '70s, i.e. democracy. Probably the most prominent examples were the Turks and the Tunisians, and Ennahda and the AKP.

And this also got into the sum of the Egyptian Brothers. Not all of them, but a significant chunk. They would go closer and closer to the ballot box, whereas the others would go from ballots to bullets, on the one hand.

And with that, what I had written at the time in 2000 was that the movement was doomed to be heavily divided, therefore would lose its identity as such. Now on the 12th of September, 2001 many of my colleagues in France asked that I be sacked immediately from the university because I was such a failure and, you know, because there was such a triumph.

But actually, al-Qaeda was but an attempt by the radical groups within the Islamist movements to try to overcome their political failure in the 1990s. They had failure in Algeria, they had failure in Egypt, they had failure in Bosnia, and they thought that, you know, with the attack on the symbol of Western dominance -- i.e. the U.S. -- then they would demonstrate how weak the U.S. was and how weak the

lackeys of the West -- i.e. the powers that be were in their terms. But they also failed, and they also failed to engineer political mobilization. Their big test was what they had hoped would be jihad in Iraq. Well, jihad in Iraq turned into Fitna, and while the Americans and the jihadists were at odds with each other their common nemesis -- i.e. Iran -- gained steam and nowadays as Americans have left Iraq, the biggest influence in Iraq is exercised by the Iranians. That's, you know, failure of the al-Qaeda, I think.

That left us with, you know -- because the sort of threat of radical Islamist groups of al-Qaeda had sort of retreated, whether this threat was real or had been hyped by the media system both in the West and here, this is a matter for discussion. Nevertheless, you know, it was constructed as a threat. This is what gave a sort of 10-year super life expectancy for authoritarian regimes. Better Ben Ali, then Bin Laden, if I may say so.

And so, the guys were still around. They

used the wanish on their hair, they dyed their hair black, but they aged. The astute autocrats that were Ben Ali, Gaddafi, Mubarak and the others -- in the beginning of their rule, became aging autocrats. With the entourage gaining steam, with the cronies becoming more and more powerful, with the façade corruption, extortion spreading, and so on and so forth, they alienated their power base in society, i.e. the middle-classes, and that led to the fact that, you know, they could be ousted. All the more so as the main base of their political rhetoric, which they addressed to the West, which was it's us or Bin Laden, had become irrelevant because there was no Bin Laden anymore.

So, this I believe is what made the revolutions possible, you know, if you put them in perspective in the last 30 years. But even though the Islamist movement had become fragmented, nevertheless they had sort of given way to a sort of -- how should I say? A daily ideology, a re-Islam-ization of society at the basic level which made their political

language palatable to the voters.

You know, I believe for instance in Tunisia -- I met a number of people who voted for Ennahda and who did not at all consider themselves as Islamists. They considered that, you know, they felt deeply Muslim and they considered that Ennahda was using a language that they understood and that they were Muslims and they were also Democrats and they felt that democracy was a major issue. This is something they perceived in Ennahda's political language.

Now, there is a debate raging on whether or not this democracy talk among Islamists today is mere rhetoric or not. Whether or not it's genuine, as far as the leadership is concerned -- and I believe the leadership is very divided. In Tunisia, for instance, there is a big difference between people like Saduk Shoru, one of the Ennahda MPs who is in favor of the immediate implementation of Sharia, and others like (inaudible) or Samir Dilou, or even Ali Laarayedh, Minister of Interior, who considered just like Ghannoushi to whom I asked the question and this is

how he answered last week: Consider that it's enough to say that Arabic is the language of Tunisia and Islam is its religion, point blank, period.

But whatever the discrepancies within the leadership, I believe that the majority of voters -- people who voted in Ennahdas -- have this democracy claim, right? Now how will it resist the challenge of bread and the economy is probably the issue of tomorrow.

MR. SHAIKH: I'll ask you another one or two questions. Going to your Phase 3 now, if these Islamist moderate so-called parties like the Muslim Brotherhood or Ennahda actually don't fulfill expectations and in fact there is a crisis of expectations -- and in fact, even if they in the medium-term fail -- who actually leads the transitions in these countries to democracy? Or are we talking about a more chaotic situation?

MR. KEPEL: Well, it is totally unpredictable as of now, of course. It may be slightly different in -- I mean, the two cases which

are the clearest, of course, are Egypt and Tunisia, for example. You've had Islamists winning at the poll in Morocco but they're His Majesty's Islamists, if I may say so. It's the Mahajan system, which is stilly pervasive. It's the Mahajan with a green (speaking Arabic) but doesn't -- it's not going to change anything.

Kuwait also was swept by Salafis at the last elections. The four ladies which had been elected in the previous Parliament were not re-elected. But I believe that there, again -- I mean, the system is quite different because the ruling family is still very much around as of now.

In Egypt one phenomenon which is very, of course, striking is that close to no one had foreseen -- except maybe for my former student and young colleague, Stephane Lacroix, who did this marvelous book on Islamists and Saudi Arabia just translated into Arabic and before that in English, and who is now working in Egypt and warned me he thought that the ones who would have a very significant role in the

future in Egypt were the Salafists.

And it was so strange for us, because last time I was in Egypt under Hosni Mubarak and I talked to a number of high-ranking officials, they considered the Salafists as people who were on their side against the Brothers. You know, well, it had become a nuisance because in poor areas, in the ashauiets (?), you know, in the outskirts of Alexandria and the like. Well it was clear that the Brothers would not go anymore because the Salafists were there, but the police could not go either and this became more of a problem for the regime because, you know, those places during the last years of Hosni Mubarak had become completely off limits.

There were voices in the Egyptian establishment, including with the new (speaking in Arabic) that expressed significant worry about the Salafi-zation of Egyptian society. But there again, you know, at the time -- and the Brothers were not present in the beginning of the revolution. They went there after a while and the magnitude of the

remonstrations definitely changed when they sent their troops there. But the Salafists clearly did not at all participate and they were against it in the beginning, very clearly. And then, you know, (speaking in Arabic) step by step they took sides.

If you look at -- you know, we now have for the first time we can do political sociology in the Arab world with numbers, not only with ideas. It's going to be the end of me because I'm better in talking without ground -- anyway, we now have numbers in Egypt and Tunisia and you can see in which constituency who voted for whom. And you know, strangely enough the Salafi vote in Egypt is a class vote. It's the poor, it's the guys from the (speaking in Arabic), it's the downtrodden. The funny thing is that when you talk to the Salafis and their leaders, I mean, who do they refer to? To the Saudi (speaking in Arabic) who are part and parcel of a system that, of course, legitimates the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. I don’t know what are your figures, but when Prince Sultan passed away estimates of his

personal fortune ran between something like $300 billion and $400 billion. I am not a student of math or have no ideas of what numbers mean, but I know that a billion and a million are not exactly the same.

And this is a very strange thing, you know, that you have the downtrodden, the poor, the wretched of the Arab earth who vote for a party which is intimately linked to the sort of capitalist super-achievement of the Arab oil system. So, this is clearly going to be a major issue for the future. I believe that it's a real embarrassment for the Brothers in Egypt, and what is difficult to analyze now is to what extent Salafi movements have cultural and religious or social agendas.

I was struck at the demonstration in Tunis on Friday. You know, you had the Salafis and the Hizb ut-Tahrir people with their flags and their (speaking in Arabic) on the black and the white and vice versa leading the march, and the sit-in. The (speaking in Arabic), as they call it in Arabic, in front of the TV premises. In the crowds -- which was not little --

you had a lot of people who had nothing to do with them. They were democrats who considered that Tunisian TV was still controlled by what we call in France the (speaking in French) of the Ben Ali people who had turned their jackets -- turncoats -- of the Ben Ali system and who were praising the new masters after they had praised the old masters.

And you know, this is a very strange phenomenon. The perception of Salafism is very mixed, and this is definitely an issue which has to be watched carefully.

MR. SHAIKH: I'll ask one more question. You talked about as one of the two issues to look out for is the social issue. There is, of course -- and I'm sure you would want to talk about this -- there is of course the social issue focused around the civil religious debate.

I was recently at a seminar in Europe and the undoubted stars at that seminar were three young ladies from Morocco, from Tunisia, and from Egypt. What was so compelling about them was that their world

seemed to have changed overnight. The society that they knew and the one in which -- okay, it was imperfect and all three of them were fighting against dictatorship -- was now changing in ways which were, perhaps, deeply uncomfortable for them.

Now you've observed this personally, I'm sure, in your travels in North Africa as well as elsewhere. Can this civil religious debate -- maybe perhaps more than that -- be managed in these societies? And how so?

MR. KEPEL: As of now, yeah. I believe it's a very big issue. And as of now, it is blurred with the use of this strange term which was coined in Arabic in order to avoid a major fight, which is this bizarre (speaking in Arabic) concept, which supposedly -- and you know, when you translate it you already take sides -- which supposedly means "civil" -- if that means anything -- "state", which one doesn't know. Because madani in Arabic means "non-military". It also means non-religious, but non-secular. And it can also mean urban as opposed to (speaking in

Arabic), which may not be well-perceived in this part of the Arab world. But, it was not coined for that.

I mean, one of the main promoters of this so-called concept was someone who is very well-known in this country and the anchor of the religious programs and Al-Jazeera, Sheikh Yusuf Al Qaradawi. And something that means that the state will not -- it's not (speaking in Arabic). It's something which allows Islamists in a majority situation to reach out to the secularists and consider that, you know, they will not make attempts.

Like for instance, let me tell you an anecdote. The Friday after Ennahda's victory at the polls I was in Tunisia, so I went to a press conference that Ghannouchi and (inaudible) gave at a place which had an English name which is still a little rare in Tunisia. It was a marriage hall called "Top Happiness". Maybe it had something to do with the marriage of Ennahda and Tunisia, I don't know.

And so, most of the press people were asking Ghannouchi and (inaudible) questions about whether

women will have to wear a veil, whether you would not be allowed to drink alcohol, and so on. And both said, no, no, no, we are for democracy, freedom, whatever. We are not here to tell you how to dress, what to drink, what to drink. Okay, fine.

And then, I was interested in seeing what would be the first (speaking in Arabic), the sermon of victory on this first Friday after the election. I asked some people where to go, and they said I should go to (speaking in Arabic), well-named as the Mosque of Victory, if you want, in the old colonial city in Tunis, and the French city.

So I tried to find my way there and I couldn't find it because I was lost, so I asked a beggar who wanted a (speaking in Arabic) and I said, (speaking in Arabic), take me there, and okay. And so we were speaking, and when I speak Arabic I usually speak with an Egyptian accent so he thought I was Egyptian at first. Then I didn't look like an Egyptian so he thought maybe I was Lebanese, so he asked me whether I was Lebanese or Egyptian. I said,

I'm French. So he thought I was a convert because I was looking for a mosque.

So, we were walking and had become best of friends in over two minutes and so I said, how come you're begging? Because he was rather well -- and he said, I was in Libya, I lost my job. I don't know whether it was true or not. And then I said, oh did you take part in the election? He said yes, of course. Oh, great. And who did you vote for? Ennahda, of course. Oh great, interesting. And why? I mean, what was the first thing you want? And he said -- I will say it in Arabic. (Speaking in Arabic.) The most important thing is that women change their dress. And I said, oh. That's interesting because I just listened to Ghannouchi and he said exactly the opposite. So, he said come on, he winked at me. He said it was just for the (speaking in Arabic) foreigners.

Strangely enough, for a beggar he used a sentence which is coined in grammatical Arabic, which is part and parcel of Islamist discourse. He said

(speaking in Arabic). We go -- yeah. By -- how do you translate that into English?

SPEAKER: Step-by-step.

MR. KEPEL: Step-by-step. And so, then he finally took me to the mosque. I have to say, I gave him a little (speaking in Arabic) had intended to, and there were ladies walking, crossing, and so he divided one third veil, two-thirds un-veil, which is still the balance now in Tunis, the capital. In the South they're all veil, already. So he said, (speaking in Arab), respectable to the ones that were covered, and (speaking in Arabic) the ones who were non-covered.

Then we reached the mosque and it was not at all a Ennahda mosque. The mosque had been taken over by the Salafis. And one of my students was there who was really a Muslim, not like me, and -- in the eyes of this beggar -- who had attended the sermon. The sermon, who was actually a guest from Saudi Arabia -- the preacher -- had not said one word about Ennahda's victory. Some faithful rose and said, why didn't you say something? Because this is a major issue. He

said, no, no (speaking in Arabic). Ghannouchi is a Muslim Brother, in his understanding, by Salafi standards. So, there was a fistfight in-between.

When I came to the mosque, it was over and, you know, all around the mosque what you had was Salafi literature. I mean, leaflets by (speaking in Arabic) and others, niqabs for sale, and the like, but not one thing written by the Ennahdas.

And you know, one thing in Tunisia -- and (speaking in Arabic) told me last week -- Ennahda is absent from the mosques totally. It's become political, mainly, but it's not. I mean, the religious feel as such. The professional, if I may say so, religious feel Tunisia is in a vacuum, is a void, largely. The Salafis and whoever has some sort of religious capital, it's up for grabs. The Ennahda people are so much into politics they have no patience or no time for that.

So this is a major fear and the (speaking in Arab) tour in Tunisia, of course, mobilized the number of sympathizers but also raised a huge amount of

worries, particularly amongst women because the faith he promised secular Tunisian women was not really looking to them like paradise, at least on Earth. And so, Ennahda people are very keen to avoid that kind of clash because if it happens it will put them in a very difficult situation, particularly vis-à-vis the West because they eagerly need to build a good relation with Europe, and particularly with France.

But by the same token, as I told you before, Ennahda I believe is divided and parts of the Ennahda establishment are getting closer and closer to the Salafists, something that is well-known in Egypt also. A researcher of Islamic issues in Egypt who unfortunately passed away a few months ago, Asamt Amam had written a piece which I think was quite well-taken called, in Arabic, (speaking in Arabic), the Salafi-zaiton of the Brothers. Something which is not all-pervasive in the Brotherhood but, you know, due to the espousing of democracy in (speaking in Arabic) circles, therefore there was a sort of -- there was a fluctuating relation to the doctrinal dimension. This

has allowed the Salafis to make inroads into what was a citadel.

I mean, the apparatchik system of the Brothers is concentrated on their political dimension. but in terms of religion, they are now to some extent less able to impose one understanding. This is not the Communist party.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Well, we're now going to open up for questions. We've got about 25 minutes or so, so we'll make sure we get your questions. I'll take three at a time.

Before I take them, please let me remind you to please put your phones on silent or turn them off. Also, if you could briefly introduce yourself before you ask the question. I'll start with the gentleman here, and this gentleman here, and this gentleman here. Yes.

SPEAKER: Yes, my name is (inaudible). I really enjoyed your talk very much. I first encountered your elaboration of these three zones in a very early almost embryonic phase in (inaudible) in

July, if you remember, with (inaudible).

MR. KEPEL: I do.

SPEAKER: And now I see it has already acquired momentum, it has gained sophistication. It acquired, in addition to the geographical and social dimension, also a temporal dimension of these three phases, and it really developed into something to give meaning and structure to what is happening. That is why I am enjoying it.

But one thing that I still think is either absent or unsaid in this wonderful and multi-layered thesis is the external players, the other forces that play, and whether they are just watching or actually playing, pumping money into the dynamic of that movement, and so on.

The second question I would --

MR. KEPEL: Excuse me. You mean extra-Arab?

SPEAKER: Yes. I mean, extra-Arab as well as sometimes -- extra-Arab are also using some Arab elements as well. So it is Europe, then the United States, the outside world. Particularly we can see

that very clearly --

MR. KEPEL: So you mean extra-Muslim. It's not exactly -- okay, no problem.

SPEAKER: Now we have to clarify.

MR. KEPEL: Fine, okay, no problem.

SPEAKER: One of the things, actually, in this debate is the use of language. I can see how the Muslims have hijacked the secular language in a lot of their new debate and the new vocabulary.

But one other question I would like you to also elaborate on is how to project this third phase into the future, particularly in the Syrian case. Thank you.

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic)

MR. KEPEL: Egyptian Revolution Council.

SPEAKER: A member of the board of trustees of Revolution. (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. KEPEL: (Speaking in Arabic.)

SPEAKER: So, first if you like a job, please, we don't like to extend -- see, I can find a business job for you and leave politics. We suffer

too much. We don't like strife, no more than the end of June. So, we were victimized 60 years in dictatorship, in corruption, and then the scurf who inherited -- Hosni Mubarak -- now are victimizing us and deliberately making the security disturbances, the economic deterioration to extend this phase.

Let me remind you that in Sena'a there is A, B, C also. You forgot this.

MR. KEPEL: Everywhere there is A, B, C.

SPEAKER: Of course, yeah. About Salafis, you didn't mention two of the first Afghan wars where these people were trained, financed -- (speaking in Arabic), the late Osama bin Laden. So, Salafis started in Alexandria in the faculty of medicine in the early '70s, but they are not one unit.

By the way, I tell you that (speaking in Arabic) are Salafis but they are -- I mean, they lived in the West and are different. Salafis are controlled and financed from my point of view, by Saudis. So, they are well-controlled. They will make --

MR. SHAIKH: Sorry, doctor. We need to take

more questions. Do you have a question?

SPEAKER: Yes, yes. A question. I have some news that al-Qaeda infiltrated from Iraq to Syria.

MR. KEPEL: To Syria?

SPEAKER: Yeah. What will U.S.A. administration react? Will this administration help them like Afghanistan? Or will they fight them? Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. Sir.

MR. MUBARAK: That you very much for the presentation. My name is Sali Mubarak, no relationship to the Egyptian dictator.

MR. KEPEL: (Speaking in Arabic.) No one is responsible for this family.

MR. MUBARAK: Actually, we are el-Mubarak. But anyway.

I'm a member of the Syrian National Council, by the way.

MR. KEPEL: Syrian.

MR. MUBARAK: Yes. When you mentioned --

MR. KEPEL: You mean, if I may say so, the one headed by my former colleague, Burhan Ghalioun?

MR. MUBARAK: Yes, yes. A nice person. Not sure of a strong leader, but --

MR. KEPEL: You sound like Ronald Regan now.

MR. MUBARAK: In the Syrian conflict, you focus on the I factor, I as in Iran and Israel.

MR. KEPEL: Yeah, okay. Fine. Should I focus on the T factor?

MR. MUBARAK: Iran's role is very apparent and they're not bashful about it. You know, they are supplying the Syrian regime with all kinds of help. To them, it's very crucial.

MR. KEPEL: Crucial.

MR. MUBARAK: What we suspect -- you know, we don't have clear evidence of this -- is that it's not in Israel's best interest to change the regime because in 37, 38 years not a single bullet was fired. Not only this, the Assad regime both the father and the son adopted the, if somebody slaps you on the right cheek they turn the left cheek to Israel.

Several time they were hit and never retaliated.

We believe that there is influence, somehow, on the West by Israel not to strongly support the Syrian opposition. There is reluctance. We see reluctance on the part of the West, maybe because Syria is not as rich in oil as Libya. Maybe, you know, there is another factor. What do you think about, you know, the I factor?

MR. KEPEL: Okay, thank you very much. These are very simple questions and we'll give a simple answer to each of them. How many days do we have? Five days? Okay, thank you. Five weeks?

Well actually, there is a common thread -- if not threat -- in those three questions, which is the role of outside forces. And I don't mean that we're going back to the good old (speaking in Arabic) which is so pervasive in Arab thoughts and which has probably led it to a standstill for so many years. But let's try to face it because I guess that the Syrian issue, as I mentioned during the examples I gave from Tunisia is a case in point in that term.

Like some of the questions you asked, the gentleman mentioned that he heard that there were former Iraqi jihadists being shipped from Iraq to Syria via Akkar in Lebanon and fighting with the Syrian opposition. The gentleman from Syria mentioned that also the Israelis prefer the enemy you know to the other.

And also, you asked what were the role of extra-other forces. The definition of the other -- are the two I's and the T part of the other? I mean, Israel, Iran, and Turkey. Are they other or are they brother or half-brother? (Speaking in Arabic.)

So definitely jihadists were trained and equipped by Uncle Sam during the Afghan jihad. I mean, there is no doubt about that, and Abdullah Azzam and the others were the darlings of the CIA. This is very well-documented. Nevertheless, after they had helped topple the Soviet forces in Afghanistan they thought that they would turn to the ones who had fed them and attack them in their turn.

You know, when you read -- I once was the editor of a book which we called in English *al-Qaeda*

In Its Own Words, translated from the Arabic, and we brought together texts by Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri -- which was the most interesting part, with Azzam -- and Zarqawi. And when you read what they wrote about the war in Afghanistan, they -- you know, Islamists or radical Islamists tend to consider that history is irrelevant. I mean, it's just a repetition of if it does not lead to the victory of Islam, it's just (speaking in Arabic). It can be the decay of Muslims -- it can be browsed away.

So they thought of the Afghan war in terms of a sort of remake of what happens in the first decades of Islam, i.e. the armies of the profits first got rid of the Sassanid Empire and then they would turn against Byzantium, right? By the same token, the jihadists in Afghanistan got rid of the Soviet empire -- I mean, a sort of re-enactment of the Sassanids, if you wish -- and then they would turn against Byzantium, i.e. the U.S., right? And we may laugh at that, but this is the way a number of those guys think.

And also, a little mistake they made is they considered for their own vested interests and reasoning that they were the ones who toppled the Soviet army in Afghanistan. They just forgot that they had been provided by ground-to-air missiles by the CIA that had downed the Soviet planes, and that on their own --

SPEAKER: Stinger.

MR. KEPEL: Yeah, Stinger, exactly. On their own they could have done nothing. So this among the things why when they decided they would get rid of Hosni Mubarak, of the Algerian generals, and so on and so forth, you know, they were left with their own forces, which were not that much.

But anyway, so even though they were on American and what have you payroll, even though the U.S. has always been at one time or another in their political history nice to the Brothers, clearly -- I mean, they liked the Brothers when they were against Nasser. They liked the Brothers a lot during the Afghan jihad. Nowadays, this is something which is

being repeated in some circles in the Arab world, they're backing the Ennahda and they're backing the Muslim Brothers in Egypt.

This is not entirely clear to me. I have heard the indictment but I've not seen any significant evidence that, you know -- and neither have I understood very clearly where their interests would be in doing that. I mean, why not? But I have still -- I'm still unconvinced as long as I am not seeing the money or the facts on the ground.

Now, as of Syria and the reason why the West would not do anything in Syria. Is it because Israel whispers in our ears that we should not down the Syrian regime, whereas in Libya where there was oil Total and BP would push Sarkozy on camera -- no, I don't think so. As I mentioned, I believe the kind of explanation that I suggested in the first part -- that we were in different zones of the Arab region is relevant. I mean, in Libya domestic issues are far more important than international issues. Libya is not the neighbor of Israel, it's not the corridor of

the Iranian policy towards Europe or what have you, and it's an oil and gas producer. And from a European point of view Libya is interesting because it has very good gas, no Straight of Hormuz thing, and it can balance the Algerian and Russian blackmail towards Europe in terms of gas. So, having the Libyans in the landscape would be a bonus.

Plus, I heard there is a new word in Arabic, (speaking in Arabic).

SPEAKER: (Speaking in Arabic.)

MR. KEPEL: (Speaking in Arabic.) Yes, this is a rogue state with pirates. Well after all, the whole of Barbary Shore and the back was about (speaking in Arabic), we know that. And also, the fact that the whole of black Africa would cross Libya and turn Libya into a (speaking in Arabic), and this is clearly a fear.

This was what made military intervention in Libya possible. If you don't take into consideration -- but you should also -- the fact that they had something to be done for Arab revolutions,

particularly after a number of European and Western leaders seemed to have been so compromised with the ASEAN regimes. I mean, in terms of Tunisia -- I mean, as you know we had a crisis in France while our Minister of Foreign Affairs was enjoying her time in Tunisia at Christmas with significant members of the fulul (?) and Azzam Ben Ali, right? And we had to have a new Foreign Minister for that reason.

So the same was true because Tony Blair, who was deep to his nose in cooperation with Gaddafi. And you mentioned that I was with the London School of Economics, and you know they had to change their director and in terms of branding it was a catastrophe for the few pounds that save gave them. They were nicknamed the Libyan School of Economics, which is not great. (Laughter) I'm a visiting fellow, so I don't say anything against them. And so on, and so forth.

So there were a number of reasons, good or bad, which made the intervention -- and you know, just to give you an example. I was in Libya in November or earlier with our Foreign Trade Minister, Pierre

Lellouche, and we met a Muslim Brother from Benghazi who told us this story. On the 19th, the famous (speaking in Arabic), the Sarkozy strike day, when the Benghazi revolutionaries who had been sent to Ajdabiya had been disbanded. Gaddafi sent his tanks to Benghazi which was, you know, an open city. And so the Benghazi people knew what it meant. Brutality in Libya was probably the worst in all Arab countries.

So this guy, he was a Minister at the time -- he was a Muslim Brother from Benghazi -- went up on the top of his building, he told us, and from the roof he saw the cloud of dust on the horizon that was the Gaddafi tanks that were approaching. And you know, he was clearly -- and he looked at the sky. What would a Muslim Brother do? Look at the sky, of course. What did he see in the sky? The French (speaking in Arabic), I'm trying to sell them to Qatar (speaking in Arabic). And in a second, (speaking in Arabic) they changed the tanks of Gaddafi into flames, and the day after a number of kids in Benghazi were called (speaking in Arabic). (Laughter)

So you know, this is -- I mean, I'm joking about it, but I think it was a very serious matter and the second time I went to Libya I had to go by road from Tunisia, and crossing the border I handed my passport with a visa. And the guy told me, why do you have a visa? You don't need a visa. The French are here, this is your country, and what have you. (Speaking in Arabic.) (Laughter)

The funny thing you should know is that the border is entirely controlled by the Berbers, which is very strange. You cross into, you know, what was supposed in the past to have been the bouncing heart of (speaking in Arabic), what have you, and it's now entirely written in Tifinagh, in Berber script. Not a word in Arabic at the border. Then you have Arabic afterwards. Things are strange. It may not last, I think.

Anyway, so therefore whatever the background of the operation in Libya, had it not happened it would have been a terrible bloodbath. There is no doubt about that. Benghazi would have been butchered

and Gaddafi may have been killed afterwards one way or another, but this was definitely -- whatever side one may take in the forthcoming French elections, definitely hadn't the strike happened things would have been different. And then I would have heard voices saying, ha, ha, ha, the Europeans are unable to do anything and you just (speaking in Arabic) and nothing else. And now because there was the strike they say, hey, the strike was there because Total and EADS and British Petroleum and British Aerospace were behind it. So, you know, this is politics. You have to make choices.

But I don't think that the issue is that there is no oil in Syria or what have you. The issue is that you do not know what you will unleash if you touch Syria. See? And even before everybody has done anything militarily, see the amount of antagonism, badmouthing, and what have you which is happening in the Arab world. You know? I mean, as I said you may, of course, regret it but the Syrian case is not as clear, if you wish, as the Tunisian case. Not from my

point of view, but in the so-called Arab Street, if such a thing exists. Right?

You mentioned the two I's, i.e. Iran and Israel. You can also mention the big T, which is looking at that with a vengeance. My understanding of this is that the real issue is Iran. If we consider that one of the real key issues -- which is, you know, exemplified by the skyrocketing of oil prices -- is the looming confrontation over oil in the Gulf between the Islamic Republic -- which is not in a good state nowadays. They have elections, the leadership is heavily divided, and is in the sort of hysteria on the nuclear issues in order to try to unify the ranks. Many of my friends and secularists who live in Northern Tehran and who eat mullah cooked in wine every morning for breakfast would die for Iran to have nuclear weapons, because they feel that, you know, this is an issue of national identity, that Iran is a great country surrounded by bandits and what have you. There are some racist overtones that can be used in those things.

So it's a means for the Iranian leadership to try to build its constituency and to unify its constituency. But if Syria is perceived as being lost to the Iranians, then I believe it tips the balance of power in the region. It weakens Iran significantly, and therefore -- well, it opens a lot of uncertainty.

Will there be a strike on Iran? Who will strike? Over which country will the planes striking Iran fly? I mean, I don't need to -- you know your geography, right? So this is clearly -- and then you may say, ha ha, this is an American plot or what have you. I don't know. I mean, I'm not sure that in terms of timing -- well, the French do not really count on that matter. They count in Libya but in terms of Gulf, I mean, even though we have a base in Abu Dhabi it's not -- we are definitely not the biggest player. I hope the ambassador does not listen to me. No, he doesn't.

But we have a presidential election, so therefore -- Sarkozy is not going to make a strike. And I don’t think Obama, who campaigned on the fact

that he would pull the troops out of Iraq and now who is deep to his knees in Afghanistan can sell to the American electorate that he is sending troops to Syria. I am not convinced that this is good for his re-election, right?

So, this is all there. I don’t know. I mean, maybe we'll discover that there are some operations, plots, or something, but as someone who is interested in social facts, I have no evidence to answer your question.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. I can't resist, precisely for the reason that you said in terms of tipping the balance of power vis-à-vis Iran. Israel may well actually now be looking for a regime change in Syria, and where it sees a strong Sunni alliance forming against it.

Also you raised a dilemma --

MR. KEPEL: Salafi-Sunni alliance.

MR. SHAIKH: That's right. And you also raised a dilemma of what to do in Syria, but I guess we shouldn't forget that tonight we have again Assad's

forces going into homes, almost a re-run of what we saw 30 years in Hama in terms of shelling mercilessly a city and its civilian population. And then, going in with your crack troops perhaps to disappear some of the people inside it. But, it is a very deep dilemma.

I want to thank you very much, Professor Kepel. We've run out of time. For your candor, for your humor, as well as of course your insights into the situation. You've covered not only Zone A, B, and C, I think you've also covered D and E. So, thank you very much for that. And again, let me say thank you very much for coming. If we could show our appreciation to Professor. (Applause)

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