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P A R T I C I P A N T S

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Saban Center at The Brookings Institution for this policy briefing.

As you are all aware, events in the Levant have grabbed the world's attention in recent months, and in particular, in recent weeks we witnessed a free and robust election in Lebanon, as Rami Khoury, somebody you are probably familiar with, wrote in the Daily Star this morning. It was refreshing to see an outcome that wasn't exactly predicted, unlike most elections that we have seen in the Arab world in the past.

That election took place out on the heels of another interesting event, a rare meeting of the Baath Party Regional Command conference in Damascus, which in turn had followed the dramatic removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon after an almost three-decade occupation there.

With the combination of all of these factors, there are a lot of questions open about the dynamics occurring in this region, dynamics which have a considerable degree of interest for Washington, for U.S. policy in the region.

It was I think because of that, that both David Ignatius and Flynt Leverett were present there, both of them in Damascus for the Baath Party conference and David in Lebanon during the election period, and we thought it would be a good opportunity to bring them together and have a discussion about what they were able to observe and what it means for political dynamics in that part of the Middle East and for U.S. policy in particular for the Bush administration's agenda promoting a democracy and, in parentheses, regime change in that part of the world.

Flynt is going to speak first. I think he is probably known to most of you as a Senior Fellow here at the Saban Center, the author of what has now become a best-selling book on Bashar al-Asad and the Syrian regime.

He previously served as senior director in the National Security Council, before that in the Policy Planning staff of the State Department, and before that as a senior analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency.

David Ignatius is a well-known columnist and writer. He is an associate editor of The Washington Post. He writes a regular column on international affairs for the Post. He is author also of five novels, one that I particularly liked about Lebanon where he reported in earlier days for The Wall Street Journal.

It says here, David, that one of your novels is apparently required reading for CIA trainings. I am not sure which one it is.

MR. IGNATIUS: That is true. The readers would tell me, but I would have to shoot them.

[Laughter.]

MR. INDYK: In any case, we are very grateful to David for joining us today and giving us the benefit of his wisdom.

Flynt, fresh from the Daily Show, is going to lead off.

MR. LEVERETT: All right. Thank you, Martin, and let me add my own words of thanks to David Ignatius for joining us today.

I can, in fact, verify that his Lebanon novel, if not exactly required reading for young new employees at the CIA, is very much strongly recommended reading and well worth reading even if you are not going to work at the CIA.

As Martin said, I had the chance to be in Damascus during the Baath Party conference. I think I may have gotten slightly better access to the conference proceedings than accredited journalists were. I was allowed into the opening session, and I was allowed to talk to people on the margins of the conference, but there were certainly big parts of the conference that weren't open to me. It was still a very, very interesting week to be in Damascus.

I also had the chance over the last few weeks to travel to the major European capitals to talk about issues of Syria policy with relevant officials and non-official types in those capitals, and I thought I would share with you some of my thoughts about where we are, where the situation is in Syria, where U.S. policy is headed, and where European policy is headed.

In my book "Inheriting Syria," I lay out a portrait of Bashar al-Asad as someone with what I call "reformist impulses," but with a lot of constraints on those impulses that produce an extremely gradual approach to change and reform in Syria.

The constraints flow from many sources. Some of them are due to Bashar's own personal limitations. He is in many ways a kind of accidental president. He is not someone who spent his education personal formation preparing for a career in politics. He was preparing for a quite different kind of career as an ophthalmologist and while I think he does have some reformist impulses, believes that Syria needs to be different in some ways from the country he inherited from his father; he doesn't have a really elaborate vision or plan for how to make those changes happen.

Some of the constraints on him, he perceives as in the nature of the political system he inherited from his father. There is, indeed, a so-called "old guard,"

and Bashar, both by temperament and calculation, I think is inclined very much to avoid confrontation with this old guard.

I believe he assumes that biology is on his side. He will turn 40 years old in September. He is not exactly term-limited or in danger of losing an election any time soon, and I think he figures that, to a large extent, he can wait out the old guard, let biology and time take their course, and over time put more and more of his own people in positions of authority.

Part of the constraint also flows from what I think Bashar takes very seriously as a risk of societal destabilization. If he pushes too far, too fast, particularly on political reform, he is concerned about, in particular, the risk of a Sunni fundamentalist resurgence in Syria, and his gradualism also flows from a lack of capacity in the system.

While he has tried to recruit a network of very capable technocratically trained and oriented people to help him devise and pursue various sorts of reform initiatives, the truth is he doesn't have enough of those people around him. He doesn't have substantial enough cadres of world-class technocrats to do reform in a systematic way.

You add all of those constraints up and I come to a picture of Bashar as someone with reformist leanings, but it is going to be a very, very gradual, very, very slow approach.

I think that what we saw at the Baath Party Congress at the beginning of June is very consistent with that model, very consistent with that portrait of Bashar.

I think Bashar recognizes, given the strategic situation that he is in, the tactical and strategic imperatives to, let's say, look busier on reform, but he is still determined to proceed on the real substance of reform at his own very gradual pace, and the Baath Party conference provided him with a very, almost, tailor-made vehicle for, let's say, a lot of motion, but not much movement approach to reform.

The Baath Party conference in the end made recommendations on a number of issues, but Buthayna Shaaban was intent to point out at her press conferences, the Baath Party is separate from the state, separate from the government.

It is not going to be the body that implements recommendations or actually makes change happen, a number of recommendations came out of the conference, for example, recommending a new law permitting political parties, nationalist parties, outside of the national progressive front to form, but now we are going to have to go through the process of drafting the law, submitting it to the parliament, letting the parliament chew on it, and when it gets to President Asad for signature, we could be months and months down the road, recommendation to review the emergency loss that had been in effect in Syria since 1963 and some suggested guidelines for criteria as to how to review the emergency laws, but again, this process could take months and months to unfold before anything substantive might come out of the process.

With regard to economic policy, there is a formal recommendation from the party that Syria adopt a model of the social market economy as its guiding framework for economic policy, but it is very unclear at this point. Bashar's approach up until this point in terms of reforming the economy has been to take some steps to try

and grow the private sector, but to avoid steps that would actually try to shrink the public sector, mainly privatization.

We know there is discussion of privatization at the Baath Party conference, but is there really going to be a concrete measure introduced to try and move on privatization? There is still very unclear, and I am sure it is going to take a lot of time to reach clarity on that point.

There were a number of personnel changes that came out of the party conference, the most notable of which was the retirement of Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, and it is anticipated that there will be more changes, perhaps even a new government, in Syria, a lot of talk about Foreign Minister Farouq al-Sharaa moving up to the vice presidency, a lot of talk about Mohammed Hussein, the finance minister, becoming the new prime minister, but all of this is going to take a lot of time to play out.

It was very interesting to me that during the week I was there, at the beginning of the week Ibrahim Hamidi, the al-Hayat correspondent in Damascus, was reporting based on his sources that there would be a new government in Syria within 2 weeks. By the middle of the week, he would be reporting that there would be a new government in Syria in a month. By the end of the conference, he was reporting that there might be a new government in Syria within 2 months.

I think if there is a new government in Syria by September, the beginning of all, that is probably about the time table we are looking at, a lot of motion, not necessarily a lot of movement.

As Bashar seeks to stick to this gradualist course, the really large strategic question I think is how stable is his regime, can he get away with this kind of gradualist course or are the pressures for change that are building so great that he is not going to be able to stay out in front of them.

I have argued both here and in other fora that I think the Bush administration has adopted a policy, unstated policy largely, of what I described as "regime change on the cheap," and this policy rests on an assessment that Bashar can't stay out in front of events, that the pressures are building so much, and if the United States takes steps to try and keep the pressure on him, then this regime will start to unravel.

Personally, I am not so sure that this regime is in that kind of jeopardy. My impression is that the withdrawal of troops, Syrian troops from Lebanon, has been internalized very well in Syria. There is no sign of a societal backlash from the withdrawal of the troops, and you could argue that, in fact, the decision, the relatively quick decision to withdraw the troops in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination, has given Bashar an opportunity to move forward to some degree in that long-term process that is consolidating control over the regime.

I think that Bashar is still very much able to protect what Syria would see as its vital interest in Lebanon. If you look at the outcome of the parliamentary elections in Lebanon, my reading is that pro-Syrian forces in Lebanon were able, pretty effectively, to play on natural divisions and tensions within the opposition coalition. If you look at it, the opposition coalition I think breaks down into three camps. You have

the Hariri block, you have anti-Syrian Maronites, and you have the Druze under Walid Jumblatt.

Pro-Syrian forces were able to play on natural divisions among these different camps I think quite successfully. In the end, the opposition did attain majority status in the parliament, but they fell short of the kind of two-thirds super-majority status that they need to do really significant things, like get rid of President Lahoud, because of a deal that the Druze leader, Mr. Jumblatt, made with Nabih Berri, the speaker of the parliament.

Nabih Berri will retain that position in the new parliament almost surely, and now I think there is a very, very strong chance that because the opposition did not achieve this threshold of super-majority status that Saad Hariri will not put himself forward to serve as prime minister of a new Lebanese government, and I think there is a very strong chance that the prime minister of Lebanon moving forward will be the current prime minister, Najib Mikati, among other things, one of Bashar al-Asad's best Lebanese friends. So I think that Bashar has demonstrated a capability, even after withdrawing Syrian troops from Lebanon, to protect Syria's most important interest there.

There is no organized opposition to the [Syrian] regime to speak of. There is only what I would call potential opposition from Sunni Islamists. Civil society activists in Syria are very divided over the question of how to relate to the Islamists. Some of them think that they can make an alliance, make common cause, with the Islamists in order to tap into their wellspring of support and use that as a social base to push for political change. Others, though, are very, very skeptical that people with an

essentially liberal approach to political reform can form an alliance with Islamists, and that if the Islamists are the spearhead of a campaign to promote political change in Syria, what you could get maybe even worse from the standpoint of the values that liberal civil society activists espouse than trying to push for change within the current regime.

All of that leads me to think that I don't think the Bush administration is going to get regime change on the cheap in Syria.

If the Bush administration makes a determination that the Syrian regime needs to go, the only way they are going to be able to do that is the way they did it in Iraq, and personally, I think that would be a near disaster for American interest in the region of U.S. policy went in that direction, but we will have to see in what direction the Bush administration heads.

In terms of Syrian foreign policy moving forward, I think that the Syrian leadership has at this point largely written off any possibility of a significant breakthrough, significant upturn in its relations with this administration, and I think what we will see in coming months is an effort by Syria to repair its relations with Europe and to try and move for a revival of the association agreement with the European Union.

In that context, I think there is a real potential for a divergence between the United States and Europe over the question of Syria policy.

I have said where I think U.S. policy is going at the moment. My sense from talking with Europeans is that there is absolutely no support for a policy of regime change in Syria. Most European governments share my assessment that this regime is

actually not on the verge of collapse; even those European governments who worry that the regime may in fact be unstable do not see its collapse as at all desirable.

I think there is a widespread view in Europe that if the Asad regime were to go, what you would get would be chaos and violence, and whatever political order emerged out of that chaos would be heavily Islamist in character. I don't think there is any support in Europe for a policy of coercive regime change towards Syria.

Now, at the same time, I also think there isn't a consensus in Europe right now over what precisely would be the right conditions for trying to restore better relations with Syria, what exactly would be the right conditions for trying to move ahead with the association agreement, but I think there is a strong interest in Europe in thinking through that set of issues.

As one European diplomat put it to me, "We need to create a light at the end of the tunnel for Syria." If Syria wants to go through the tunnel, Syria is going to have to do a lot of things, but we need to create a light at the end of the tunnel, and something like the EU association agreement could be part of that light.

In other words, from my narrow perspective as the author of "Inheriting Syria," the Europeans are much more receptive to the notion of a strategy of conditional engagement with Syria than the American administration, but since I am something of a refugee from this administration, I don't think I should be particularly surprised by that.

Anyway, that is where I think we are in terms of internal dynamics in Syria, where Syria is likely to go in terms of its foreign policy, and U.S.-European dynamics over Syrian policy.

MR. INDYK: Great. Thank you, Flynt. We will come back in a moment to that.

David, do you want to start us off on Lebanon in view of what is happening there?

MR. IGNATIUS: Yes.

The first thing I want to say is that if all of these people at the CIA are reading my novel, they must be passing around the same copy because it is not reflected in sales.

[Laughter.]

MR. IGNATIUS: So, if there is anybody here who can do something about this, it is not just must-reading. It is must-buying.

I am going to have some critical comments about Lebanon, but I want to open with positive comments, and I think on balance, I may be slightly, slightly more optimistic than Flynt.

I have to say that the scene as you cross the border from Syria into Lebanon several weeks ago was startling, and it is important, with all the caveats I am going to make, to keep that in mind.

You enter a country that is visibly, palpably free of Syrian interference. As soon as you cross the border, the first thing you see actually is a Dunkin Donuts franchise, which is unlikely, but seemed very busy, and then during election season, this was election season in the Bekaa Valley and in the Central Mountains. So everywhere you saw election posters. I have never seen a sort of festival of democracy quite like

this, as I wrote, all the way over the mountain and down to the sea, you had this intense political debate visible before you.

We talk a lot in interpreting the election results about pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian factions, but I couldn't find anybody who wasn't basically happy that the Syrian-occupying troops were gone. It seems to me that there is fundamental unity among Lebanese on this point, and it is important to bear it in mind that this is not, on that issue, a country that is deeply divided.

The other thing that I would say is that the remarkable developments in Lebanon—if you had said a year ago that this chain of events would have taken place, you would have been laughed out of this room or anywhere else.

The reason that it has happened is because of people power. We often say it is crucial for the Arabs to write their own history rather than having it written for them by Americans, Israelis, Europeans, anyone else, and that has really happened in Lebanon.

I was there immediately after Hariri's assassination, and I will never forget all those people in the streets who just wouldn't go home, who set up tent cities. I remember going to Hariri's grave site at 2:00 in the morning, and it was still packed with people. It was the refusal of the Lebanese to go back home and be intimidated, as whoever murdered Hariri intended, the best protected and strongest man, if we can kill this man, we can kill anybody, so go home and shut up. That didn't happen. People didn't go home.

I am told there were orders given by somebody to open fire one day on those crowds, and they weren't obeyed. Lebanese generals weren't prepared to live in that world anymore.

Among my friends, many of whom were very close to Samir Kassir, that killing clearly intended to intimidate journalists, people of opinion. It didn't work. Talking at the memorial where that car bomb exploded, standing over the hole in the pavement with people who all feel that they are targeted, they are not going to back down.

I really think it is important to understand that, that the Lebanese do not want to go backwards, and in that sense, I feel fundamentally hopeful that there is a consensus that "we are just not going to go back in the world that we live, and we are prepared to take considerable risks, personal risks to make sure that that doesn't happen." So that is my initial positive comment.

This election cycle reminded me that the character of Lebanese democracy remains sectarian, and we should understand that, not pretend otherwise, and not blame any particular sect for that reality.

I had hopes in February that perhaps with the younger generation of Lebanese, the intensity of feeling of the civil war years was over, that people didn't have the same confessional identifications they did, and I think the elections taught me that that is not so.

General Aoun has been blamed as a symbol of that, and he certainly is a symbol because the Christians rallied around him I think as the tough general who would protect Christian interests when people felt vulnerable, but in reality, every other

group and every other weekend of the election told a different version of that story, the patriarch Rafiq Hariri's son Saad is the leader of the Sunnis and of the urban constituency in Beirut, the Sunnis have always really defined. That was the message of the first Sunday.

The second Sunday's elections in the south, the ability of Amal and Hizballah, which really hate each other in normal times, to unite and campaign together for the sake of the Shiite voice and undiminished Shiite power was a reminder that that Shiite identity was the strongest thing people felt.

Then we went into the third Sunday with General Aoun's victory, and suddenly people seemed to wake up to the fact that sectarian loyalties were still alive in Lebanon.

The last Sunday was a nice quota, and I think it is immensely to Lebanon's credit and future success that the Saad Hariri-led slate was successful, but I am told that if you look carefully at the results, you will see that in Christian areas, the people were holding pretty tight to the traditional loyalties in the north as in every other part of the country.

I think we just have to accept that as a given. I don't think it obstructs the importance of the initial points I was making, which were very positive.

It has been obvious for a long time that the central issue for the future in Lebanon, the shorthand for it is Hizballah, but the more fundamental question is how the Shiite constituency that Hizballah represents can be drawn fully into the Lebanese political process and if and how Hizballah can be disarmed and the rest of UN Resolution 1559 be fulfilled. That is really going to be a very, very tricky challenge.

Let me just talk a little bit about my own thoughts after talking to Hizballah officials and others in Beirut.

I think an interesting first question—and I am like Flynt, I don't think this is resolved, but maybe I need to do some reporting today—is whether Nabih Berri will in fact continue as speaker of the parliament, the top Shiite position in the government.

The American embassy has made very clear to all parties in Lebanon its strong desire that Nabih Berri be replaced. That was one of the subjects when the ambassadors met in Paris in an important meeting in the week before the final round of elections.

I think the reason people feel strongly about that is twofold. First, Berri is for many Lebanese, including for many Shiites, a symbol of the old order, not simply in that he was pro Syria, but he is seen as part of the kind of corruption that has gathered around Lebanese politics and the Lebanese statement, and it is important to turn the page.

I must say that Aoun, of all the political figures, seems to me to have taken this issue of corruption and the need for reform most seriously. If you look through Aoun's fairly detailed manifesto, which is available on the web, you see fairly well-thought-through strategies for trying to address that problem.

The second reason why a possible change in the speakership is important is that it could only be done with the acquiescence, a connivance of Hassan Nasrallah and Hizballah. So, in that sense, it is an early test of whether they are really willing to

play in this new Lebanon. As I say, I think it is unlikely, but not impossible, that there would be a formula found in which Nabih Berri would be replaced.

I am told he was in Tehran on Monday. That is interesting. That is a lot of political speculation about whether he was being given the bad news, being given the good news. What that was about, I don't really know, but it is interesting.

Certainly, when I talked with Hizballah officials about this issue, I said Hizballah, if it is known for anything, internally is known for not being corrupt and standing against corruption and are you prepared to follow through on that, and you get very cagey answers. People are pretty honest about their desire not to dilute Shiite political unity, but at the same time, they understand that it is important for them, especially now that the Syrians are gone, to continue with their political program and image. Again, I think it is conceivable that their interests would like in some change.

You hear names of specific people, quote, "independent," close quote, Shiites who might be candidates for speaker, but obviously they would be there only if Hizballah decided that that is what it wanted.

On the question of disarmament, there is an obvious dilemma. If you push too hard to disarm Hizballah, you break this fragile experiment in democracy. If you don't disarm Hizballah and leave it an arm presence within the state, you break this fragile experiment in democracy. It is not as if postponing this decision forever gets you an acceptable solution, in my judgment.

Hizballah is talking out of at least two sides of its mouth on this question, depending on the nature of the conversation, whether it is public or private.

Privately, senior leaders, including Nasrallah, are indicating a willingness to address this issue in a way that will reassure Lebanese and point the way toward an eventual genuine disarmament.

I should note that when we are talking about this issue, we should have the word "disarmament" in quotation marks because I am not convinced that any of the Lebanese militias have truly and fully diminished. The weapons may be in a second basement, but I don't think they have disappeared. Lebanese militias don't sell their weapons on the international market. So disarmament of Hizballah to me really in part is symbolic, and it is the symbolism that is important and I think perhaps might offer some opportunities for actually doing something that would be visible and reassuring, if not to the United States and Israel, at least to other Lebanese.

Some way in which Hizballah would recognize and accept the sovereignty of the Lebanese state, the primacy of the Lebanese army, its subordination to the Lebanese state, any time I have asked Nasrallah personally or any of his top aides this question, they always answer immediately, "We accept the authority of the Lebanese state. We will not contest it. We are not about contesting it."

I thought that in some ways the key moment in this amazing process since Hariri's assassination which told you this is going to work was when Hizballah went into the streets and everybody played it as this great pro-Syrian rally. They went into the streets with Lebanese flags, and I think that fact that it was Lebanese flags and not militia banners told you they wanted to be, they needed to be seen by their own constituents as Lebanese in supporting the national project.

I think what the American embassy is said to be telling people in Lebanon in effect on this question of the disarmament of Hizballah, you have got either a sharp turn in the road where there is a quick disarmament—and we understand that many Lebanese don't want that—and you have got a scenic tour that winds you around, up and down the hills, and gets you there. We are willing to think about the scenic route, so long as we see real progress on the reform agenda.

In other words, if people are buying time to buy time and nothing real is happening underneath, that is not going to be acceptable. If there is evidence that this is the phased approach as part of a clear strategy to change Lebanon and is going to lead to this disarmament of Hizballah over time, it might be acceptable. I don't want to say would be.

My own view is that, although I think pushing too hard too quick is a mistake, all you have to do is look at Northern Ireland to know that postponing this issue too long is a mistake.

The idea that a healthy Lebanon can grow and connect with the rest of the world and be everything that it wants to be while there is this large arm presence calling itself the "resistance" locked in the struggle with Israel, I just think is unrealistic, and I think that this is one of those problems that however painful it is to deal with in the near term—and I don't mean immediately, but in the near term, however painful it is—it really should be dealt with. You will get yourself only misery if you postpone it too long.

I think sending Hizballah the signal that this will be deferred indefinitely would be mistake. How you make it happen, I don't begin to know.

Just talking briefly about the future, obviously the initial question that looms is whether Saad Hariri wants to be and should be prime minister. They are separable questions. I don't think he has made up his mind about the first. I think he is taking advice from lots of people. I think he is somewhat less certain he wants to do this with a 72-vote majority than the 90-vote majority that seemed possible a bit earlier. I think whether he has a working alliance with Hizballah, so that their additional seats are really something that he can work with, is important in his decision.

My sense is that he has a pretty good relationship with Nasrallah, that there has been a quiet dialogue between those two behind the scenes which has been very productive.

I should also say that as somebody who didn't know Saad Hariri, your initial guess is gee, he has never run for office, he doesn't know a whole lot about things, I wonder if he has the experience and political savvy to be prime minister; I was very favorably impressed with my conversation with him. I spent 2 hours with him in what can only be called a "safe house" in the Bekaa Valley. He had ventured into the Bekaa where his father never, never dared to, to campaign, and that was an important piece of symbolism, but the place he was staying was so hard to find that it took my driver at least 45 minutes to find the right dirt road to go down.

Spending a good deal of time with him, I found him really quite sensible, understanding what he knew, what he didn't know. I think he has done a good job of gathering the opposition together.

There was a real letdown after February I think when Walid Jumblatt and others were trying to be the voices of the opposition. I think Saad Hariri's arrival at the center of that really made a huge difference.

I do think the question of whether Emile Lahoud should remain as president of Lebanon is crucial. It is crucial because job one for Lebanon is security. When you have people being assassinated for challenging the new order, that is unacceptable, and Lebanon is going to have to think very carefully about security, get the people who can manage security in place, and there is a real question whether President Lahoud can and should be part of that.

If he wants to be the president of this new Lebanon, he has to show that he can lead the process of change that gets people who were alive with the old order and are seen as instruments of Syria out. I just think there is really no other way. That is another one that can't be dodged.

I have talked about the question of the speakership and who will take that.

The final thing I would say is that Lebanon is that rare example of a sublime working partnership between France and the United States. There are not a lot of them, but it is important to understand that all of the good things that have happened in Lebanon happened in significant part because the French took the lead.

At a time when the United States was preoccupied with Iraq, the French said we have to address this, we have to address the outrageous Syrian attempt to rewrite the constitution and re-impose Emile Lahoud, and the French were crucial in the United Nations both in getting 1559 and in the follow-on.

So I think it is really important that that coalition remain strong. My sense is that it does remain strong, that there is a real identity of interest and objectives. I think it has been very important that the U.S. not be the loudest voice in town.

Let me just quickly say a couple of things about Syria. I certainly agree with Flynt in the sense of blockage. The way I would define the blockage is that Bashar Asad has two roles. One is as president of Syria, and in that role, he understands that Syria is in terrible trouble, that economically it is just dead on its feet and absolutely needs change, and as president of Syria, he is fed up with the Baath Party which he understands is corrupt and inefficient and must give way to other forces.

He has a second role which is as clan leader of the ruling Alawite clan. His father had that role. It passes to him, and that group obviously is centered around the security services, has gotten rich off the old order, is going to fight efforts to change that old order, and the two roles are just absolutely and fundamentally in conflict. You can't do both. You have to choose.

I think he goes one way toward one responsibility, and then he is pulled back toward the other. It is not that he is insincere in his professions of interest and reform to people like me, when I talk to him, but everybody who sees him. People come away saying, "Gee, I think that young man really is serious," and he is when he has got that hat on. The problem is he has that other hat.

Unless he tackles that problem—and that is just the toughest thing that you could ask of him—I don't think he is going to really make progress.

When I was in Damascus, I was told wait until after the congress, then you will see whether this is for real, and there have been some rather interesting changes in personnel in the last week.

If you go online today, there is a posting on Joshua Landis' Syria comment blog from Sami Moubayad, who is one of the more interesting reform voices, writes for the Daily Star in Beirut and is just an interesting person, summarizing all of the personnel changes that have happened, they include the president's chief of staff, the chief of staff's deputy, the head of the security directorate.

Bahjat Sulayman—who was important because he was the person who is said to have educated Basil first and then Bashar in the arts of intelligence as he prepared to become prime minister—he is out and somebody new is in. As we know, Khaddam is out. Mustapha Tlass is out. There are a number of changes.

There are people who were reformers clearly who were being given more authority, Abdullah al-Dardari, who people speak highly of, has got a new position sort of as economic czar. I think he is deputy prime minister or something like that, but he has a much expanded portfolio.

So there is reason to think that changes that would be required if Bashar was going to choose to be president first and make that as priority. If he was going to resolve the conflict I was describing, he would do the sorts of things that he is in fact doing.

To conclude, just briefly on Syrian foreign policy, I think that Flynt is right that the Syrians have basically given up on the U.S. relationship. They know that for America the overwhelming priority is Syrian help in reducing the flow of

insurgence, cutting the insurgent logistical pipeline to Syria, and they being all the appropriate complaints, this is a huge border, you can't control your border with Mexico. They have asked the British for night vision goggles. In the end, the British wouldn't give them to them. They say, "How can we be expected to do this if we don't have the equipment," et cetera, et cetera.

I think that the strategy the Syrians have decided on is to go first to Baghdad, if you will. The root to America is through Baghdad. If they can establish a bilateral security relationship with the al-Jaafari government that begins to produce some results on the ground that the Americans see, that that may change people's minds in Washington. I am a little bit doubtful that it will, but I think that is the agenda now for Syrians who think about foreign policy, get al-Jaafari to come to Damascus, get the embassy open again, move past all of the old feelings.

Then, just finally on the Europeans, yes, I think the Europeans are nervous about an American policy that frankly just lacks articulation in too many respects—it would make anyone nervous—but you shouldn't underestimate the degree to which the French, who are clearly the key players here, are fed up with what has been happening in Syria.

The French and Chirac in particular, made a big commitment to the idea that Bashar Asad was a reformer. The French sent teams of top ENArque people to Syria to do an audit of the Syrian bureaucracy and made very serious quiet recommendations about reform, sent other legal experts. They did everything that they could do, and absolutely nothing happened. And the French got pretty upset about that.

So I think that, again, there is more identity of interest between the American and French analysis here. That is not necessarily to say on what to do about it, but on the situation that we might think.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

Let me begin the discussion by a couple of questions, one to each of you.

Flynt, just picking up on the last point that David was making about Syria and Iraq, I want to give you an opportunity to share with us your sense of what the Syrians are up to there and what is the likelihood that they are going to cut off support for the insurgency.

For David, you made several references to the role of the American embassy, and I thought that was quite unusual. It almost sounded as if we were the arbiters of what should happen in Lebanese political reform process.

I wonder, is that accurate? Do we have that kind of influence on the situation? Does it really matter what Ambassador Feltman has to say in this regard? Is that healthy for Lebanese democracy if in fact it is the case that America has such influence on the agenda? What exactly is your understanding of the role that the United States is playing in the political reform process there?

MR. LEVERETT: On Syria and Iraq, first, let me say a fairly high level of strategic abstraction. I think that the Syrian game since the U.S. invasion of Iraq has been twofold.

First of all, they did not want for the United States to have an overly easy or comfortable time in Iraq. I mean, this whole operation was setting a precedent which was very disturbing from the Syrian point of view, and they didn't want the United

States to reach closure in Iraq so quickly or so easily that the administration might feel they could apply that precedent in other cases.

Secondly, I think the Syrians wanted to create something of a bargaining chip with the United States, a problem on the border, a problem with stuff coming across the border from Syria into Iraq that supports insurgent activity. The Syrians have in a variety of ways, over the last 2 years really, signaled at various points, shown that they could do things which would be helpful, which would contribute to American efforts in Iraq, but they want something in return for that.

They want a strategic understanding with the United States about Iraq's basic orientation post-Saddam, about the kind of relationship that Syria could have with a post-Saddam government, and about the U.S. inclination or not to use Iraq as a platform for putting pressure on Syria. I think that is really what the game is that the Syrians have been playing.

Over the last month, I am told by western diplomats in Damascus, there is mounting evidence that the Syrians are in fact doing more. They are doing more on the border. They are arresting more people trying to come across the border into Iraq, and I think that David is right. The orientation for those efforts right now is not so much the United States, but the new Iraqi government.

They are very eager to have Iraqi officials come to Damascus. Syrian officials tell me they have extended all of the invitations and want to have those visits take place, and I think they believe that perhaps they can diffuse this issue to some degree with the United States by working around the United States and dealing directly with the Iraqis.

But I still come back to Europe as well. I think part of the reason, these diplomats in Damascus were telling me the evidence is mounting that the Syrians are doing more on the border. They are not American diplomats who were telling me that. They are European diplomats who were telling me that, and I think that part of what the Syrians are doing is trying to lay the groundwork for going to the Europeans over the coming months and saying, "We need to work some things out."

MR. IGNATIUS: In recounting what the U.S. embassy thinks, I am simply replaying what my Lebanese friends are hearing from senior officials at the embassy who were not being shy about making their views known, and indeed, some of these views were expressed at a recent event where I think five or six journalists were present, which as we all know is a very good way to keep things quiet.

I think Lebanese are looking to the United States in this period of difficulty in transition for guidance. I think strong and clearly articulated American views ideally are articulated in private, but Lebanon is a country where as soon as it is said in private, everybody is going to know what it is. I think that is all to the good, and we shouldn't worry about being proconsular.

My impression is that Ambassador Feldman is doing a fabulous job.

[Side B of audiotape begins.]

MR. IGNATIUS: [In progress]—a lot of negative comments about him from any quarter. I think it is a narrow line he is walking, but he is walking it well.

I do think it is important in Lebanon for all sorts of reasons to be in step with the French. It would be unfortunate and a mistake if that was gratuitously squandered.

Just to say one final thing on this larger question of the American role, I went to see one of the top business leaders in Lebanon, a person who controls a company that perhaps is the largest employer in the country now. He said to me, "How long do we have?," and by that, he meant how long is the United States going to stay committed in Iraq, in Lebanon, in this period of really intense American involvement, intense dangerous, difficult American involvement, and I found that quite haunting.

It is a reminder that people out in that part of the world really are counting on our staying power, which as history shows is not always a wise bet.

My answer was I would guess that this president is not going to fundamentally change his policy in Iraq, remove substantial troops while he is in office. So you can reasonably bet that you have got 3 years to work with in that sense, but I think whatever the American embassy is saying short term, that is the thing that people are wondering about, worrying about.

They read the congressional debate. They know the president's poll numbers are falling, opposition to the war is rising, and they wonder, "Oh, my Gosh, are the Americans going to pull the plug on us again?"

MR. INDYK: And I wouldn't be surprised if they are watching the same polls and debates in Damascus and wondering whether we are growing short of breath as well.

Okay. Let's go to questions. I see my friend here. Please.

PARTICIPANT: My name is Tammam al-Barazi from al-Watan magazine.

I would like to ask you a question on the conference in Syria. Most reports, at least inside Syria, as far as I know, said that there is more infiltration of the Baath Party by the military and the security service, like [unintelligible]. There is more diffused presence now, and they compared it to his father. There was not a prevalence of the security apparatus inside the party. Can you comment on that?

MR. LEVERETT: Yes. There is a stream of individual appointments like that that you can point to, people who now occupy positions in the party leadership structure.

I guess there are a couple of things that struck me about the way Bashar is restructuring the leadership of the Baath Party. One was that for all of the talk and, in some ways, action early in his presidency, to put a younger generation onto bodies like the parties in the NPF, the visual inside the hall for the opening session of the conference was really very striking.

You had several hundred, probably close to a thousand delegates in the hall. There is a smattering of women in the group. There is a smattering of males who were recognizably under 50 years of age, but for the most part, the crowd in the hall looked very much—and I will get in a plug for my book. If you go out and look at the cover of my book and you see all of these guys arrayed behind Bashar al-Asad in the cover of the photograph, it was hundreds and hundreds of guys like that. This was the new Baath Party.

I really think when Bashar came into the room to give his opening speech, I really think he was the youngest person in the room, 39 years old, and I found that very striking.

The other thing that I think is striking, though, is that Bashar is I think—and some of the security military appointments reflect that—he is essentially trying to—I think he is trying to undermine or weaken. To the extent that the Baath Party as an institution has any sort of institutional autonomy within the Syrian structure, he is trying to undermine that, trying to weaken that over time, gradually, in part by allowing people from the security structure to assume positions in the party leadership, but you also see people like Mohammed Hussein, people who are generally identified as being part of his reform camp assuming more positions of responsibility in the party.

There was some talk before the conference in Damascus that the Baath Party would in effect put itself out of business at this conference. I always thought that was a bit exaggerated hope, but I think it is because Bashar still needs the Baath Party as an institution because of the way that the Syrian constitution is written. He has got to stand for reelection in 2007. The Baath Party controls 53 percent, I think it is, of the seats in the Syrian National Assembly.

It is the candidate of the Baath Party that will be put on the referendum in 2007 to go before Syrian voters. If Bashar puts the Baath Party out of business or takes away its sort of enshrined leading role in society, the role enshrined in the constitution, if he takes that away before 2007, he doesn't have a clear and easy constitutional mechanism for getting himself reelected in the 2007 referendum.

So I think he is working to weaken the party as any sort of autonomous institution, an institution that could post barriers to his reform goals or objectives, but he is doing it very gradually, and he is not going to do anything very profound in terms of the party standing I think until after the 2007 presidential election.

MR. INDYK: Let's go over here.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you. Michelle Steinberg from EIR magazine.

This is a question for Flynt. It is about the hit list that came up from Ms. Rice and the White House spokesmen and President Bush himself about 10 days ago, and my question is whether you have any insight about the authenticity of that hit list.

Ambassador Mustapha really went after it on one of the talk shows, and it seems that the pattern of assassination makes no sense to automatically for the United States to say it is Syria, it is Syria, as Ms. Rice sort of implied again yesterday. Do you have any thoughts on that?

MR. LEVERETT: Well, obviously, I don't know what the facts are, but I won't let that completely stop me from addressing your question.

It struck me in the reporting on the administration claim that there is a hit list. I was particularly struck by the New York Times' coverage of that story because the Times reporter Steve Wiseman actually took the trouble of going to sources that he had in the U.S. intelligence community to ask about the intelligence on which the administration was basing the claim of a hit list.

At least in his story, he reported that his intelligence sources said that this was a single-source report, not very good; it wasn't something that intelligence professionals were really prepared to endorse.

I know that has never happened with this administration before. Never mind.

But I don't know what the facts are, if there is a hit list or not, but at least some of the reporting that I have seen in the press on this story suggests that—and I

think it is probably the case—the administration is basically trying to build a case against Syria, against the Syrian regime to support a policy that is increasingly aimed at overthrowing that regime.

I think that making an argument that there is a hit list of people in Lebanon that the Syrians are systematically eliminating is part of making the case against the Syrian regime.

MR. INDYK: Maybe I can get David to come in on this. The fact is, on the other hand, that somebody seems to have a list.

Three people who have been assassinated, they all happened to be anti-Syrian. You made some reference to this, but I wonder if you could start by telling us a little bit about George Hawi and what you make of that latest assassination.

MR. IGNATIUS: All I can say is I was scratching my head about it like everybody else. It doesn't make a lot of sense. You could say it might be opportunistic as some particular enemy he has as seizing the moment, but the similarity to the bomb that killed Samir Kassir suggests otherwise.

I just have two thoughts on this question. It does seem as if the intelligence about the hit list is pretty frail. Indeed, the very idea that a security service is drawing up a hit list, like "Should we put Hawi number three or number six?," in one sense it would be unlikely if that happened in real life.

That said, what I heard from Lebanese was, "Thank goodness the Americans are making noise about this. This is our best protection." This is a dangerous time to be a Lebanese politician, to be a Lebanese journalist, and people are nervous. They are going to bed worried. Their kids say, "Daddy, are you going to get

killed?" Many of our friends, and I am sure people in this room, know that this is real. So, when Condi Rice speaks out, that does not upset people in Lebanon, near as I can tell.

The second thing I would say is that in truth, the Syrians have a powerful interest in doing what they can to control this because, if they don't, if these assassinations continue, they are going to present the United States, France, and the new Lebanese government itself with a very stark choice. It is intolerable that this continue. So, at some point, people are going to have to do something about it, and then you may move to a much more focused policy of regime change than now. Now I think it is sort of diffused. I don't think there is a focus policy.

So I think that paradoxically, the Syrians are putting themselves in a very dangerous position by allowing this to continue, and they have an interest in doing something to stop it.

MR. INDYK: Okay. Sy.

PARTICIPANT: My name is Said Arikat, Al-Quds newspaper.

First of all, congratulations on being on the Daily Show. That is a true accomplishment.

MR. LEVERETT: Thank you.

[Laughter.]

PARTICIPANT: My question to you is why discount a military option in Syria. Listening to all of the rhetoric that we listen to, especially over the past couple of weeks, with Senator McCain saying perhaps we should go into Syria and destroy insurgent bases and so on, there are rumors that Special Forces are doing that, indeed.

Perhaps there is some thinking that the low-grade war can finally bring the regime down. So I would like your thoughts on those things.

MR. INDYK: What do you think of the Cambodia option?

MR. LEVERETT: Yes. Well, I think we may well be seeing something like the Cambodia option over the next few weeks and months. The administration could conduct cross-border military operations into Syria from Iraq under the rubric of pursuing insurgents or disrupting supply lines to the insurgents or any of the kinds of language we used to justify going into Cambodia. I could easily imagine that sort of thing happening.

My own sense, though, is that that in and of itself is not going to cause the Asad regime to collapse or to unravel. I don't think there is going to be a lot of support for that kind of action by the United States, either among other Arab states or among Europeans.

I think the administration may well try it, but I don't think it is going to have the outcome that some in the administration might want.

Like I said, if the administration makes a determination that it wants to get rid of this regime, I think it is going to have to do it the way it got rid of Saddam Hussein's regime.

MR. IGNATIUS: Mark, could I just add quickly two thoughts?

MR. INDYK: Yes, please.

MR. IGNATIUS: About the Cambodia option, first is it didn't work very well in Cambodia. I mean, that period of incursion was followed by Pol Pot.

Second, I think the United States has to think very carefully about who the constituencies for positive change in Syria are and what will hold Syria together in a period of transition which has clearly begun and what role specifically should the Syrian military play in that. I don't know enough about Syria to offer any thoughts, but I think that is a crucial question.

And humiliating the Syrian military, which would be a significant consequence of these cross-border raids, it says to all Syrians, "Your officers, generals, and troops are"—that might be a very stupid thing to do.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

Please.

PARTICIPANT: Hi. I'm [inaudible] from Boston Freedom and Peace Trust. I have a question—two questions and a small comment, very quick.

Also relating to the gentleman's comment about whether the military option is possible in Syria, my question is whether a regime like Syria or North Korea, you always need to show them the light at the end of the tunnel is the best option. I guess you answered that.

The question to David is about the Shebaa Farms. You didn't mention that, and that seems to be a kind of factor in getting Hizballah really to disarm. What are your thoughts on that?

And I just want to comment that the elections were the biggest disaster for Lebanese democracy and a big slap to the million-plus people who showed up on March 14th because all of a sudden you have people like Aoun coming back and killing people's power basically, and Jumblatt, the biggest opportunist riding on Hariri's death.

As a warlord, he and Berri really should be in jail with Samir Geagea. That is just my thought.

MR. INDYK: Thanks for that comment.

MR. IGNATIUS: The latter part of your comment, I have to say—well, I did say it. I disagree with you.

On Shebaa Farms, I think if the game is creating an environment in which Hizballah can move toward giving up its role as the resistance and subordinating itself to a Lebanese state and fulfilling 1559, that addressing their *raison d'etre* which is Shebaa Farms and the Seven Villages is going to be essential. I don't see a way to finesse that without addressing the issue.

It strikes me that that is not an insolvable problem. In a Mideast where there are problems that really look like they are impossible, that is not an impossible one, but I think everything depends on the kind of dialogue that is going on quietly with Hizballah, with Nasrallah in particular, to see whether the other pieces of this puzzle can begin to move.

MR. INDYK: I agree with you on the problem of Shebaa Farms is not an insolvable problem, but I think that if you read carefully what Hizballah is saying publicly, you see that they understand that it is not an insolvable problem, too. So now they are shifting their rationale from Shebaa Farms to their role as deterrent of Israel, a much broader principle of resistance that they are trying to establish for themselves. So I am not sure that it will solve the problem.

MR. IGNATIUS: Just to respond, I don't think over the long run that that will work because I don't think that their constituents are going to buy it. I think

that if the prop for the resistance role falls away, I think it will possible to force them to change.

MR. LEVERETT: I just wanted to comment about my advocacy of additional engagement and its creating light at the end of the tunnel for a state like Syria.

My argument for that is basically an argument in terms of what is going to achieve U.S. policy objectives more effectively and more efficiently. We could, if we wanted, pursue a campaign, of course, of regime change against the Syrian regime. What is that going to achieve?

I think that the most likely alternative to this regime in Syria today, it is a society that is at least as complicated as Iraqi society, and if you knock off this regime, you are going to get the same kind of chaos. If there is not a U.S.-occupying force, you are going to have probably even higher levels of violence proportionately than you are seeing in Iraq, a real potential for inter-sectarian violence.

Whatever political order emerges out of that chaos, I think is probably going to be heavily Islamist in character. I don't see why that scenario serves U.S. interest. I don't see why it serves our interest in terms of what is going on in Syria, and considering the repercussions of that scenario in the rest of the region, I don't see that as in our interest.

I think we have a discrete set of very powerful bilateral disagreements with Syria, and I think we could resolve those problems through a strategy of conditional engagement. If that requires, as part of that strategy, creating a light at the

end of the tunnel, I think that is smart foreign policy. That is why I argued for that course with Syria. That is why I would also make that general argument toward Iraq.

MR. INDYK: I am going to take two more questions. Ted Kattouf [ph], down in the back, please.

PARTICIPANT: The Ta'if Agreement was endorsed by Europeans, I think the UN, the U.S., virtually all major Lebanese parties with the exception of General Aoun, who likes to remind everybody of that.

I don't disagree with the comments that David Ignatius made that Lebanese politics are essentially sectarian and get used to it, that is the way it is, but Ta'if did call for some reforms that would over time deconfessionalize some aspects of Lebanese policy.

Nobody has been entirely comfortable with all of Ta'if. Every party would like to pick and choose, cafeteria style, from Ta'if, but do you have any sense that Ta'if is still alive and, that once a government is formed, there might be some attempts to try to reform the Lebanese political system through Ta'if?

MR. IGNATIUS: Everybody that I talked to at any length, Ted, mentions Ta'if and the Ta'if issue as being on the agenda of the new government, and yet, it is one that once you open it, you open all of the most difficult and threatening issues for Lebanese.

I feel as if the issue is in large part whether a political role for Hizballah can be found and will draw Hizballah and its constituency into the political process, and that is certainly one big post-Ta'if issue, what about the Shiites in Lebanon.

I think Christians are upset about all kinds of things. I think that is one reason why I am not as worried as some by General Aoun's dominant role as a representative of the Christians because he will reassure people in a period of anxiety, post-Ta'if reexamination of Ta'if anxiety about the Christian community. Having the patriarch such a strong political figure obviously is also going to be crucial, but my guess is that people talk about this being on the agenda, but they will defer it for a good long while. That is one I think you can defer, unlike the question of disarming Hizballah.

MR. INDYK: Flynt?

MR. LEVERETT: I wanted to say I think that there is a link between the issue of disarmament and deconfessionalization, and it is one of the reasons that I think disarmament of Hizballah is not going to happen any time in the foreseeable future.

Hizballah has a trump card to play on that one, and it is the deconfessionalization issue. It is clearly the Shia who are the most disadvantaged in the current distribution of political power assets along sectarian lines. They are the ones whose representation is most out of whack with democratic reality, and if anybody has any illusions that they are going to be able to leverage or push Hizballah on disarmament, I think Hizballah has a "Get Out of Jail Free" card on this one, and it is the deconfessionalization card.

If there are people in the opposition who want to push on Hizballah over disarmament, Hizballah can push back. You want to implement Ta'if? Fine. Let's implement all of Ta'if. Let's have one man one vote, and I think it is the people in the

opposition, constituencies in the opposition, who are going to be much more threatened by that approach than anybody else.

I think it is going to produce internal stasis in Lebanon on the disarmament issue, and there is going to be no one there who is really willing to force the issue.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you. My name is [inaudible].

The UN Security Council passed a resolution and called on Syria to withdraw its troops out of Lebanon. Separately, U.S. Congress passed the Syria Accountability Act, and now Syrian troops are out of Lebanon.

My question is when Bashar Asad raised his voice and started his own campaign probably in concert with Jacques Chirac to call on Israel to follow even the Security Council resolution and withdraw its troops out of Golan Heights, and B, the second part of the question is when will the U.S. Congress enact Israel Accountability Act?

[Laughter.]

MR. IGNATIUS: Well, look, I think the Syrians are already saying—I mean, I have heard Ambassador Mustapha say, I have heard other Syrian officials say, "Look, we are complying with the UN Security Council resolutions that apply to us. We are moving our occupying troops from a foreign country. Wouldn't it be great if the United States and Israel applied the same standards to their own behavior?" It is a nice rhetorical line in a speech. It is not going to have any impact on reality.

The Syria Accountability Act calls on Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, but it also calls on Syria to do a lot of other things that Syria hasn't done, and I don't really anticipate any significant movement in U.S. law or U.S. policy on that front.

It is a nice rhetorical line, but it doesn't have any impact in the real world.

MR. INDYK: On the question of Security Council resolutions, though, I can just report from my own experience that Israel did offer to formally offer to withdraw fully from the Golan Heights, three times formally and once informally to the Syrian government. So it was prepared to implement Resolution 242.

MR. LEVERETT: Including the eastern shore of the lake?

[Laughter.]

MR. INDYK: That was negotiable. Of course, that is a question of interpretation of 242.

Gary Mitchell has the last question.

PARTICIPANT: Thank you. Gary Mitchell from the Mitchell Report.

Earlier in the spring, Fouad Ajami had an article in Foreign Affairs magazine which I think it is fair to say characterized Syria essentially as a pariah state, describes them as virtually alone in the world, no friends, no allies in the region or elsewhere.

My questions are, A, does that strike you as an accurate characterization? B, if not, where would you differ with that characterization, and do you see signs that—and this is in light of what you said earlier—do you see signs that Bashar is, A, aware of that and, B, making some movement to change that perspective?

MR. LEVERETT: I think I would disagree with a sweeping characterization that Syria is internationally isolated on the scale of something like North Korea. I think that is simply not an accurate characterization.

There are some important relationships that Syria has which even at the worst of things in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination remained vital. Syrian-Turkish relations have turned up dramatically under Bashar al-Asad, and I think that relationship continues to be in good shape, somewhat to the consternation of the Bush administration.

Just as Lebanon provided the occasion for the U.S. and France to find an issue on which they could cooperate, I think Lebanon has also provided an issue on which Syria and Iran have increased their strategic cooperation, which was in some degree of difficulty after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

I also think that obviously Syrian relations with Europe took a hit over Lebanon. Syrian relations with some of its fellow Arab states took a hit over Lebanon, but I don't think that amounts to a permanent isolation, and I think that now that Syria has withdrawn its troops from Lebanon, as I said, I think they are going to make a serious effort to repair relations with Arab states, and I think David is right, starting with Iraq. And they are going to make a serious effort to build on their relations with Europe and try and separate Europe from the United States on broad questions of Syrian policy.

We will see whether they can succeed or not, but I think you are right. The characterization of Syria's international isolation in the Ajami piece is, to my mind, a little bit overdrawn.

MR. INDYK: David, do you want the last word on anything?

MR. IGNATIUS: I will just close by saying that they are not a North Korea, but they sure feel isolated to me.

Syria is so poor, and I think the way I would close is to say that I don't think the Syrian—the Damascene business elite, the ordinary Syrian is going to put up with a situation in which their isolation keeps them in this backward state. So I think they are going to have to do something.

I think there is a lot of pent-up investment demand that is there. I talked to very wealthy Syrians who have lots of money that they would be putting into play if they felt more confident about the situation.

So that is the challenge, and that is why I think at some point, some government headed by somebody is going to take advantage of it.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. Thank you very much, David, for joining us today and sharing your insights. Thank you to Flynt for his observations and analysis, too.

In case you didn't hear him, copies of Flynt's book are available at the book store.

MR. LEVERETT: At the book store.

[Laughter.]

MR. INDYK: Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

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