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# IRAN AND SYRIA: A TALE OF TWO CRISES

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**Introduction and Moderator:**

KENNETH M. POLLACK
Senior Fellow and Director, Saban Center for Middle East Policy
The Brookings Institution

**Panelists:**

MICHAEL DORAN
Senior Fellow
The Brookings Institution

SUZANNE MALONEY
Senior Fellow
The Brookings Institution

ANDREW TABLER
Next Generation Fellow
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. POLLACK: Welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. I am Ken Pollack, the director of the Center. Thank you for joining us this morning.

First, a couple of points of order, if everyone could please set their cell phones to stun, so that we're not constantly interrupted by ringtones.

Second, we are on the record this morning, and we're going to be discussing the two crises. The kind of immediate, obvious, kind of very tangible crisis of Syria within the larger issue of Iran, which in some ways lies behind a whole variety of other issues in the Middle East, but is in and of itself its own set of issues.

It's not necessarily our point to suggest that these two things are inextricably intertwined. But nevertheless, I think during the course of our conversation this morning, we're going to get into some of the ways that these two crises are linked in different ways.

And, of course, one of the big question marks out there is, just how much are these two things linked? How much should we see them as being part of the same set of phenomenon? Again, something that we hope to explore this morning. I'm joined by a terrific panel. I'm not going to go into lengthy introductions. You should all have their

introductions out there, so their bios out there. In addition, it's all on the web and I think you know all of these people. They are well-known Washington experts.

To my immediate left is Suzanne Maloney, a senior fellow at the Saban Center. To my immediate right is Andrew Tabler of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Andrew, I should also point out, is the author on a phenomenal book on Syria called, *In the Lion's Den,* which for my money is really the best thing out there right now on Syria and understanding the Syrian regime.

So for those of you who are scrambling around desperately trying to understand a little bit more about this regime and what makes it tick, I really could not think of a better resource than Andrew's book. And then finally, to my far right is Michael Doran, also a senior fellow at the Saban Center.

I want to start by talking a little bit about Syria. It's been in the news a great deal, there are some very immediate issues on the table, and I thought that we would build from the kind of very specific question of Syria into the more generalized question of Iran.

Which, as I said, has both its direct specific elements and then it's kind of broader issues tied up with America and its role in the Middle East, and Iran in its role in the Middle East, and this wider sense

of, you know, is there this chess game going on between the Americans and the Iranians. A struggle for the Middle East itself. So we'll start with Syria. And I'm going to start with Andrew, because I want to start by talking a little bit about what's going on inside Syria.

Obviously, we're reading a lot in the newspapers and we're getting flashes here and there, but I think one of the hardest things for Americans to get a grip on, and especially when we try to start coming to these much more difficult questions about what it is that the United States and other countries ought to be doing about what's going on in Syria. Something I'm going to pose to Mike.

I think the place that we really need to start, the thing that we're all searching for and having a great deal of difficulty really getting our hands around, is this question of really what is going on inside of Syria right now, and what should we be looking for? So, Andrew, let me start with you, and if you don't mind, let me put that question to you.

Help us to understand a little bit. What's going on in Syria right now? What are the big factors? Help us to make sense of this. And also, help us to think about what this is likely to look like in the near future. I mean, where are things headed? What are the different scenarios that we ought to be thinking about?

MR. TABLER: Well thank you, Ken, very much for the

invitation. And thanks to Brookings for hosting this. It's always a pleasure to be on a panel with people that know what they're talking about, and follow what's going on. And the reason why it is indeed, hard to sort your way through all the information that's coming out on Syria, a very good friend of mine in government says that it's akin to drinking out of a fire hose.

And it has increasingly become so, especially at times when there are crises about -- concerning the situation in Syria as well as what U.S. policy towards Syria should be. And we're in the middle of one of these crises. The previous major crises occurred last July and August. Ahead of which -- that crisis was generally generated by a sharp uptake in deaths on the ground.

As many of you know, if not most everyone in the audience, President Assad has been deploying what they now formally call a security solution to put down the uprising inside of Syria which has gone on now for almost 11 months. It involves the use of live fire, the use of Shabiha militias, which are minority based militias that report to a number of figures around the Assad family; they're used to terrorize populations, also to chase the U.S. Ambassador in Syria and other people.

And overall, last summer, the death tolls began to spike. And there was very good story in *Foreign Policy* a few days ago by David

Kenner which tracks this, and you can see per month what the death tolls were. And as of last July, before our decision that President Assad had to step aside, death tolls were reaching about 600-650 per month.

Since that announcement by President Obama in the summer, the situation in Syria -- for a while it settled out a bit, and then it began to get much worse. Why? Well, a couple of reasons. One, President Assad's approach to dealing with the crisis did not fundamentally change.

The security solution was maintained. There was some lip service paid to a series of reforms in the country and they've been outlined by President Assad in a number of speeches which you can find online which involve a committee to revise the Constitution. Also, then, a referendum on that new Constitution and then parliamentary -- free and fair parliamentary elections inside of Syria.

Unfortunately, because President Assad continues to try and chew his way out of this crisis, Syrian people are not buying it and they continue to come out in the street. Also, they probably know that Syria is not a parliamentary system, it's a presidential system. So, you know, these are really cosmetic changes. It's far too little and far too late.

The protest movement overall, which has continued to come out, is beginning to organize on the ground with local committees. And

they are increasingly calling for international intervention. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean military intervention, but they are asking for international protection increasingly.

And why is this? Because they continue to face live fire. In response to that, they continue to come out into the streets, but they began to realize that there was not a light at the end of this tunnel. That the protests were continuing, but that there wasn't really a clear strategy about how those protests would dislodge the Assad regime.

It's constructed in a very different way than in Egypt, where you have the minority nature of the regime means that the generals and the security services and the army are, you know, reporting directly to the Assad family. And it's very unlikely that they would break away as a (inaudible) body and oust the ruling family inside of Syria.

What happened is that the protestors tired of getting shot and facing this kind of live fire and also sweeping arrests, began to have a relationship with a group which once it was dismissed as an internet phenomenon, and it's called the Free Syrian Army. Now, the Free Syrian Army is not one organized group or an organized insurgency per se.

It is primarily made up of -- the first branch which was formed in the summer, was made up of defectors. The leadership, so to speak, and what there is of it, is in Turkey with Colonel Riad al-Assad.

And as the regime began to deploy more forces to put down the protests and to get people to go home, more defectors broke away. But then another variant of the Free Syrian Army or groups that called themselves the Free Syrian Army, began to appear and they're what are referred to in diplomatic circles as local boys, civil defense units.

It is a situation where you have these groups which call themselves the Free Syrian Army, but don't necessarily report to any kind of organized command. They have come out to protect the protestors and to carve out civil space in which people can protest. So what does that really mean?

Well it means taking out snipers. It means chasing back security agents. And you can see some of their activities online. And this has -- this means that beside the peaceful protest movement, which has been the majority of the opposition, you have this new armed branch, which doesn't necessarily compete with it but somehow protects it.

And they work in a symbiotic relationship with each other. The Assad regime -- more and more areas of the country then began to adopt this model and the control of the state has waned. And in the middle of all this came the Arab League observers, about which we can talk about a little bit later. But during that time, the Syrian protestors were also emboldened, they came out.

That hasn't gone as well as we had hoped, but at the moment President Assad is now trying to re-assert his control in a lot of these areas where power has slipped out of his hands. And that's what's driving up the death tolls now, where you have something like 100 a day. So just to, again, refer you to the FP story, now we're talking about a death toll of about around 1,100-1,200 per month.

So this crisis is not getting better. And to our great frustration, and I think you've been watching what's going on in New York, both sanctions and diplomacy have not reversed President Assad's course. He continues to use the security solution. The Arab League has put forward a transition plan in the last few days, which outlines a dialog with the opposition within two weeks.

President Assad then organizing -- well, helping to organize a national unity government within two months. President Assad giving power over to his deputy and then eventually holding free and fair elections. President Assad is not having any of it.

And currently in New York they're working on a resolution and there's a draft actually, which has been leaked out this morning which compared with that which we had a couple of days ago, is significantly scaled back both in terms of being as explicit with what the Arab deal entails, also in terms of paying it forward with the Russians in terms of

making a military option and taking it completely off the table. And also, and I think this is also controversial; it has taken all references to sanctions, which was in the original draft, off the table as well. And there's a lot of diplomatic maneuvering going on at the moment there.

MR. POLLACK: Andrew, you put a lot of really interesting and important stuff on the table. One thing that really leapt out at me that was kind of, you know, embedded in something that you said and then you moved on from it, was this point that you think it unlikely that the Alawite community will ever abandon this regime.

That they'll go gently into that good night, which seems to suggest that a peaceful solution to this situation is going to be hard. And I'd like to put that to you in the form of a question. Can you imagine, realistically, a peaceful solution? You know, is an Egypt outcome or, you know, Shah leaving Iran outcome -- you know, is there a peaceful outcome out there? And if not, what are we looking at for the different alternatives?

MR. TABLER: Yeah, it's possible but again, I'm very hesitant to go -- I think our -- in terms of Western or even in many cases Arab, our penetration into those circles of the regime is very limited. I think at a certain point this does get into the realm of the Alawites' overall survival on a post outside Syria, I think there are a lot of concerns about

that. Many people are saying yes, if we get a resolution, even a watered-down one at the U.N. that will send a signal to these circles inside of the regime that it's time to get rid of Assad and his family and you'll have some sort of, you know, transition. He'll go to the Emirates or whatever.

I don't know. You know, there's this saying in Syria: those who know don't speak, and those who speak don't know. I would not bet the farm on that, and it is possible that we're going to have to work this from the edges. The scenarios are: Bashar is ousted by the Alawites around the regime -- and I think here we're talking mostly about Alawites, not only -- and that group would hopefully cut some sort of deal with various Sunni forces in the country. Then there is the alternative where Bashar, I think, and this is what we're looking at, at the moment, he holds on. And what that means, people often ask me: Andrew, how long is Assad going to hold on inside of Syria? Well it depends on what holding on means, right?

I mean, it could be very much like Algeria, where you have the government having control of populated areas or certain centers by day, and by night, not. You could have also, for example, according to a lot of discussions I've had just in the last few days, there are large parts for example, of Idlib Province which are just outside of state control, which

gets us into a discussion.

And that's where the discussions coming out of Turkey concerning humanitarian buffer zone or a corridor become interesting, because you have similar situations, I'm not an expert on Bosnia but I do know that there are enough parallels that if you have areas which are liberated, so to speak, or even for a period of time, and then you have the regime playing whack-a-mole and trying to reassert themselves, this can generate the kind of death tolls that can garner an international intervention.

And that's something which is possible from the Turkish side, but I think it's pretty early to talk about that.

MR. POLLACK: Fair enough. And one last question before I turn it to Mike and this is actually a good segue to Mike, which is, mention the Arab monitors. And I think there's a question going forward as to what role they can play. Let me hold off on that and I'll pose that to Mike.

But the question that I have for you is what was the regime's thinking in allowing them in? I mean that to me was one of the most puzzling aspects of all of this, given that they weren't planning on just kind of going home and making peace, given that they all always were planning to continue to use force to hold power. Why let these guys in?

MR. TABLER: I think they -- were there various reasons, they were under a lot of pressure to do so. I think also that the Assad regime often times thinks that it can cut political deals. It has cut political deals with the United States over the years in which we have a deal with them and then we pretend that there isn't a problem on another track. The Assad regime trades like this all of the time.

So I think that they thought that somehow they would manage it, that that would then show the situation on the ground that other Arab countries would call it something akin to a civil war or something thereof and keep their hands off of it. But of course that didn't happen because the Assad regime could not implement the agreement that the Arab League had put forward.

The Arab League was quite -- especially the Ministerial Committee -- was quite adamant about, and politically came out, after the report. And very interesting; right after the report was issued, you have the Qataris, the Saudis, and a number of other parties being very hard on the regime.

At the same time, Syrian State News Agency puts out communiqués saying, no, no, no, look at the actual text of the report by Dhabi and it's actually very fair. So they thought that somehow that based on this text that they would be able to convince people to stay out of the

country. Of course, the opposite has occurred and those of you that watch the U.N. session the other day, had a sort of full episode of where everyone's arguments are at the moment.

MR. POLLACK: That's great. Thank you, Andrew. Mike, let's bring you in and I'd love it if you could help us to kind of think a little bit about Syria in a regional and an international context. You know, what's out there in terms of what the international community is thinking about, different aspects of it, and what could be done, what should be done about it?

MR. DORAN: Let me answer that by talking about two players. I think there are many out there but there are two I think that are crucial, with respect to what the United States is going to do and that's the U.S. perception and the Turkish perception actually.

Let's start with the Turks. And I emphasize them because if there's to be -- I think Andrew did a great job of describing the stalemate, the very, very slow motion collapse of the outside regime, but also the chance that it may yet even hang on. And so if the international community is going to step in and intervene, it's going to be through Turkey.

Any intervention is really an invitation for some kind of Turkish-Syrian conflict. And the Turks have shown all throughout this

conflict that they are extremely hesitant to do anything that would require intervention and that's even steps that, you know, you might call soft intervention, like a humanitarian corridor or a no fly zone or anything of that sort.

And I think there are several reasons why the Turks are hesitant. One is they are concerned about the Kurdish question, they're concerned about refugees, they're concerned about having massive disruption on their border, they're concerned about getting involved in something that is extremely open-ended.

There's another side to this as well and that is that the crisis in Syria was something of a policy defeat for the -- or a policy embarrassment -- for the Erdoğan government because they had no problems with neighbors policy, which they touted as the platform on which Turkey was going to become an absolute major player throughout the region. No problems with neighbors, I mean no problems with Iran, no problems with Syria.

Syria was the flagship of that no problems with neighbors policy. But the problem with it was it was based ultimately on a misperception about the nature of Turkish-Arab relations and a kind of naïve pan-Islamism of the Erdogan government.

You can only have no problems with neighbors if the

neighbors don't have any problems with each other. The minute the neighbors are at war with each other then you have to choose sides. Am I with the Assad government, or am I with the opposition? If I'm with the Assad government, then the opposition hates me. If I'm with the opposition, then the government hates me. If I go with the opposition and the government hates me, then uh-oh, I also have a problem with Iran, because Iran and Syria are allies.

So there has been a desire after they announced this policy, and with much fanfare and pursued it for a few years, that they were very embarrassed by the uprising in Syria. It was kind of doubly embarrassing because Assad did what Assad always does; he made lots of promises and then didn't deliver. So Davutoglu went to Damascus; I don't know how many times, 60 something.

SPEAKER: Quite (inaudible)

MR. DORAN: I mean an enormous -- don't quote me on the number -- an enormous number of times -- came back many times and said, you know, I have the agreement and then the Assad kept shooting at civilians. So they were embarrassed and they had to recalibrate, and they recalibrated it by cutting it down the middle, right. They came out in favor of regime lead reform.

So they're having it both ways: continuing to support the

opposition, continuing to have a role for the regime, and having a role for the regime means they can keep better relations with the Iranians.

We, for most of this crisis, I think have been following the Turks and continue to look to them. We're very hesitant to make any demands on anybody in the international community that's going to involve Turkey in a way that Turkey doesn't want to be involved.

Now over time, like everybody else, they've become increasingly hostile to Assad and disappointed with him. But still, despite the fact that they have lost all faith in Assad, there's this deep reluctance to do anything. And so that's a problem that the United States has.

Now, then looking at it from the American point of view, I have to say that I don't understand the frame in which the Obama Administration is reading Syria. Let me explain the frame in which I read it and then from there say that I think there are a couple of options for understanding the Obama Administration.

When I look at it, I don't think of Syria in isolation as the Syrian problem. I see it as part of a complex of problems, that at the top of which is Iran and I look at it and I see toppling Assad is the right thing to do from a human rights and humanitarian point of view, but it's a right thing to do from a U.S. National Security point of view because it weakens Iran and it takes the most significant ally of Iran away from it and it cuts

the line that Iran has to Hezbollah.

And so for me, our values, our humanitarian values, our concern for democracy, and our national security interests all point in one direction. So the vector is very clear. When I listen to the Obama Administration's statements, when I talk to people in the government, I don't understand how they're reading it. Sometimes they say yes, that is how we're reading it, but then you look at what they're doing and they're not doing a lot.

Even now, I mean we've got very nice statements of concern from the Secretary of State up at the U.N. debate, but very little with regard to, well, what's the United States going to do when the Assad regime doesn't comply with whatever resolution comes out? And as Andrew told us, the resolution that we're going to get in the end is going to be pretty mild, it's not going to put that much more pressure on the Assad regime, and so the question always remains, well what are we going to do?

And the message there, the sense that one gets here is that like the Turks, we don't want to do anything. It's in the too hard category. And my question is why is it in the too hard category? And I think that there are possibly two answers. One is they don't really see it as I do. That is, that all of the vectors aim toward toppling the Assad regime.

They're not really reading it as an important strategic play against Iran.

The other answer is that they think that they can get the result that they want without doing much; that the fall of Assad is inevitable and if we just continue to keep up the diplomatic pressure, put pressure on the Arab League to do something, that through masterful inaction we'll get the exact same result we would have through some kind of intervention, but without all of the costs, diplomatic, the domestic political diplomatic, in terms of resources and so on that an actual intervention would entail.

That seems to me to be the most serious argument for what they're not doing; that it's masterful inaction. I personally don't agree with it because I don't think we can be sure that we're going to get the result that we want by taking this kind of hands off approach and putting the Arab League forward. It's clear, from what Andrew said, the Arab League is not going to bring Assad down. He's going to continue to say no.

If Assad falls it's going to be because of internal dynamics in Syria. So that, I think, is very clear. And he might yet hang on. If he doesn't hang on, we still have another problem from a strategic point of view, as I think Andrew described very well, Syria might turn into something like Lebanon, where you've got to kind of a cantonization.

Even if the regime goes down, the Alawites are a compact minority up in the northwest, we could still have pockets of the old Assad

Security Network operating in Syria, much like Hezbollah operates in Lebanon.

So to put it this way, how is Tehran reading this? Tehran is seeing the same picture we are and Tehran may well be saying, you know what, our boy is going down. So what is our plan B? How are we going to keep our strategic link to Hezbollah in the new Syria? And my view is we should be very concerned about that.

We should be concerned about democracy in Syria, but we should also be concerned, ultimately, from a security point of view of severing the Iranian tie through Syria to Lebanon. And we can only do that if we're in the game. Masterful inaction won't ensure that we get that.

MR. POLLACK: Thanks Mike; both informative and obviously very provocative. Let me push the elephant in the living room to the side for just a minute. We'll come to that in just a second. But first I wanted to get this point that you put on the table, which Andrew has also kind of hinted at, which is this question of the Arab League and what's possible.

I mean can you imagine, is there a scenario out there where you could imagine either the United States or Europe or other groups of players injecting some, you know, greater power, some greater efficacy into the Arab League? Is there any potential Arab League solution out

there or could the Arab League be part of another solution?

MR. DORAN: I think the Arab League is very useful in terms of getting international legitimacy, for putting a spotlight on the Assad regime. I mean all of the harassment of the Arab League mission by the regime did a lot I think to publicize just how despicable the regime is and what the situation is like on the ground. So it has political value, it has value at the United Nations for pushing the issue along.

But in terms of changing the power calculus of Assad, it's not a great vehicle. So if our goal in the end is to change Assad's power calculus, then we need to come up with a different vehicle.

MR. POLLACK: Andrew, is that your sense as well or --

MR. TABLER: I think the problem, I mean at the moment, the way the Arab League Ministerial Committee is constructed politically, it works great. I mean the Qataris, the Saudis -- been right out there.

Now in March, who heads the Arab League Ministerial Committee? The Iraqis. That is going to get you into a different area all together, okay. And that's with the problem with the draft that's apparently being talked about in New York. It makes the Arab League deal less explicit. It's not actually fully laid out in the draft as it's apparently being discussed. It was a few days ago.

So with that, then all of a sudden it becomes -- it makes it

less explicit, therefore, kicking it to the Arab League. If the Iraqis then take over in the Arab League, you can see a shift. There are different axes within the Arab League on how to deal with this.

You have the Lebanese, the Iraqis, the Sudanese, and the Algerians, who are very much different in their positions than the Qataris, the Saudis, and even to a certain extent the Egyptians, and the Tunisians, and Libyans. So that's a danger.

And I think that's one of these things that, you know, Mike, again, one of the downsides of leading from behind is you don't have control over a lot of the outcomes as you would like; you're less explicit, and by doing that you allow other people to serve their agendas and it becomes more complicated.

I'm not saying -- I think the Arab League plays a tremendous role, I think they've done a great job thus far, but there are a lot of question marks that specifically concern the current draft being debated. I'm not sure how that's going to put us into the kind of dilemma where he has to really choose.

MR. POLLACK: All right, Mike, let me come back to you and let's talk about this big thing that you've now put on the table. You kind of used the phrase "toppling the regime," three little words that could translate into a very big effort. What do you mean by "toppling the regime?" You know,

we've seen at least two models of regime change in the last 10 years, or three: the Afghan model, the Iraq model and now the Libya model. Is that what you have in mind for Syria? Is it going to be something different? What do you envision for toppling the regime?

MR. DORAN: I'm glad you asked that because I realize there's a -- I left out a little piece of the logic here, and the logic is this: that this crisis is not going to go away until the regime goes away. And I don't want to put words in Andrew's mouth, but that's what I thought Andrew's analysis said.

I mean this regime is basically -- it's a family-based regime with a family and an ethnic community in the end. I'm not saying that Assad represents all of the Alawites, but the key members holding the levers of hard power are Alawites and then tied to the family in some way. And the entire economy and the political system are in the grip of the family. So reform of whatever nature, you can come up with whatever scenario you want, but the minute you say reform, you're talking about regime change, even if you don't use that word. And that's why the Assad regime has done what it -- has been remarkably recalcitrant, remarkably unwilling to contemplate any kind of serious reform.

So we're not going to see reform, that is not on the table. So we either have continuing civil war, a collapse of the regime, or regime

change. Those I see as the only options.

Am I saying that we need to send in U.S. troops? No. I mean I think that's off the table. But I think the Libyan model would be a model. Or just recognizing that that is the reality, recognizing that it's in our strategic interest to see a new Syria, it's in a humanitarian interest to see a new Syria, and to do everything possible to change the calculus at the top and to strengthen the forces on the ground.

MR. POLLACK: Maybe we'll come back to some Q&A. I'm sure some of the audience may have some questions, as well. I will simply say for my part, I'm somebody who's been deeply torn about Syria. On the one hand, I'm one of these liberal interventions guys, and, you know, my heart bleeds for the people of Syria. On the other hand, as an old military analyst, I'm very skeptical that the Libya model works in Syria. I mean there are just some fundamental geographic and military differences. Maybe we can get to that in the Q&A. It'll be a good subject for that.

In the meantime, let's turn our attention a little bit further east. Ron's name has been invoked several times. As it always is, and I think that it is worth talking a little bit about what's going on in Iran itself because it does get linked with so many of these other issues, and because it is clear that we have a problem with Iran all by itself, even if the

rest of the Middle East were completely quiescent.

And I'd like to start by turning to Suzanne and just asking her to kind of do the same thing I asked Andrew to do with Syria. Because as always with these countries, it's critical that I think we get some feel for what's really going on inside the country. So, Suzanne, help us, you know, give us a little bit of, you know, a map. What's the lay of the land look like in Iran right now? And how are they looking at the world, which I think is one of the most important issues that's not often very hard for us, but that we often ignore to our own peril.

MS. MALONEY: Well, I've been listening to the discussion with great interest, and I am not going to take the bait, as Ken advised me not to do. But Mike put out there -- Mike and I have an ongoing sort of debate out the centrality of Iran to U.S. Middle East policy and the way that we go about solving our various problems. But I think it's important, as Ken said, to look at Iran as a problem that is distinct. There's obviously a number of points of interconnection between Iran and Syria and some of the other crises and difficulties that we face within the region.

But precisely as Ken said, irrespective of everything else that's happening today in the Middle East, if we were looking at Iran solely, we would still have I think a foreign policy crisis on our hands.

If 2011 was the year of Arab transformation and the year in

which the Arab world dominated our attention in terms of foreign policy concerns, 2012 is certainly shaping up to be the year of Iran. And that is, to some extent, predictable in the sense that it is an election year and Iran has a special residence in the American political debate.

But it's also a function I think of the fact that now three odd years have passed, the Obama Administration's efforts to deal with the Iran nuclear issue and the other problems that we face with respect to Iran. And there is a growing sense of frustration certainly here in Washington, and perhaps more acutely in Israel, about the level of success that we've had in altering the fundamental strategic choices of the Iranian regime. And so you saw really as the year began a dramatic escalation in what were already some of the toughest sanctions that Iran has faced in its 33-year history since the revolution in 1979. We have been quite successful over the course of the past decade I think in making U.S. sanctions newly relevant, in having real impact on the Iranian economy.

But the sense of frustration that ultimately the nuclear program remained unimpacted at least in large way by the sanctions themselves, that the regime was refusing to concede, refusing to come to the table in a significant and serious way gave forth I think the sense of newfound urgency on Iran, that and some of the revelations, both the IAEA

revelations about the state of Iran's inquiries into military technologies, and, of course, the announcement of the indictment of Iranians in a conspiracy to assassinate the Saudi ambassador here in Washington, led to a situation toward the end of 2011 with really a lot of hype and a lot of excitement certainly in Capitol Hill to move forward with new measures.

The Obama Administration was, in fact, inclined to continue a kind of incremental ratcheting of sanctions, but thanks to one of the most universal votes that we've seen on a divided Capitol Hill in several years, the administration was really forced to move forward with the decision to sanction the Central Bank. And following in the wake of that, the European Union has now, of course, instituted an embargo or a boycott of Iranian crude oil imports which will force Iran to find new markets for about 18 percent of the oil that it exports on any given day.

Both of these measures are incredibly severe. If they were fully enforced and fully adhered to by the international community, really make it effectively impossible for foreign governments to purchase Iranian crude or to have any direct feelings with the Iranian government in any way.

Both of these measures have an effectively six-month grace period, and so there's at this point a lot of uncertainty as to exactly how they will play out, to what extent waivers, or there will be a policy of

looking the other way in order to avoid the most dramatic impacts on oil markets.

But for the Iranian leadership and I think the Iranian regime, or the Iranian public, these new measures really came as something of a shock, and a dramatic sense of urgency was felt into Iran as a result. You saw in the early days the flight of the Iranian rial, it's now lost about half of its value in the span of less than a month as Iranians rush to black market when it's open in order to gain some access to stabile forms of wealth. And you saw the Iranian regime react in ways that I think were entirely predictable. If you've watched the way that this leadership has reacted to sanctions over the years, it's kind of a multifaceted approach to dealing with sanctions.

The first is to lash out. Iranian leadership right now, particularly this component of the leadership that dominates the political spectrum right now in Tehran, really believes that the best defense is a good offense. And so the threats to close the Strait of Hormuz, the posturing that we've seen, and, of course, the corresponding announcement here in Washington that we may now be facing a situation in which Iran may strike directly at the homeland gives some indication of what it is the depth of the anger and the sense that the Iranians have that they need to project an assertive response rather than a compliant

response.

The second phase of this Iranian or the second dimension of this Iranian response to sanctions has been denial. And you find this not even just from the hard-line Ahmadinejad crowd, but even from those more pragmatic elements of the regime who typically don't have as great an influence today as they had prior to the 2009 election protest.

But there are many Iranians who believe, you know, we've ridden out sanctions now for three decades, you've thrown your worst as us, we've had oil prices sink to less than $10 a barrel, we've dealt with revenues that were less than a tenth of what we took in from oil exports in the course of the recent years, we can live with this. And moreover, we see that you're hurting. We see a west that is potentially in decline, a Europe caught in a debt crisis, America -- the Iranians spent a lot of time on the Occupy Wall Street Movement. But in America, that is itself besieged by economic concerns, and class differences, and a deep splintering of its own political sphere.

And so there is the sense from the Iranians that, in fact, either the sanctions won't be as fiercely implemented or as strictly implemented as some might suggest, or that the concerns about the impact, concerns about rising gasoline prices are going to sort of create a kind of self-censorship on the part of the West, whereby there will be a

blind eye turned toward expanded purchases of Iranian crude from a variety of different sources.

The third dimension of the Iranian response is retaliation. And I think that, you know, the bluster, the lashing out that we saw in the very beginning is only the beginning of it. We're going to see retaliation. My best guess for where that retaliation will be focused will be in the immediate neighborhood. The Iranians see themselves under siege. They believe that they are now, you know, facing economic warfare from Washington, and they have long believed that this administration, that this government is looking to unseat the regime and will never be satisfied until the Islamic Republic is removed.

And so as a result, they're going to try to strike back. And I would suspect that they will look to do so particularly in Iraq, where there is a certain degree of Iranian supremacy, but also a certain utility with respect to oil markets and future production.

Just finally, the last element of the Iranian response is going to be a relatively pragmatic one. They're going to look to try to preserve their economy to the extent that they can. They're going to look to find ways to get the barrels out there. And frankly, if they're willing to accept a discount, I've heard estimated as low as ten percent, as high as 20 or 30 percent, that oil is going to flow. They will find buyers in this market. With

that, let me turn it back to Ken.

MR. POLLACK: Suzanne, that was a great overview. I think what's so nice about is was, you gave a sense of where the Iranians are going and also the internal dynamics that are driving it in this direction which is totally so important to understand what's underpinning it. I think it's also a great way of getting into what I think is the big question out there, which is what might cause the Iranians to change, what might cause them to change course, either in a direction that we would want or in an even worse direction from our perspective.

And I'm not going to ask you, you know, people like the four of us often get asked, you know, well, what are they going to do, what's, you know, what do you predict, and the truth is, that's a really unfair question because none of us know. And especially it's very difficult with the Iranians.

But I think what actually is very helpful for people to understand is to maybe unpack a little bit the things that you're going to be looking for, the things that are out there, the potential indicators and warning signs that, you know, if this happens, it may be a sign that they're moving in this direction, and at the same level, what are the things that you're going to be watching that you think do underpin this set of decisions, and so that if the Iranians come to different conclusions about

them, they might actually decide to change.

MS. MALONEY: You know, to start with where you started, I am exceptionally pessimistic that the measures that we've undertaken are going to help create a constructive platform for negotiations, I think. As I said, the Iranians see themselves under siege, and, you know, the attack on their central financial institutions, the statements by U.S. senators that were out to collapse the Iranian economy play directly into that paranoia.

And so, again, because their presumption is that they have to assert themselves whenever they're under attack, the last thing that they're likely to do is to come to the table and conciliate in a serious way.

I do think it's quite possible that we'll see a little bit of movement at the P5+1, the multilateral negotiations. The Iranians will look to play for time. They will try I think to demonstrate a little bit of receptivity perhaps to the sort of confidence building measures that a number of people proposed, looking at the 20 percent enrichment issue in particular, as a way to buy a little bit of goodwill with the Chinese, perhaps the most important economic actor for Iran today, and as a way to blunt any new pressures within the debate here to move toward kinetic action against Iran.

I think the Iranis feel a certain sense of invulnerability in the sense that they probably understand an administration that is not looking

to undertake strikes on the eve of a presidential election here, but they recognize the big, wild card out there is the Israelis, and what the Israelis are going to do remains I think a genuine point of concern for not simply the Iranians, but the broader international community. I think it has motivated much of what we've seen in terms of tougher measures.

So what I'll be looking for from Iran is, as I said, continued defiance, but it's an unpredictable country as we all know. Parliamentary elections are coming up. The outcomes of those elections, I think, are almost sure not to have an impact on Iranian decision making, but anytime you give Iranians an opportunity to voice their political sentiments, to go to the streets and to engage in a political process, it's a moment of vulnerability for this regime. And we saw in 2009 Iranians took advantage of that moment of vulnerability. And while clearly they are deeply intimidated by their own repressive forces, I think it's not inconceivable that we'll see new moments like that, new kind of cracks in the regime's ability to maintain control. And that's particularly true if we continue to see the currency slide.

MR. POLLACK: So I just want to push you on two specific issues that you touched on. The first is the issue of the oil sanctions; that is, what the administration, what the international community at large to a certain extent, is betting on. And you talked about how there's an

expectation among Iranians that the sanctions might not be enforced as much as people have suggested that they could be, and that they may not be really in it. Do you think that that's one where if the Iranians really saw that they were being enforced to the absolute maximum that that would fundamentally change their calculus?

MS. MALONEY: I think ultimately they have a calculation which is based on a belief that a president running for reelection can't afford to see the price of gas at the pump rise to $150 a barrel. And they recognize that they have some capacity to influence that and that full implementation of these sanctions in a way that's really disruptive to markets -- forcing or sanctioning Chinese companies, sanctioning Indian companies, going after the Turks and others, and really insisting that the Japanese, the South Koreans, and those countries that have indicated they want to be helpful but obviously have some economic constraints which may require them to continue to buy from Tehran -- that those sorts of measures would almost surely have a disruptive impact.

If, in fact, over the course of the next six months we find a way to encourage all of our allies to significantly diminish their purchases from Tehran -- from 20 to 40 to 60 percent in the case of our closest allies -- if we lean heavily on the Chinese to press for the largest discounts possible, I think we can have an impact on Iranian revenues, but I think

that they will continue to feel as though they can manage on even considerably less money coming in.

MR. POLLACK: And then last I want to push you on the opposite tack, which is -- this is always difficult. It's always very dangerous to try to put yourself in the shoes of an Iranian decision maker. But unfortunately, we don't have an Iranian decision maker here at the table, certainly not one who'd be willing to actually speak freely. So I've got to ask you the question, which is imagine that you were an Iranian decision maker. And let's imagine for a moment, since none us knows what the reality is, but let's imagine for a moment that the Iranians really were planning to kill Adel al-Jubeir, that they really were planning to blow up Café Milano with all that that entails. And let's imagine that you're an Iranian decision maker and you know that that's what you were planning to do and the Americans just caught you red-handed. And the administration has, in effect, done nothing about it. And by the way, I'm not suggesting that we should have gone to war with Iran over it, but I think that it is nevertheless important to think about how the Iranians may think about it. What do you think their reaction might be to that? I mean, how might they be using that to gauge where the Obama Administration's redlines are? Or do you think that they just felt like we dodged a bullet,

that's good, let's not go back to it? Or is it kind of an hmm, maybe we can push harder?

MS. MALONEY: I think what you get into is the difficulty in reinforcing the credibility of coercive deterrence with respect to Iran because of the lack of communication, because when we signal we often have to effectively overemphasize our point in order to ensure that it is fully understood. And so you see almost wild vacillation from the administration where senior officials talk about the disutility and the problems that would come from military strikes and men are forced to sort of go out publicly and ensure that it's clear that all options remain on the table.

The Iranians know that we can hurt them. We have made that clear in a number of different ways. And I think that the apparent communication that took place from the administration to Tehran, underscoring that any action, any move, to in any way impede travel through the Straits of Hormuz, would be seen as a redline, as crossing a U.S. redline, was important. I think the continued presence of battle groups in the Gulf is going to be very important. But again, it leads you to a situation where there is the potential for miscalculation where assertive Iranian counter responses are going to lead us into, I think, a very precarious rest of the year.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you. Okay, before I turn it over to questions, I wanted to make a couple of comments trying to kind of pull these two things together. And Mike keeps trying to encourage me to ask myself questions and maybe even jump from seat to seat as I ask and answer them. But I keep insisting that I'm perfectly good at making an idiot out of myself without pulling a stunt like that. But I do think it's worth thinking about some of the ways that these things are connected, and I want to toss out two, but I'm also going to invite any other additional comments from the panel that you guys would like to make as well.

But the first thing that strikes me -- and Andrew's comments really started to get at this and it's in my mind very important -- is that we have to recognize Syria is now in a state of civil war. We've seen these kinds of inter-communal civil wars before. We saw it, as he pointed out, in Bosnia. We've seen it in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Congo, in Afghanistan. We have a lot of history. We also have some actually quite good scholarly work on this. One of the big problems with inter-communal civil wars like these is that they spill over, and we're already starting to see the manifestations of spillover from the Syrian Civil War. And at their worst -- and some of you have heard me talk about this from this podium when back in 2005-2006 Dan Byman and I went back and looked at the history of spillover from civil wars and used that to try to start to think through all

right, what do we do about spillover from the Iraqi Civil War? And, of course, our answer was, "Wow, we really don't want to get into that question because it's a very tough question to answer."

But we're already starting to see it from Syria -- refugee flows, radicalization of neighboring populations, economic dislocation. I think we can start to expect to see terrorism coming out of Syria as well. Almost inevitably they start to provoke greater and greater neighborly interventions. Again, we're just starting to see that. We've seen the impact from the Syrian Civil War in Lebanon, with Turkey as both Mike and Andrew were talking about, and to a certain extent, although much milder than I think any of us would have predicted, with Israel. But I think we can expect to see more on all those countries, and I think we ought to start to expect to see more in Jordan and with Iraq. And I think that that's a big one out there.

This isn't a panel about Iraq. We're going to do a session on Iraq at a later date because that needs its own session. But Iraq, as you've probably noticed, is teetering on the brink of civil war. And believe me; the Iraqis don't need any help, okay? They are perfectly capable of pulling themselves into civil war without any external assistance. But they are now sitting right next to a country that is in itself in civil war. And at its worst, civil wars have a very bad habit of causing civil wars in neighboring

countries and in metastasizing from civil wars into regional wars. And both of those need to make us very alert to the possibility that civil war in Syria is going to overflow into civil war in Iraq or just combine with civil war in Iraq. It certainly isn't helping the situation in Iraq. It's making it much worse.

The other point that I wanted to make, which kind of brings the Iranians back into this, is a number of weeks ago I had a conversation with a very interesting Saudi. And we were talking about Syria and we were talking about Iraq, and he made an incredibly interesting comment. He said, "We see these as one civil war. As far as we're concerned, Iraq and Syria are the same civil war. It is Shia governments backed by Iran in both countries oppressing their Sunni populations." And he went on to say, "And look, the tribes of Eastern Syria are the same tribes as in Western Iraq. They span the border. The Shammar, the Jabouri, these major tribal confederations, they are the same as far as we are concerned."

Years ago some of us were on this dais and were asked by people about these fears of a new Shia crescent or a great Sunni-Shia war. And I think we were very rightly dismissive of those fears, that those fears were really overblown at that period of time. And I remember saying, "Look, I think that the only way we get a Sunni-Shia war is if the

Sunnis decide that that's really what's going on, and they can create a Sunni-Shia war when it doesn't have to be that way at all." But I think increasingly that's what we're seeing going on, that the Saudis, the Jordanians, a number of other Sunni countries, are increasingly seeing it that way, exactly the way that Mike painted it. You can disagree or agree with Mike, but that does seem to be where a lot of the regional governments are going. Looking at what is going on in Syria and Iraq and adding in Bahrain and a little bit of Lebanon as well, and seeing this as the manifestation of a great Shia conflict backed by Iran against the Sunni states, against the Sunni powers of the region. That's a very, very dangerous way to think about the Middle East right now. And the problem, of course, is the more that these states conceive of it in this way, the more that they will act based on that assumption. And that just makes it a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Anybody want to add on to that or contradict it or anything else? Mike, you want --

MR. DORAN: I'll just basically agree with it and add one point. And that is that there's been a tendency in our government, which started back in the Bush Administration because of the Iraq War, to treat each one of these as a separate container -- Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and so on. And I think it's important that we actually have a -- I wasn't quite sure,

Ken, if you were saying that we need to have it and look at it as part of a complex and have a policy toward the complex, or if we need to avoid doing that. I would say we have to see it as a complex, both because the dynamics are such that it is a complex and everybody in the region is reading the map that way, including the Iranians.

MR. POLLACK: I wholly agree. Andrew.

MR. TABLER: I think concerning what you said about civil war, I think there are, of course, shades of gray on this. I think certainly around Holmes, the environment of Holmes, you really have something more akin to a civil war where you have one community, which is one sect, fighting another community, which is another sect. This is something that was stoked by the regime and has generated a lot of bloodshed.

In other parts of the country, it's closer -- and, again, this is shades of gray -- to an armed insurrection or sometimes even an insurgency depending on how well it's coordinated. But in the end the problem is that -- let's say best-case scenario of today or this week we get a resolution at the Security Council. Great, and then there could be talks, there could be this process -- President Assad has already said he won't do it. What's likely to happen, whether this stays an insurrection in some areas or morphs into an insurgency or then becomes a full-blown civil war all over the country, is that given everything that is strategically at stake in

Syria, I think you're going to have a lot of individuals and governments in the Middle East start to back different factions inside of Syria.

And this brings in, loops in, what you were saying about this, for lack of a better term, Sunni-Shia struggle or whatever you want to call it. I mean, people have very real interests inside of Syria; it's very important geographically. Anyone who has ever talked with President Assad or his family or the regime will emphasize this over and over again as a reason why to engage them. Now it's a reason to meddle around in their internal affairs. And given that this is going to go on and President Assad -- I don't think anybody really is keen for him to stay on, perhaps with the exception of the Russians. I think that the likelihood of this becoming a much larger conflict is going up, and I don't know how to arrest that. And that's probably the looming crisis we have on our hands no matter what happens in New York this week.

MS. MALONEY: Can I make just a quick response, too? I fully agree with your description of the way the Gulf States are viewing this. And while I agree that from Washington we need to have a holistic as well as a narrow and specific capability for dealing with and analyzing what's happening, I think it is dangerous if we find ourselves in a position of buying into a narrative, which is at its heart deeply, deeply problematic for the long-term stability of the region.

If, in fact, we accept this idea that all Shia are somehow the tools of Tehran, that all of the violence in the region is emanating solely from Tehran, that in fact there can be no such thing as a Democratic Shia government even in, God forbid, a Shia-dominated or Shia-majority state such as Bahrain, then we are in for I think a very long and ugly period in the region.

So I think the challenge for Washington is to recognize that this viewpoint is out there, to achieve a kind of holistic way as well as an individual way of dealing with these crises, but also to begin to bring the region's thinking about the ethnic and sectarian divides more into a kind of modern appreciation of a multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic future.

MR. POLLACK: Very nicely put. Okay, let's open it up to questions, and I'll call on people. We'll take three or four questions at a time and put them to the panel, and if everyone could please identify yourself as I call on you.

Please, sir. Right down here.

MR. HERREOD: Judd Hereof, documentary filmmaker. In this Sunday's *New York Times* magazine --

MR. POLLACK: Ronen Bergman --

MR. HERREOD: -- he opined that there will be an Israeli attack on Iran in 2012. I'd like to press you a little -- I know we've

mentioned this, but I'd like to press you a little bit more on it. Do you agree with this or do you at least feel that the risks are very high on this, and what would be the downstream effects of such a strike? And also, is it possible that Israel would strike without a green light from the United States?

MR. POLLACK: Again, let's take a few more, but a good one. Barbara, there, and the back.

MS. SLAVIN: Barbara Slavin from the Atlantic Council. This is for Mr. Doran. I wanted you to be a little more specific about what you expect the Obama Administration to do. The doctrine they've set out, at least from Libya, was that you had to have perceived need, regional buy-in, and a strong international legal underpinning for any kind of military intervention. We have one and two, perhaps, but unlikely to get the third. So, what exactly more does Obama have to do?

I agree with your analysis that knocking down the Assad regime would be an enormous strategic benefit to the U.S., but I just don't see how we get there. Thanks.

MR. POLLACK: Young lady in the middle of this side?

MS. BARR: Hi, Lauren Barr from the U.S. Institute of Peace. We talked a little bit about the Free Syrian Army, and I was wondering if you could address the rest of the Syrian opposition, in particular whether

the Saudi recognition of the Syrian National Council is significant, and whether that could lead to a more NTC-like situation where the rest of the world buys into that opposition as the legitimate government.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's take one more. There's a gentleman in the back.

MR. MEYER: Excuse me. Ken Meyer, (inaudible). Question for Ms. Maloney. Who do you think was responsible for the most recent assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist, and would you classify that as an act of terrorism as well as an act of war? Or, perhaps do you think it was a figment of Iran's paranoia?

MR. POLLACK: Okay. Let's -- if we can keep our answers brief, but let's -- in fact, why don't we start with Suzanne, if you'd like to, and we'll work our way down this way.

MS. MALONEY: I wouldn't be able to say with any degree of certainty as to who perpetrated the assassination of the various Iranian scientists, but I can imagine as we all -- as I think most of Washington does -- that the most likely candidate for that would be Israel. I tend to think it is not a terribly constructive way to move the Iranians toward a better stance in their negotiations or to undermine the program. It doesn't have any real long-term significance to their capacity to move toward a nuclear weapon, and I think it only creates a greater coherence among the

scientific community and possibly even among Iranians at large in favor of a nuclear program at very high cost.

In terms of the *New York Times Magazine* article, I think we could do a whole session on that and I think all of my colleagues would have opinions on the number of questions that you posed. I will answer very briefly that I think -- I remain a sort of hopeful skeptic on the prospect of an Israeli attack, although I think the prospects today are higher than they have probably ever been, even after years of anticipation and expectation that such a strike would be imminent. I think the world jitters are legitimate this time around. I think the after-effects would be disastrous for U.S. interests and, for that matter, for Israeli interests, and it would not set back the program significantly enough to justify those after-effects.

MR. POLLACK: Andrew?

MR. TABLER: Concerning your question on the Syrian opposition, there are -- besides the Free Syrian Army which is, again, a loose association -- it's a franchise more than organized militia, so to speak -- you have the Syrian National Council, which you mentioned, which is abroad. It has a lot of exiled opposition members inside of it, but also includes representation from various Tunsikiats (phonetic) -- coordinating committees, for lack of a better word -- who are on the

ground, and they are an umbrella organization. Then, you have on the ground Tunsikiat inside of Syria and you have those that -- some are from more organized -- and this is in broad brushstrokes -- towards the younger generation, much more anti-regime and very involved in organizing protests, communications, boycotts, general strikes.

Then, you have other similar groupings, usually from an older generation of oppositionists who don't like the regime but are more amenable to negotiate with it, although the Assad regime's quadrupling down on the security solution has made their position untenable. It's very difficult now as a Syrian oppositionist, even someone more in favor of dialogue, to truly dialogue openly with the regime, which then begs the question -- this is also in the current draft. There's a Russian proposal to take the opposition to Moscow to then dialogue with the Syrian regime. Well, the Syrian regime has agreed to do that but the opposition obviously has not, and it's -- I think there are various reason why they're not.

So, overall the Syrian opposition still remains rather divided. They're much more organized than they were previously, but you know again a result of anyone who spent a lot of time in Syria knows that a result of being suppressed and brutalized for that long is -- one of them is grandiosity. Egos, unfortunately, dominate a lot of the Syrian opposition with hardly -- the only country in the Middle East -- I spent 14 years in the

Middle East, met with a lot of people from all sorts of oppositions. You know, unfortunately it gets in the way of our planning with the opposition often, but we are making some headway, and I don't want to discount the opposition because I think they have made some strides, especially over the last two months.

MR. POLLACK: Mike?

MR. DORAN: One of the great things about working in Washington is being in an ego-free environment. (Laughter)

You know, Barbara, in answer to your question, you're totally right. If we work with those principles that the Obama Administration has enunciated, then we can do nothing because, you know, one of them is we have to have international legitimacy. Okay, we need a U.N Security Council resolution. The Russians are supporting the Assad regime, they'll never agree to anything that's going to require us to do anything, so we can't do anything. But, I don't agree with those principles.

The question I ask myself first is, is it a vital national security interest of the United States to see to it that the Assad regime is replaced? If it is, then what are we going to do about it? If it's not, then it's not. I personally think it is, and I think if we can't do something to make a Bashar al-Assad more uncomfortable, then we should just pack it up and go home.

What would we do? We would start with putting together a contact group of action-oriented states that actually do want to do something. Putting together a coalition visible, public that is constantly pressuring for greater action. We have -- there are a number of things on the table about humanitarian corridors and no-fly zones and so on. That requires us to sit down, have a very serious conversation with the Turks about what they might be willing to count. That's the key relationship. I think the Turks and the Saudis together, as well as the Europeans, but we have to take leadership.

The one thing that we really haven't done -- and this is the essential first step, is we have to put ourselves out front and say we have a vital national security interest here, and we are the indispensable actor -- the only one on the stage -- that can pull all of these different actors together and point them in a direction.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's take a couple here and then I'll move over to this side. So, first Sam, actually. The gentleman there.

MR. LEWIS: I'm Sam Lewis. I'd like to pursue the economic issues involved with getting rid of this regime. This regime, not your regime. (Laughter)

By the way, I think all the presentations were terrific. Very good. But you know, you haven't really mentioned the economic

sanctions issue with respect to the Syrian regime, and what I read publicly indicates that they are really being very badly squeezed. We know the relationship between the economic leadership in the North, in Aleppo, and it's very close to the Turks. If one thing is ever going to persuade the Turks that they want to move in somewhat -- and that's a touch choice for them for the reasons you suggested. It's probably because the economic bottom falls out of this regime, and it looks to me like it's falling out.

So, we have a big interest in getting rid of Assad, yes. I wouldn't say a vital national security interest of the United States. My years in government -- I think that's a very limited way to think about it.

We have a big interest, a big national interest. Vital interest means we're ready to go to war. This country is not ready to go to war for Syria, and I don't think we should be -- or, we'll need to be. Iran is a wholly different problem, in this respect. But how much can we do on the sanctions track -- we're already doing a lot. Others are doing a lot, the French are doing -- you know, there are a lot of people imposing a lot of sanctions on Syria and they are being squeezed. How much chance does that have to force a coup or to force a replacement before you get to the full-scale civil war, which can easily spread?

MR. POLLACK: Okay. Gentleman on the aisle right over here.

MR. GLUK: Thank you. Peter Gluck. I'd like ask whether you believe there is -- that the Iranian decision-makers attempt any calculation on how their behavior would affect the presidential election in this country, and if so whether they realize that at least three of the four Republican candidates are far more trigger-happy than President Obama, notwithstanding his order to kill Osama bin Laden and rescue the people in Somalia.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's start taking some from this side. Perhaps the gentleman right here in the black jacket?

MR. GUPTA: Bisan Kip Gupta from the Osgood Center.

My question is, how do we anticipate the nuclear issue that takes place between the U.S. and Iran, post understanding the dimensions of Iran and commenced by the U.S. senators that the retaliation will take place and they want to see a downfall of the Iranian economy? How do we anticipate that? And moreover, since the Russians are supporting Assad's regime, don't we foresee or anticipate a war-like situation? What happened in the -- I mean, something similar to World War II with Russia, Iran, and Syria on one side and the U.S. and Israel on one side?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, big issues. The gentleman -- perfect.

MR. INNIS: Hi, Alex Innis. I'm just wondering -- especially

given the conference with the Kurds in Erbil this week and how much of a limiting factor the Kurdish influence is going to be on Turkey's potential intervention, given the history there?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, and the gentleman right behind him.

MR. KOBER: I'm Stanley Kober. I'm looking at a story here that Iran has agreed to be paid by India in rupees for its oil, and the Indians are going to be sending a trade delegation to increase their trade with Iran because it's the only way the rupees can be used. So, this seems to be an unanticipated effect of our sanctions. What does the U.S. government do now? Does it crack down on India as punishment? Does it ignore? What do we do?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's take this batch of questions. These are huge questions, but if I could ask the panelists to keep the answers relatively brief so we can take at least one more round of questions, that'd be great.

Mike, why don't we start with you?

MR. DORAN: Okay. I take Ambassador Lewis' point, and I'm willing to downgrade it from vital national interest to strong national interest. (Laughter) But, very strong national interest is what I was saying.

I thought you asked a great question about -- let me just add

to that. Unlike you, though, I do see it as part of the larger complex part of the Iran problem. One of the reasons that we want to do this is in order to change the power calculus in Iran and the likelihood of an Israeli attack on Iran, so I see it as all part of a complex, for sure. So, that's one.

But your question, which I think Andrew is better-placed to answer than I am. But I want to point out that I think the vital question is, how do we -- it gets back to what Barbara was asking. How do we turn the people of Aleppo? I think that's the shoe that hasn't dropped in Syria, and the Turks probably have a lot of leverage there.

I personally am not well-enough informed about those economic ties, who the key individuals are, who the key merchant families are, and what tools we might have to change their calculus. But if we did that, that would be something way short of war that would have a massive impact on the situation on the ground.

MR. TABLER: Great question as usual, Ambassador Lewis, and I commend you for getting Mike Doran to cave so easily. (Laughter) I never seem to do that.

To get to your question -- and it's a very good one -- in that the economic issues inside of Syria are huge. The oil sanctions which were put into place last August by the United States and very quickly followed by the EU have enormous impact. It accounts for about 95

percent of Syrian oil sales.

And since that time, we've known that the Syrians have tried to sell their -- they have a very heavy and sour grade of crude. They've tried to sell it to the Iranians, who then would turn around and sell it on the international market, but the tankers aren't big enough. It seriously cost the regime.

There are estimates that the regime will run out of money -- seriously run out of money -- in the Summer, and then you're talking about the regime's inability to buy off key constituencies not only around the regime itself in terms of the minorities and the generals and so on, but also to fund the state and at that point, you might see things come apart faster. But again, it all depends on what does President Assad or the Assad regime holding on mean? Oftentimes people think, oh, it means he has complete control of Syria as it is now. I think it's likely that hand-in-hand with this degradation you'll see pockets of the country slip outside of central government control, and then again in that environment you -- without a kick it's going to be very difficult to dislodge the Assad regime. And I think that's the problem. The problem with the resolution, which is in New York, seems designed, in my opinion, to send a very clear message to those around Bashar that it's time to get rid of him because it's very hard to see what that resolution really does to arrest the killing on the

ground at the moment. It seems to be a very strict signal. The problem with the draft that's out there today and it's the problem that we have going back for a while, in my opinion, concerning Syria is that you have to put Bashar into dilemmas, real choices, not false ones, and like every dilemma, there has to be something that enforces it. If you don't do this, you're going to get that. If you don't adopt this, you're going to have Arab League sanctions on your country. And this is where, unfortunately, lots of people urge a lot of caution. I'm not saying we say, okay, if you don't implement this, we immediately bomb your country.

Intervention in Syria, very much like Bashar holding on in Syria, could look very different and I think will look very different than Libya. It might not be an overall military intervention; it could look more akin to Bosnia with safe havens. Anybody who can predict which way this is going at the moment, I don't think anyone can really predict it. The economic issues as concern Turkey and LPO, yes, because Syria is first and foremost a trading country. So, the relationships to Turkey, the relationships to Jordan and the gulf, in eastern Syria, the relationships to Iraq are going to be enormously influential as this crisis unfolds.

MR. POLLACK: Suzanne?

MS. MALONEY: The question about Iran and the U.S. presidential election I think gets at the kind of distinction between our

appreciation of our own politics and whatever appreciation the Iranians can manage from Tehran from such a distance where they have very little direct contact. They followed the elections really closely. They like everything the Republicans have to say about what a failure Obama is. They don't at this stage distinguish terribly between Democrats who advocate engagement and Republicans who advocate war. They believe that every candidate is out to get them. So, they actually have a particular disdain for Obama because they never took his engagement policy seriously and they believe that he has, in fact, presided over a considerable intensification of the soft war and economic war against them. So, while you and I may see it as a more rational position to, in fact, empower Obama if you're sitting in Tehran, they don't see it that way.

With respect to oil markets and the ability of significant Iranian customers such as India and China to continue buying oil from Iran, I think, in fact, the administration wants to see some sort of finale, culmination, to these sanctions in which Iran continues to export a considerable volume. This is not a sanctions program intended at driving Iranian oil out of the markets; it's a sanctions program intended at hitting very hard at their revenue stream. And those are two important distinctions, and it may not be possible to, in fact, engineer one without having the other, as well, but the administration would like to see

continued supply out of Iran simply because they want to keep the price at the pump relatively stable. And I think the fact that you've not seen a great deal of excitement in oil markets, I mean, prices have bumped up a bit as these new sanctions have been unveiled, but they have not gone through the roof. And so, I think what you're seeing is in effect and it's what I'm hearing from people who do work in the oil markets that there's a considerable degree of confidence that the oil will flow, that there will be buyers for Iranian crude, there will be mechanisms found and that there will not be draconian enforcement of these sanctions.

MR. POLLACK: Before we take another question, the gentleman's question that no one on the panel wanted to touch, I will give my own response to it because I think it gets to a set of points that we were all making earlier, which is the importance of recognizing the connections between these different issues, as Mike pointed out, there's a terrible tendency in Washington, especially in government -- it's not just the Obama administration, it's government -- to stovepipe these issues, to see them, to compartmentalize them, and it's to see them as wholly discreet. And it's a very big mistake because they all do influence each other, and as we're also pointing out, the people of the region see them as connected. But one of the great fears I think that all of us have that your question comes back to is this point that Suzanne in particular

was trying to address that one of the great problems in the region is that they do see it as connected and oftentimes they connect the dots in ways that make the problems worse than they already are and even harder to solve, and that one of the most important things to do is to deal with these perceptions which can create self-fulfilling prophecies and create much worse situations than we already have. Point to keep in mind there is just that while Iran plays a role in both Syria and Iraq, I think one of the dangers -- and I'm not suggesting that Mike is seeing it this way; I think Mike doesn't see it this way, but one of the dangers in taking the position that Mike has espoused is some people take it and say it's all about Iran, therefore, we should just go at Iran. Forget about Syria, forget about Iraq. Let's go right at Iran and if we get rid of the Iranians, it solves all the other problems in the Middle East. That is unbelievably dangerous and a wrong-headed way to think about things. And I would argue that even to the extent that you do believe that these problems are exacerbated by Iran, the best way to deal with Iran profiting from these situations is actually to deal with the problems of Iraq on its own, deal with the problems of Syria on its own. If you can create greater stability in those countries, they will drive the Iranians out; they will weaken Iran's influence in both of those countries.

Okay, let's take one last round of questions, and, again, if we

can make the questions quick and if we can make the answers quick.

Adrianna, why don't we start with the young lady right in front of you? And then we'll go to the gentleman and then we'll take these two over here.

SGT. ESTRADA: Hi, Sergeant Estrada from the Marine Corps Information Operations Center.

And I was wondering if Iran loses regional hegemony after the fall of Assad, will there be a renewed focus on their nuclear weapons development in an effort to counter Israeli power in the Levant?

MR. POLLACK: The gentleman right in front of her.

MR. TOUR: Thank you. Benjamin Tour. How do the panelists read the recent statements by Secretary of Defense Barak and Mossad Chief Pardo on Iran, Barak saying that Israel is not anywhere near a decision on what to do about Iran and Pardo suggesting it seems to me that Israel could ultimately accept a nuclear Iran and that would suggest a kind of acceptance of a containment policy?

MR. POLLACK: Gentleman right here.

MR. RICHMAN: I'm Al Richman, former State Department.

This is a question to Suzanne about a response that she made to a previous question, and that is: Is the Iranian leadership so illogical, so divorced from seeing some realities that they would think a

Republican administration in the U.S. would not be more able to coincide its views with those of Israel and take more militant actions or support more militant actions than the current president is liable to take? Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: And the last one, the gentleman in the medium blue shirt.

MR. SIMON: Hi, I'm John Simon from the Project on Middle East Democracy, and my question is: How does Hezbollah assert itself if the strategic link is broken between Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah?

MR. POLLACK: Great question. Brings that link back together. Okay. Why don't we start with Andrew this time around?

MR. TABLER: A bit about concerning your question on Iran and the Levant. I mean, from a -- and it gets into the Hezbollah issues. So, Syria, it is the keystone in the Iranian Alliance in the region. It gives Hezbollah strategic depth in Lebanon, and in the past, that usually meant transfers of short-range Katyushas, shorter-range weapons, and that was up until the 2006 war. And after that, you have the UNIFIL solution. You see a lot in the Israeli press and other press about there being short-range weapons in the UNIFILs, and there probably are, but things have changed a bit in that the role of Syria has changed. It's no longer just a conduit for weapons coming from the outside, from Russia, from Iran, and so on.

There are two weapons in particular that get Hezbollah over the UNIFIL solution in South Lebanon that they are the M600 M and Rs. M is for missile, R is for rocket. Missiles have guidance systems, rockets not so much or not at all. They have long ranges and they can hit many places in Israel, if not most of it and depending on where you fire them, and it gets you over the UNIFIL zone. And those are manufactured in Syria. They don't come from Iran, they're manufactured in Syria. There could be some Iranian parts, but by and large, Bashar makes those things and delivers them to Hezbollah. There are then Syrian SCUD-Ds, which are modified in Syria and parts of them are manufactured. You remember the SCUD crisis of 2010. Our first indication that things with Bashar were going really wrong. Those also are heavily dependent on Syrian manufacturer. Without those two weapons, it's hard to get over the UNIFIL zone. It's harder for Hezbollah to wage war, and, so, if Iran is knocked out of that, then it makes it more complicated for Hezbollah to assert itself not only in the short-term, a lot of those weapons I think have been delivered to Hezbollah now. I mean, I don't know exactly how many, but in the long-term, let's say Israel goes into Lebanon again and does as they promised they're going to do, just levels the country. Rearming Hezbollah with those weapons or other weapons without Syria would be much, much harder. It's possible, but it'd be much, much harder

logistically depending on also whenever a solution is derived afterwards.

MR. POLLACK: Mike?

MR. DORAN: I agree with what Andrew said and with regard to the question about Iran and Hezbollah, that the connection gets a lot more difficult to maintain. The scenario that I have in my mind about what they will do after they suffer that blow if it comes is that the Iranians will seek to establish relations with former security elements in Syria who are willing to continue the relationship with both Hezbollah and Iran. Exactly what that would look like, I don't know, it's all going to depend on how the Assad regime goes down and what we have on the ground there when it's gone, but Syria is going to be very hard to put back together in a coherent fashion. You can see that right now. It's really several different countries in a way.

There was a question about the will the Iranians pursue their nuclear program with greater vigor if Assad goes down, and I think no, because I think they're pursuing with the greatest vigor anyway. My own reading, I don't know if Suzanne agrees with me, but they're hell-bent on the nuclear program and there's not much that's going to change that. They perceive that their situation on the model of countries like North Korea, they perceive that their situation gets a lot better with nuclear weapons, and, so, they're going to go for it.

I wanted to just say that to associate myself with the remarks of both Ken and Suzanne about this question of Shiite Crescent, when I said that I thought we need to look at the region as a complex, it doesn't mean that we necessarily have to adopt the world view of those who see it as a huge sectarian battle, but we have to understand that in the minds of everybody on the ground, they are reading all of these things together and we make a mistake if we don't realize that and come up with policies that are designed to address that. And I would think that one of our goals should be actually to the extent that we can to keep the eastern Mediterranean and the gulf as separate systems. Anything that links the two of them is not good for the United States, but we have to understand when we're looking at this that there are lots of other actors out there who are doing everything they can to link the two. And so, it's the funny thing about the Middle East, everyone one of these countries has its own dynamic, its own players working autonomously for their own interests, and, yet, they are all connected in some way and our policy has to address them on both levels.

MR. POLLACK: Suzanne?

MS. MALONEY: Very quick answers to the couple of questions that were about Iran.

With respect to Iran, Syria, and this question of what

happens if Syria falls, I think the Iranians have been hedging from the start and I think that their calculation is that the Syrian situation will not read down to the benefit of any outside actor, and, so, they're probably better prepared to survive the fall at least politically with respect to their reach across the region. There are going to be huge logistical issues for them, but they have a greater sense of strategic depth today as a result of their comfort level with the Maliki government and other shifts in the region than they would have had had Syria begun to implode 5 or 10 years ago.

With respect to Israeli politics, I will say we have a new edition to the Saban team, who if it were not so late, we would put on the spot, but is a true expert on Israeli internal politics and I would defer to him and point you to him, Natan Sachs, who's here in the audience, should you want an informed answer to that question.

And, finally, on the question of how ideological is the Iranian leadership and to what extent are they able to appreciate the distinctions between Republicans and Democrats, I didn't mean to gloss over that they are profoundly ideological, obviously, at this stage. But at the same time, I think the nuances that we see, the embrace of engagement that certainly it's a political issue here in Washington, is not as evident to the Iranians, and, so, as much as during the prior election, they were not, in fact, rooting for Obama at least at the leadership level in Tehran. I don't see

them having an incredibly larger sense of security if it is a second Obama term versus a Romney, Gingrich, or Santorum presidency. I think that they believe that they're under siege, they try to get through every day with the regime in tack, and, ultimately, they want to live to fight another day.

MR. POLLACK: Well, on that note, we will bring this to a close. Please join me in thanking our terrific panel. (Applause)

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