

BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

ABBAS'S GAMBIT AT THE UNITED NATIONS:
POSSIBLE SCENARIOS AND OPTIONS FOR
PALESTINIAN MEMBERSHIP

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HAMID: Okay, I think we'll get started. Welcome to the Brookings Doha Center first of all. Thank you all for coming. My name is Shadi Hamid. I'm the Director of Research here at the Brookings Doha Center. I'm very excited to have these two great speakers with us who will shed light on an issue I think many of you are following. It's going to be a big week at the U.N., so that's why we're all here.

Ever since the Arab Spring began, it's gotten harder and harder to think the best, and what seemed impossible one day becomes possible the next. So I think going into this very important week, it's really hard to know what is going to go on. There's a whole variety of scenarios that could take place, depending on how different countries react to the unprecedented situation. We have a lot of variables here. We have the U.S. We have Israel. We have the U.N. General Assembly. We have the Palestinians, of course, so -- and there's still some doubt about what each player is willing to do. But I think what's also

interesting here, and it's not just about the Palestinians and Israelis anymore while the rest of the Arab world watches in silence. What we're seeing now because of the Arab Spring is an Arab world that is empowered, and they want to have something to say about the Arab-Israeli conflict. And as countries become more democratic as in Egypt, for example, Egypt is going to play a more assertive role. And it already is as we've seen in the last couple of months.

So with that in mind, I think we'll get to it. Our first speaker, Mahjoob Zweiri, will talk about the regional context and inter-Palestinian issues. And Salman Shaikh, our second speaker, will talk about how the U.N., the U.S., and the scenarios going forward in the coming recent months.

Let me just go ahead and introduce the two speakers. Mahjoob Zweiri is the Head of the Humanities Department at Qatar University and a Professor of Contemporary History of the Middle East. He is also a Visiting Professor at Durham University.

Salman Shaikh, as many of you know, is our

Director here at the Brookings Doha Center and Fellow at the Brookings Institution. He worked with the United Nations for nearly a decade, primarily on Middle East policy as the Special Assistant for the U.N. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and as Political Advisor to the U.N. Secretary-General, the personal representative from Lebanon during the very important 2006 war. So Salman Shaikh not only writes and does research on the issue, but he's been on the ground and knows the practical impact of what's going on here and knows many of the important players firsthand. So he'll draw on his experience in that respect. So with that, Mahjoob, would you like to start?

MR. ZWEIRI: Thank you, Shadi, and thank you for the invitation. Good afternoon. I guess it's evening now. It's my pleasure to be again here in Doha and Brookings and speak about the issue that basically is now -- it's very difficult to speak to -- to hide the Arab Spring revolution, but in the talk of this important mission now in the world.

I want to share with you some of the points I think that you need to remember when you look at what's going to happen on Friday in the United Nations, if it happens. The first point is Palestinian independence to Palestinians, of course, was always forbidden from the international community. Yasser Arafat, because of that kind of denial (inaudible), he declared to the presidency in 1988 in (inaudible). So basically by saying use the situation, the alternative is to find the world (inaudible). We have an issue. We are people living under the occupation (inaudible). So basically they have decided to (inaudible) to go to the United Nations and speak about state.

In the last few years, we witnessed the failure of the so-called negotiations. And this kind of failure can be (inaudible) for political reasons. The nature of the Israeli government, the situation within the Palestinian scene has (inaudible). And I think on top of that, the -- I would say the thing of the American foreign policy in the last two years to

deliver on that topic, the issue of the Palestinian problem. I think the situation inside the United States and the current crisis have led to see the administration focused on the (inaudible) more important to them, much more appealing because it may bring back Barack Obama as the next president in two years.

So basically, these three reasons actually can be seen -- can secure us the issue of autonomy. One is (inaudible) this now. Last September 1 was about (inaudible) on September 2010. So basically, it was timed with the rumor or a lot of debate around the (inaudible) of what the Ambassador was trying to do on Friday.

The issue of Palestinian central goal at least since 1988, it was on top of the debate and all that has happened since 1993 (inaudible) is actually (inaudible) to see the kind of (inaudible). So why now (inaudible)?

The other issue I think we need to take consideration. I thought it was the changing mood,

the regional mood. We have the absence of Mubarak, the issue of Arab Spring, the changing of an (inaudible). These are completely together and when you look at them, you will find that there are (inaudible) whether we like it or not to change the mood, the political mood. I think those (inaudible) for the first time really we see Arab states decide to go within the (inaudible) Arab (inaudible) voted in 1980 because this (inaudible) support Arab states. So basically, this is an indicator of the changing mood in the region. And I think here this is the (inaudible). I think Arab Spring -- whether those who are with or against, Arab Spring has delivered a very important message which basically says look, you have a very important (inaudible) your people. If you arrive (inaudible), if you take into consideration (inaudible), even if (inaudible) shape now, but this consideration will shape a new course.

And I think one issue also is important is we're witnessing a new discourse about the region starting in Turkey. In the last 60 years, there was

kind of a denial with (inaudible) but then we moved on to the case of (inaudible) state, Arab change of mind with Israel. Turkey from the beginning accepted Israel as dignitary and now its discourse which is read as a joke, you are a state (inaudible) but you should accept the fact for the international goal. And this is (inaudible), you cannot ask without splitting the international goal. This message, changing mood in the region, we don't -- if we reject you as a state, we should accept the international goal (inaudible). And this message actually put Israel in a lesser situation that you always say people who know their freedom (inaudible), this is a state that you have a rare issue with because (inaudible). I think this changed the nature of political dynamics in the region.

Now we go to (inaudible) attempt to look at the Palestinian scene (inaudible). And I think this time an important issue so basically to think about as a question and (inaudible) arrive at the fact that even though one remaining negotiation on (inaudible)

since 1993. So basically he goes to the best supporters from being the chairman of the (inaudible). I think by that (inaudible) has disadvantages, advantage that no one can I would say raise doubt about his movement. On the other hand those (inaudible) for doing such things.

For the last 5 years there was no achievement in the (inaudible). There was failure upon failure. The reconciliation in (inaudible), the situation (inaudible), the political situation (inaudible). There is no (inaudible), a (inaudible) has been seen. So basically the (inaudible) of this message is actually to the (inaudible). We have something to do. At least we want to do something. This may change or break the silence in (inaudible) because (inaudible) too much. This may break us and this may lead to change with the Palestinian politics. We may hope this kind of change will affect the government. We may actually affect Israel. This may convince the (inaudible) that no, the (inaudible). You have to go back and put it in (inaudible) which it

has (inaudible). All (inaudible) has been done for (inaudible).

So basically, they may think of things of issue (inaudible). My point, the new regional move will lead to change in the region. As part of -- if they want to stay (inaudible) where they deny that, they will be (inaudible) because this stage started with September 2010, and I'm not saying it will lead to paradise, but it will lead to real change in the region. Thank you so much.

MR. HAMID: Salman Shaikh.

MR. SHAIKH: Good evening and it's wonderful to see you all here. Let me speak a little bit about what Shadi said and also draw a little bit on what Mahjoob was saying.

I thought of actually making two images for you, which is sort of a cartoon that explains one is the idea of diplomats going wild at the U.N. There's actually a riot going on at the United Nations right now -- people scurrying between halls, bits of paper being moved around, lots of closed conversations, lots

of finger pointing, and lots of telephone calls. And I think those do matter in this case, so something that I will come back to.

The other image actually was in an Arab-Israeli newspaper today -- the Ma'ariv -- the image of Abu Mazen, President Abbas, standing on top of the United Nations building with two wings which are the Palestinian flag, kneeling, getting ready to jump. And underneath him there are diplomats in suits, some saying "jump," others saying "don't do it." So I think it was intended as Israeli sense of humor during this very important period for the Middle East.

Let me say in terms of the Arab Spring, (inaudible) what has been a changing dynamic as Mahjoub explained it and Shadi pointed to. I think what's now moving on -- and by the way, it's always been said to me that at the end of the day we come back to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and we now did. And in my view, the Arab Spring is designed with the events that we are going through, and New York is a game changer. The Arab-Israeli dispute is very much

now center stage on the world stage.

We don't, of course, have to be here. We don't have to be in this particular predicament. If we had negotiations started certainly on the Palestinian side you had a dream ticket of President Abbas and Salam Fayyad preparing and building a state. Unfortunately, we didn't have the parameters for negotiation the last couple of years. We know if we had parameters which were focused on negotiating around 1967 borders with land swaps, discussion on Jerusalem, a solution on the refugee issue, and one half of the process perhaps supported, we wouldn't be here. We would have had negotiations which would have made much more headway than they have. Instead, we've had more settlement building and a breakdown of trust between the parties. In fact, settlements in the 18 years since Salzburg have more than tripled, both in the West Bank and also in Jerusalem even if there has been, of course, the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip.

So where are we? I think the Palestinians

are actually attempting a brand new paradigm of internationalizing this particular dispute because those negotiations involving a very select number of actors led by the United States has not worked, and I'm afraid the trust has broken down in that space. And this approach showed that the world became flat where the Palestinians and the Israelis can be together in the room and come to a solution has not seemed to have worked. In fact, the negotiations that were finally put together in the last six weeks, in sort of September to about October of last year.

So the Palestinians are trying to make it an international responsibility, and this particular one year since partition (inaudible) first presented by the United Nations responsibilities going back again to the cause of the United Nations. And yet I don't think we should be under any illusions. This is still very much on a two-state solution, something that the Palestinians have said something that the Israeli Prime Minister said he's committed to as well as others in the international community. The question

now is how do we get there? And some of the scenarios that are playing out in New York in my view are trying to create the conditions. Perhaps a more level playing field for the kinds of negotiations they are trying to achieve for that two-state solution where previously it has not worked.

I should also recall, of course, that the Palestinians have already been told that they're kind of ready for statehood, and of course, they actually did it in March 2010 -- the World Bank and the donor groups that have been doing it over the last couple of years -- but we haven't got that particular solution.

So now where are we? We've got our part (inaudible) on the U.N. and every day there's a different scenario. I guess round one was the bell that was sounded last Friday when President Abbas said that he was going to the Security Council. And round two, the bell that that round sounded this coming Friday when President Abbas is going to hand over his Letter of Application to the U.N. Secretary-General. So we are going to the Security Council -- unless

something dramatically changes, we are going to the Security Council.

So the point of the scenario there right now is to give you, I guess, a little flavor of what's going on. Well, the first scenario has been going about getting the 9 affirmative, yes, votes that you need to pass any resolution at the United Nations. If the Palestinians are not able to achieve that, then the U.S. will then have to veto it. If they've got more than that, then the United States will face a tricky choice -- whether we go to a vote and we will be forced to go into that, and then whether the United States and others come to the Security Council and actually exercise their veto.

Right now as it stands it's like a (inaudible) table of (inaudible). It seems as if the country's over-focusing particularly on our (inaudible) and is Nigeria. There's also some discussion about Nigeria's intentions also in terms of Portugal, et cetera, et cetera. There are ten lone members of the Security Council who I bet you are

getting a lot of conversations and a lot of pressure (inaudible). And, of course, the U.S. is in a full-court press to try and achieve at least the 7 votes, which are either "no's" or "abstentions" in order not to allow the Palestinians to get to those 9 votes.

So what I want to say to you is that there is a scenario whereby which the Palestinians may well bag those votes, but we don't necessarily move straight to a vote. There's also a scenario where the President of the Security Council, which is normally the case, would refer this to a special committee inside the Security Council -- which consists of all the members of the Security Council -- to discuss this particular (inaudible). It's called the Committee on New Admissions, Article -- Rule 59 of the Security Council's Rules and Procedures. If you haven't looked at it, it's worth reading up on right now. This Committee could take a number of months before we actually get to any kind of a -- in fact, it may go backwards and forwards in that respect. I'll remind you even Israel's application, which of course

Israel's informed declaration did come through the United Nations, was first I think created in November '48 and it didn't come -- or '47 -- and it wasn't admitted as a member until March the following year, five or six months actually.

Now, a five- or six-month delay in this particular environment would be very interesting indeed, given everything else that's going on in the region and given the tumult that the region is already in. One way to avert that, of course, is to have a timeout whereby which actually there's an agreed timeout between all parties in order to get negotiations started. If there is a breakdown of the diplomatic talks, then that I think will have a profound impact in terms of raising the diplomatic pressure at the U.N, but also on the ground and not just in Palestine as we've already seen with earlier events in Cairo and Jordan amongst other places.

Then what is the scenario in (inaudible)? It may be that the Palestinians also choose to go to the General Assembly. The conventional wisdom, of

course, is that they may well do that and if they do, they will be applying for an upgrading of their status from a non-member entity to a now member state like other states. It's rather like the Vatican. But that is a scenario which right now the Americans and Israel and some of its allies, even if they're in the minority, are trying to make sure doesn't happen because that does mean that the Palestinians for now would have voting rights -- would have the right to take Israel, for example, to the International Criminal Court and to the International Political Justice and other things, and to pursue the illegal activities of Israeli individuals or even groups through that recourse, something that they've not had before.

The Europeans right now from what I understand are trying to invent a new category, which is that the Palestinians get non-member status, but they don't have that right, as a way of trying to build some sort of a confidence. Anyway, you get my drift. There are the scenarios.

There's one more scenario I'll point you to, which is when 1950 Resolution 373 was passed by the General Assembly -- actually initiated by the United States at the time in the lead-up to the Korean tensions in the midst of the Cold War whereby which the General Assembly could actually override a Security Council veto. And that can happen if half of the membership of the United Nations actually agreed to what is called an Emergency Special Session, and then two-thirds actually vote for that resolution. It has happened before. In fact, out of the 10 said Special Sessions, six have focused on the Middle East. Now that would be tantamount if we do go down that route I think to the Palestinians pressing the nuclear option because then we would really get into a no-hold-barred kind of race to try and secure the two-thirds votes that you would need to pass that resolution. And then let me just remind you in the U.N. Charter -- actually the General Assembly is the one, is the organ that has primary responsibility and the Security Council has secondary responsibility.

And it is because of Resolution 373 under this Uniting for Peace Resolution that you can have this kind of recourse. But I don't think we're anywhere close to that yet.

So those are the scenarios, and let me just quickly say just a couple of observations on top of that. Out of all of this, who's going to emerge the winner and the loser? Nobody knows. I don't think the Palestinians know, the Israelis know, the Americans know. We're still a number of days away even from round two starting. So this is a very long time, and in fact, as Secretary Hillary Clinton said yesterday, we're in the early days. And I think she's actually absolutely right in that respect.

It may be that if, of course, Israel does come out the loser, it will come out more isolated than ever, its borders look more porous or more vulnerable than ever. And maybe, you know, that we're back to 1967, that we have Israel feeling that it has to do something in order to safeguard its security. The Europeans may well come out the losers or they may

well come out divided. In fact, I like to say that there are probably some who are for the Palestinian vote, for Palestinian membership, and there are those against. And there will be those who will just have to flip a coin in the last few minutes in order to be able to arrive at something.

Then, of course, there's the Arabs themselves. Now as a bloc, they have indicated that they're going to support strongly the Palestinian membership. But we've heard that before and when push comes to shove, it will be very interesting to see whether that is the case and whether they use the leverage with others, too, in order to try and ensure that.

And then finally, of course, there's the United States, and let me just dwell on that for one minute. The United States, if it does veto, I think will emerge as probably one of the biggest losers out of this episode. It will also probably emerge as one of the biggest losers in the Arab awakenings, which are taking place. And countries which have not

necessarily gone as far as the United States in supporting people's aspirations in places like Libya and Syria and elsewhere would actually come out rather well, especially if they vote for full Palestinian membership -- countries like Russia and China. The next few days will tell us how the United States is able to manage this particular process. It's not had a good start in terms of -- we're not at the negotiations which are really bearing fruit. Instead now we're looking at a supreme will, a supreme look at American humility to be able to affect the situation. And if they don't, for example, achieve the nine votes in order -- and do have to veto, I think it will signify that perhaps their influence is very much in (inaudible) in this region, and that they lost the ability to be one actor that can steer this particular process. It will certainly be a sign of the standing of U.S. influence in the region, and with that I'll stop.

MR. HAMID: Thank you, Salman. Now before we open it up to questions, I just want to get the

ball rolling and use my position as chair to question both of our speakers. You're both talking about how the paradigm is still a two-stage solution. But if I take a broader perspective and look a decade or two down the road, what I'm having trouble understanding is the Israelis are willing to offer less. They have a more rightwing government than Israel has veered to the right. There isn't really a strong contingency for peace as there was in the late 1990s. That's Israel right there. For Palestinians, the wind is blowing in their direction so there's going to be less of an incentive for them to compromise in the way they were doing 10 years ago. All the trend lines are moving in their direction. The Arab world is coming behind them. And we see them as I mentioned with Egypt. So the Palestinians I think have a sense of history as on their side.

So considering that, where could the two sides really meet? I mean, maybe just kind of either or both of you could kind of give us what the longer term scenarios would be and what would an actual

solution look like in practice?

MR. SHAIKH: Well, that's a very good point. Look, the Article of -- in Tuesday solution I'm saying there's a change in paradigm in terms of nationalization and in terms of the negotiations. But yes, the goal is still very much the Tuesday solution. This is a very important point because this may be one of the last times that the international community and the process can really get behind them, particularly if you couldn't have Palestinian leadership. In spite of all the challenges that it faces, but it's as though they've been stuck to this. What is interesting even in the changing dynamics in the region is that you had Prime Minister (inaudible), you've had others and you, of course, got the Arab Peace Initiative on the table since 2002, which is still strongly supporting the two-state solution.

The reality on the ground, of course, is that we're moving further away from it because of the continued settlement building and the actual, sort of facts on the ground are making that much more

difficult. This may be, of course, the last chance to do it, which is why, of course, we need a multilateral effort perhaps with the U.S. as its lead. We can triumph with this particular paradigm and this solution, and which is a piece of paper strong enough in order to give change, the facts that have emerged on the ground.

If you ask the Palestinians, they are still broadly in favor of a two-state solution. If you ask the Israelis, of course, they'll say the same thing. We just haven't been able to find a way in order to realize that. And let me just say that the current attempt is probably one of the most amateurish I've ever seen in negotiations, and, you know, I've been following this for and been involved in for quite awhile. And it's really impressible that we have got to a state where we're having a confrontation on both rather than on trying to collectively find the solution.

MR. ZWEIRI: I think there's a sticking point here, which is that the United States meeting

the obligation of Palestine. This is may be perceived by others as (inaudible) resolution, and this would be -- I think what the United States is doing now is trying to manage to reach their point, trying to send a message that we still believe in a two-state solution; however, we believe this can't happen through negotiation (inaudible). But (inaudible) as you mentioned with the developments (inaudible) that there is no really (inaudible) to have (inaudible). So basically I think it's efficient and we're going to see what the United States will do, especially if (inaudible) the whole idea of resolution. I think the Europeans, Russia, other Arab states, they will be warning about this resolution, how they will get this application.

MR. HAMID: So now we'll open it up to your questions. Try to keep your questions brief. We'll start with the Ambassador here.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. And thank you very much for (inaudible). For us it was (inaudible). We've been losing for more than 60 years

so after (inaudible) it doesn't change much for our situation. But if we get the membership, it's a great step forward that would mean the peace process would become a state and (inaudible) are very determined to (inaudible) Americans are very determined (inaudible) we see the Americans use the veto against (inaudible), that the loser (inaudible) of the American (inaudible). And the other losers will be the Israelis because, you know, the fact is that Israel is who are not serious, and if they are not serious that we want to be a partner in this process. They want to impose their (inaudible) and they will be seen as losers (inaudible). So that puts the (inaudible) to take care of the (inaudible) because so far we have been (inaudible) was not allowed to be a partner, negotiating in the Arab Spring. But nevertheless it was able to make this (inaudible) and to abide by the rules of the game and to play the game of (inaudible) according to the (inaudible). And the Palestinians all the time showed willingness (inaudible) to (inaudible) that makes us sometimes appear (inaudible)

to negotiate. And what did the Americans propose? We accept all the time and the Israelis don't listen. I think the speech of Mr. Obama (inaudible) when he talked about a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967 when I think (inaudible). It was accepted by the Palestinians by (inaudible). It was kept (inaudible) White House and he said he knows and everybody knows the game which was (inaudible). So here is the (inaudible). So it will be here with you (inaudible) use the veto against us, but we know that the outcome (inaudible). We don't use it, it will sit back. If you go there (inaudible).

You know, there is a story of a rightwing (inaudible) that the mother-in-law says to her daughter-in-law about the (inaudible) effect. (inaudible). Now this is the same thing. So we are going to be big losers. I think we (inaudible) a good state. Well, a smaller state with upgraded status and processed as you said when we have the numbers there and can meet members of the ICC (inaudible). So here (inaudible) other partners, Europeans you know, don't

have (inaudible). So (inaudible) not wanting to lose too much, but another point I want to say that now on the 23rd, this Friday, it's not going to be either Israel or United States. For us it is the beginning of long process that might take more than year to (inaudible) use that trick (inaudible) to discuss it and I think if it takes several months, okay. We've been (inaudible) for past 60 years. We can do it for a couple of months, four, five, or six. But who knows what will happen (inaudible) -- solution for Palestine and as you will say, a more (inaudible) atmosphere around us is changing and I hope that all the partners here are (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: I understand in terms of bruises, there is a closer scenario on the day after whereby which Palestinian (inaudible) and that the Israelis decide that you're not aid, a partner to be negotiated with, it's not the (inaudible) tax revenues that are Palestinian tax revenues, but which they collect money on behalf, which they did in 2000. In fact --

SPEAKER: (inaudible)

MR. SHAIKH: Yes, which is about \$100 million I think a month. And then also, of course, there is a bill who are being (inaudible) right now within Congress being discussed about the drawing -- the USA's money which is about half a billion in a year. And then, of course, on top of that the Europeans with our (inaudible) \$1.4 billion in aid to the Palestinian side as well as, of course, other diplomatic measures that could be taken. Those words I guess had quite a dramatic effect in terms of liability of Syrian authority to function. And the question will be will Arabs or others step up in order to (inaudible)? So often Arab states have (inaudible), but they don't necessarily come up with the funds that they have promised. And that has been our (inaudible) since (inaudible).

MR. HAMID: Is there a question here? And could people just identify themselves please?

SPEAKER: My name is (inaudible). I'm also the boss at (inaudible). I love all that power.

Let's assume that we will have a less positive outcome of the Friday meeting. And in your opinion, whether the (inaudible) negotiation will be under the umbrella of the recent proposals of (inaudible) -- I read something about it in the newspapers -- whether the future negotiations will be (inaudible).

And another thing which really bothers me the last two or three days is the (inaudible) complete unity in your mind within the Palestinians and the recent comments from some newspapers (inaudible) questioning the legality of President Abbas. Initially, isn't a kind of (inaudible) of the game or is President Abbas has (inaudible) before?

MR. SHAIKH: I'll take the first and maybe you want to take the (inaudible). Future negotiations for the deadline, I mean, the current negotiation is not working and what is there is suggesting I think is only a variation of that. What is clear to everybody, what was being actually suggested when President Obama gained office was (inaudible), which he did, which has to be given a lot of credit -- the first set of phone

calls he made were to President Abbas and others -- but also to set the parameters. And that's something that they've not been able to do and then also to work with those in the international community (inaudible). It's on the second and third I think where we need to focus on how you can move the negotiations forward and that means having more active, more multilateral process than we've had. And also to set quite clearly the kind of parameters which we all know about on borders, on security, on refugees, on Jerusalem, which need to be discussed. In 1988 when Yasser Arafat actually led Palestinian statehood, the American expression then was extremely strong in nipping it in the bud as it moved towards the U.N. at that time. I'm sure there has to be a relative strength of division situation. But they didn't leave it at that, especially on the back of the first bill forward, they really initiated the Madrid peace process. And I would actually say that this is the time to acknowledge and finally grant this and move forward in a very time-bound discussion involving all the key

countries and regional nations may well put the pressure on parties to come to the kind of a solution that we are looking for on Tuesday.

MR. ZWEIRI: There is something about the Palestinian division (inaudible). There is always some kind of division within the (inaudible) and this is also -- you can see the difference even in a Jewish state. Look at Turkey, for example. All of its foreign policy with Arab countries (inaudible). This kind of division is indeed something normal, but I think the statement we heard from (inaudible), those are delayed statements (inaudible) Ambassador (inaudible). I think they may be the medicine for two reasons. Why? Because the whole issue of consideration has not been succeeded and basically (inaudible) by itself and in the case of (inaudible), they know that it will take (inaudible). You know, it will have (inaudible) more time and then the others, they will be in.

So basically, this kind of division is -- I see it as the normal, but from outside a weakness that

we expect that to go as a (inaudible) recognition. It's a real division and it will go until you have this kind of environment with the Palestinian (inaudible) in the presidency because one of the reasons behind the division is actually the (inaudible). And until that division is (inaudible), I'm not sure that we can have this kind of community (inaudible).

SPEAKER: (Name inaudible). As far as the issue of two-state solution as being accepted by all sides, are you sure that this is not the only problem actually? I think that the main problem is also how it perceives the state in a two-state solution and what is their understanding of the Palestinian state, for example. And when it comes to the Israeli understanding of what is or the ambition of the Palestinian state, I don't think that we can call this as something that is within a state definition because the (inaudible) actually is closer to one understands than to restate with no viable economic state. This is the first issue.

The second is when you talked about the possibilities of punishing the Palestinian authority by the U.S. and the EU by cutting funding, I frankly don't think that this is really dramatic, first of all because this is first on a material chain. Secondly because I don't think that the U.S. and the EU pushed that to the extreme because I don't think it is in their interests to weaken the Palestinian authority and to create a kind of vacuum in the region. Thank you.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) They insisted that their (inaudible) must be on the eastern bank of the (inaudible). So this is (inaudible). Do you know why? Before they considered that all the eastern part of Egypt (inaudible). So they are not serious. Before the financial crisis, 600 Arabs, and they are shown in (inaudible). Palestinians were half (inaudible). Palestinian authority is quite serious. They are. I mean demanding (inaudible). What they were demanding (inaudible) extending hands to negotiate for half million dollars and (inaudible).

Americans not serious, but I am past one (inaudible) Egyptian revolutionist say to (inaudible), please note that you (inaudible) bridges, you will lose hearts and minds of Egyptians for all the area. You (inaudible) will lose your (inaudible).

SPEAKER: (Name inaudible) When Mahjoub Zweiri said that with the Arab Spring awakening that there's a newfound voice of democracy in the region. And certainly that's -- it's hard to say that nothing will happen, but my question is are they too -- Egypt and Libya are and some other countries are so concerned -- they have so many domestic issues going on, can they really afford to spend the diplomatic energy outside their own borders?

MR. SHAIKH: That's true. I mean many people pointed out that, of course, (inaudible) is very fast. It's not only known in Benghazi or anywhere else. But what is clear is that the factions of this particular issue, a Palestinian issue, and then having to parallel a narrative talking about the justice and dignity and rights of Arabs somehow

excludes those of the Palestinians. So it's something of an international thing that I think many Arabs do, of course, come back to this issue, especially when it is rather center stage. And I think it underscore the need for Israel to lead this, to make peace, not just with a few select number of leaders in the Arab world as they did in (inaudible), but also to try and extend that peacemaking effort with the people of the region. And that's become clear. It also means, of course, that the people in the region have to understand that (inaudible) and its security and its own essential concerns are something which will -- if they're not met -- which will also drive the conflict. And that is something I think is considerably important for us also.

MR. ZWEIRI: Arab Spring has set the new agenda in the so-called region's order and internationally. And this agenda basically (inaudible) -- I understand your argument that people busy within their own borders, but they have also -- they have to change directions. The issue of

(inaudible), there is a change on the so-called security (inaudible) in the region. Because (inaudible) in 2010, the White House told Mubarak they cannot solve (inaudible) problems. Now this (inaudible) because at least they need to convince the people of Cairo to take the (inaudible) in days. So basically there is a new security arrangement forced itself and set a new agenda to that (inaudible) and they are (inaudible). If you go back to pre-September 2010 and look at the (inaudible) the President of the United States, Foreign Minister or Prime Minister of Britain, or the President of France, they have reason to (inaudible). What happened to the peace process? Now they are (inaudible) since September. So this -- the whole -- will set the agenda and I think this will lead that they are to (inaudible) that changing agenda.

SPEAKER: If I could just say at the end very quickly, we're in election season right now in presidential and parliamentary. And everyone's competing with everyone else to see who can be more

pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel. So the military council is in charge now. There is (inaudible) power, but it won't be in charge forever. And whatever government is elected, it's going not to prioritize Palestine because Egyptians are angry about it. And that's what democracy means. You have to be theoretically responsive to the will of the people. So I think we're going to see a shifting dynamic. And the opposition groups of Egypt, they don't like each other at all, but the one thing they agree on is how much they hate Israel. So I think that's sort of where we're at right now on that.

MR. SHAIKH: On democracy in the world is critical. I mean, we've also seen that frankly in Europe where there is much more sensitivity and perhaps sympathy for Palestinians who are still living under occupation. And I personally witnessed it in 2008 in the Gaza War, how London is and other Brits were coming out and demonstrating and how that had quite an impact on British government policy. We will see that in France. We will see that in other places,

so it's not just confined to the region.

SPEAKER: Saudi Arabia told the U.S. that if they will use the veto, they will seriously compromise their relations with Saudis. I wanted to know in your opinion how serious is this threat and what is the role of the GCC countries and the dynamics of U.N. membership? Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Well, I think time will tell. That's I guess the hedging answer. Certainly we've seen something very -- or we have had something significant on Monday where Saudi Arabia, which has given \$200 million to the Palestinian authority for its budgets. That's a clear sign of intent, I guess. It will also be interesting to see what is along with the GCC states to use its leverage with key countries at the United Nations both inside the Security Council and outside it. They are well positioned to do so. And it may be for Saudi Arabia, rather like it is for other regional states such as Turkey, much easier to push hard on this particular issue especially in the form of the wishes of the people in the region rather

than to have -- and also perhaps deflect some of the criticism that they may be receiving with regard to other situations in the region.

MR. HAMID: Question right here?

SPEAKER: Thank you. I'm president of (inaudible). I was attempting to ask about some Arabic decisions, which is the same subject related to the Palestinian membership in the United Nations. And there my friends (inaudible), they were saying all the time about the U.S. this week is the victor and that's also a waste of time and effort. And I said you know the American foreign policy is run by -- or is influenced by the (inaudible) -- we call it the (inaudible). And I wrote Chile a letter that once the revolutions are over, they'd better get out with (inaudible) and GCC countries to create, to support their role in the U.S. That would be consistent with the Jewish, the Israeli Jewish who are sympathizing and supporting Arab, American Jewish who are also speaking our voice. They are liberals and they are (inaudible) -- and those other Americans who are after

peace and after human rights. And I thought that those people would be invited to come to conferences to share and we will hear their voice and al Jazeera and other media. And we will be given different accounts to support so that we will be, the Arabians will be and the U.S. -- America will be more friendly to the Arabs and we will create such -- come to terms with American (inaudible) in the U.S. and would give more support and more (inaudible) to the American foreign policy. I always write and most of my letters end up in the dust pan. So we ask Muslim Arabs, Muslim people and I personally was asked by government to sit in my chair. My son was there so he (inaudible). They had to come (inaudible) and you know what they called it? (Inaudible) of peace. And I said I give approval. I said I am a man after peace and I spoke to my child and my child is in the beginning of them and I agreed to go. And my challenge at that time we believed was the Israelis. They said we want peace with you and we want to live together in peace. And Palestine and I am president

of (inaudible). And then my child came and then Netanyahu came and Netanyahu is as bad as I thought he'd be. And I am, you know, and I am very much (inaudible) and I would like to see the future Palestine run by (inaudible) people who find it and go after peace. I'm not very much a friend with Hamas. They want to keep woman at home. Maybe one day they will allow girls to go to school. I don't know what they intend to do, but this is not my way. There is one point I want to say, and that (inaudible). They caught me as returning as I was ferrying to (inaudible) independence day when I would (inaudible), when I would come from America. They like me for coffee. They make me talk to them and since then I don't know what happened. This is a true story. When I go to Georgetown for (inaudible), I raise my arm. They make me the last day of (inaudible).

MR. HAMID: Thank you. Does anyone want to comment on the role of (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: I'll comment on what you said about politics, and I won't take it on directly, but

what I want to acknowledge is what you said about politics. And secondly, on the Israeli side, it showed resilience -- consideration for that -- the resilience of the Netanyahu government in that. And perhaps he knew if he took a more far-reaching position, and there have been attempts even more recently, (inaudible) to map out some parameters and Prime Minister Netanyahu in the end has I think decided not to go with those because it would have a detrimental impact on his coalition.

Also on the American side -- I don't want to refer too much here -- just last week I think there was a violation in the 9th District of New York, a very solidly Jewish democratic district. And for the first time the Democrats lost since 1923. And some of it people are saying they were willing to do with satisfaction in terms of how Obama has been handling the (inaudible) issues as well. Again, this is a consideration; we're now into election season in the United States for Obama and the advice that he's getting. I'll also say you may very well get an

invitation from the Obama White House -- but you probably wouldn't get one from Netanyahu.

MR. HAMID: Next question? Right here.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Donna (inaudible). I'm a senior at Georgetown. I want to summarize -- I have the privilege of being in an internship in Washington D.C. where we had an opportunity to go to the Department of State. And we got the opportunity to sit with one of the Middle East policy advisors and this topic came up. And his argument that he kind of portrayed was that it interrupts the negotiations if Palestine becomes a state at the U.N. And to my limited understanding -- and this is why I'm asking -- it kind of seems to me more sense to me that if you're negotiating with a united body that it would like have more progress rather than disruptive and completely ruin any negotiations. And so that's part A.

And I think I forgot part -- oh, and my part B question is recently the U.S. and Israel have been kind of, I feel, reached a point of their arguments are not even logical anymore, where it almost sounds

ridiculous in some instances. At what point -- are people starting to get just not believe it anymore? Is there any like public resistance against some of their -- how they justify this?

MR. ZWEIRI: You mean the Palestinians? You mean to stop there with Palestinian negotiations?

SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. ZWEIRI: I think this was a part of (inaudible) -- I mean it was obvious that (inaudible). Then trying to set (inaudible) of the Palestinians, and this was quite basically what we witnessed in the elections in 2006 and the victory of Hamas (inaudible). But this never happened because this is the -- more important we learned (inaudible). You say Hamas (inaudible). But I remember one of the points in 2006 I raised in London and in Qatar (inaudible) that look, you are the (inaudible) Palestinian people because you don't want to accept the fact that you made a mistake in Europe (inaudible). You refused (inaudible) for awhile but realized (inaudible). So basically, they did the same thing with Hamas. They

divide the Palestinian society and they say, okay, there is no united -- unity -- you don't have a one voice from (inaudible). They don't see this and they don't want to see this kind of one voice. And they remember the government was actually formed by both (inaudible) and Hamas. Had they actually been rejected by the (inaudible) led by (inaudible). So basically, we have -- we should not forget that this divisional difference (inaudible) on this kind of division.

The second -- the last -- I think the whole issue of negotiation from the beginning is to secure Israel -- is to make sure that Israel is secure -- and not the inclusion of Palestinian interests. They don't have the right to have a normal life. So basically, as long as this mind (inaudible) exists, even if they now speak about admission, and then we will continue negotiation. But this will not be -- will not have -- I won't say a positive result.

MR. SHAIKH: I will say very quickly on the point you made in terms of state-to-state relations,

it is a point which is often made now. You know, what is the harm in having state-to-state relations, discussing issues such as borders and security which would hold the parties much more responsible and force them towards some sort of negotiation? It's something that I have quite a lot of sympathy with, if only because it levels the playing field now in terms of negotiating. What you were pointing to was very much that we had (inaudible) priorities often in negotiations, and yet when you have much more of a state-to-state discussion, these are much more formalized and perhaps enable us to achieve much more on other's core issues.

MR. HAMID: Okay, we're running out of time so we'll take three questions in this round. The Palestinian Ambassador, if you want to jump into your question, then here, and then all the way in the back right there.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I just want to ask (inaudible) engage in such positions. Usually the Americans if they use the veto the next day you

will hear them start negotiations. We have procedures to (inaudible) and such (inaudible) as I said and I'm sure (inaudible) that it would the Americans much more than it (inaudible). Do you think that such procedures will become the (inaudible) and start the negotiation and try to come up with a new proposals to bridge the gap between the Palestinians and (inaudible)? I just want to (inaudible) insists that even after submitting the application to the Secretary-General and whatever result there is assumed that one day will be given membership (inaudible)? You know, the Palestinian position and to have the Israelis (inaudible).

SPEAKER: Thank you. John Lafreeze, professor at the University of Qatar. This question is directed at Salman. So we all agree there's a very strong consensus that the U.S. veto would be very bad for the U.S. What do you see as the likelihood that the U.S. might be able to persuade -- I'm thinking specifically of either Russia or China to cast a veto instead because both of those states have concerns

about their own populations and the whole idea of sovereignty and statehood. So if the U.S. could employ that instead of passing a veto would have a veto cast?

MR. HAMID: Okay, way in the back.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is (inaudible) and I'm from Georgetown University. My question is basically first of all as a Palestinian before this proposal, before many of these negotiations, I was personally against a two-state solution just for the -- just because of what you can refer to as items within Israel which I think points and all of these things are going through. I don't know -- if you could please express to what extent you would agree or disagree with this, but it would be on how, let's say it does work out, then Palestine is a member of the U.N., how they would be able to work around us?

And also if we say that Palestine does become a member of the U.N., what kind of conditions, what kind of -- if we talk about humans involved or anything of that sort-- what kind of conditions would

the Palestinians be living in the State of Palestine afterward? Would it even be better for the Palestinians, for Palestinian citizens? What kind of -- are they going make a trade embargo with Israel or be completely isolated and -- they should concentrate on education, younger generations? How do all these factors -- will it really be better for the Muslims?

MR. HAMID: Thanks. You want to take whatever parts you want that are left of those three questions?

MR. SHAIKH: Sure. The U.S. punishing with the aid -- I don't think they will. And actually to be honest about it, it's actually in Jerusalem. I think that the realization that there's a great danger that the aid could collapse and that they would be left holding the baby. And certainly the State Department and the White House have been trying to convince those in Congress who are taking a different view that this is actually detrimental to U.S. interests leading to Israeli interests. So in the short term, I don't think that's the case. But we

can't guarantee that pressure will continue to build within Congress, and also will be aided by some key ministers and factions from Israel. But in the immediate aftermath, I don't think so. Another question is the leverage the U.S. has in trying to convince the Palestinians not to go down this route. And let me say also -- because this was earlier regarding the Europeans -- I didn't think for a second that the Europeans are going to cut aid or anything like that. They've been long supporters of the Palestinian statehood project and I think they will continue that respect. But certainly there will be some hard discussions still to be had in the aftermath of whatever happens because -- and not according to how the Europeans are wishing.

And then just on the Russian and Chinese -- they have already said that they will vote for Palestinian membership. In fact, the Russians -- I think it was the Prime Minister or maybe the President who said we'll do whatever the Palestinians want us to do. Of course, they realize that this is such a hot-

button issue in context. And they've been rightfully criticized for dragging their feet -- and frankly, the disgraceful bucking of action regarding Syria for example -- that they wouldn't necessarily agree with the United States on Gaza needs.

I was just going to say that, of course, what you're really referring to is about the Palestinian state, especially as it looks now. And yet if you have a serious event stance that you can't really pull that viable state. So, of course, the level of the world has to come out for the negotiations in terms of what is acceptable and in agreement to the Palestinians. And, of course, getting back to their sessions at Camp David I think the Palestinians said well, we were being given a sort of framework of the house but we weren't being given the stairs or the plumbing and that doesn't make it very livable or very viable. So that's absolutely essential if you're able to get the right kind of the two-state deal. I think Palestinians are extremely ingenious in how they've managed to cope with

conditions that they live in now and still see growth in both the West Bank and Gaza, albeit from various low points. And especially if they're allowed to trade across their borders, if Palestinians are allowed to get fruit and vegetables and their furniture and other things that they make. I think for a relatively small population, they'd do rather well if they're given the chance. It's -- my bottom point is it's noticeable to me when used to actually recognize it even (inaudible), you would see kids going to school. I believe in other public service and that was always the case with an emphasis on education and relatively high levels of education, even finding ways of educating children when they can't even go out of their houses, through television or other means. But yes, we have lost a generation of being productive and, of course, that continues and that will continue until we have a Palestinian state.

MR. ZWEIRI: Just two points: I think this is a new chapter in this conflict. I'm delighted to see a very (inaudible) because basically this is a

process, and I think Palestinians use for this kind of (inaudible) are patient. I think they need it, more of it, because the only things around them are (inaudible). I think (inaudible) continues for change and hope in the region. This has to play a (inaudible) that this is a real state. It is not Iran. It is not Arab states. It's a state that's a true state. Turkey is a true state. And that state already defines interest and (inaudible) regardless of (inaudible) whether cyclical or estimates. I think as a true state, Israel will think a lot about its movement in the region. And I think the difference is meant for the movement, I think the meetings (inaudible) will have a (inaudible) on the American position toward membership. We have to look at (inaudible) of this conflict.

MR. HAMID: Okay, we have time for two quick questions and I'll ask the each speaker to make closing remarks. Mike, Steven, did you have a question?

SPEAKER: I did, otherwise people ask

(inaudible). So given that very fine line to ask you (inaudible) -- your description of many of these U.N. Security Council issues was certainly relevant. What I'm wondering is that continuous U.S. (inaudible) exercising its veto in itself is not that damaging in the first place? So even if the (inaudible) have waited and wanted a particular scenario comes true, do you not think the damage to U.S. credibility has already occurred given that the (inaudible) of the U.S. position is be against the declaration of (inaudible) state?

MR. HAMID: And the last question?

SPEAKER: Can you (inaudible) the United States in this matter? Let's not forget that the United States last Tuesday (inaudible). Now it's under the rules perhaps (inaudible). I think this affects a bit (inaudible) and is an end of an era, which was to be -- and regardless of the outcome of this (inaudible) work whether the state will be accepted or not, I agree that what we are witnessing now is a new, perhaps (inaudible) which is (inaudible)

-- (inaudible) from Tunisia or wherever (inaudible). (inaudible) a first step toward (inaudible) in the Arab world (inaudible) and Gaza. Perhaps something like 3000 kilometers of (inaudible) states. Yes, we are not yet ready to have (inaudible), but I believe (inaudible). And here as I said perhaps in the last Congress (inaudible) started to realize it we are witnessing now that Israel is ready (inaudible). (Inaudible) this new path, this reserve, will not affect very much. Perhaps it's time to (inaudible) I believe this is a hint of that. Next time probably there will not be in the same situation that we (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you for that. Really, we are at the end of an era and we're at the start of another one. We're not quite sure the direction which all of this is going. I'll tie this in with also the question (inaudible). Yes, you can talk of the (inaudible) damaging, but at the end of the day it's the policies that matter. And yes, we do worry at the amount of diplomatic energy that the United States is

spending on this. It seems as though the whole goal is just to stop the U.N. action rather than charting a way forward even though this is what the rhetoric seems to be.

And so much of this is leading to the Arab awakening, the people's awakenings. So much of the discussion around Washington has been about balancing values and interests. And yet (inaudible) in a new era people matter, people's rights, their dignity, their right to representation, their right to self determination -- these things matter, and I actually think that the U.S. is still well placed in order to be able to realize interests, especially falling back on its own values for those kinds of things and supporting it. And certainly, in the case of Palestine, the opportunity is here to show real leadership, and it can lead. It can lead, and it will bring the international community with it, and it will bring Israel with it. Right now, it's not doing itself any favors, and it's not doing Israel any favors. Until and when President Obama and those

around him understand that, as I said before, I'm afraid, despite -- that I know some of the real hardworking personal efforts of many Americans in this particular region -- they will emerge as one of the biggest losers with what's going on.

MR. ZWEIRI: As I stood in (inaudible) and we are starting contemporary where we're basically -- where the desperation is leading the change where basically we will not (inaudible) everything and we don't want to take the position (inaudible). And as part of that I think the issue of Palestine is the cause that lasted 60 years, but is still (inaudible). I know this will be the case in this century. But if you look at the slogan of (inaudible) in Arab countries where they witness revolutions, Palestinians want in their hearts and in their minds. The case of Tunisia I think they do the same. The (inaudible) of the solution in Syria isn't because of Palestine. If there was a Syria in North Africa, there would be a different way. Because of Palestine, Syria has not been sold yet because they want to secure Israeli

first and then think of what's going to happen to Assad. So basically thinking and (inaudible) change and this change will influence the whole (inaudible) of Karzai. I'm not sure the United States will be (inaudible) in that. I mean, just remember that the Soviet Union fell in 2009 and one still acted as a strong power. The United States may be too in a similar role, but doesn't have the same influence. This will take us to the point that you will find some different powers from there and then we will contact (inaudible). We have to combine our efforts, our (inaudible) and as the people in the region today the change they wished is actually (inaudible). Thank you.

MR. HAMID: Thank you. I think we'll close there. Thank you to both of our speakers and thanks to all of you for coming. We'll have a reception right in the next building here with some food and drinks. I hope you can join us for that, and we'll see you next time. Thanks.

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