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ISRAEL'S SECURITY AND IRAN:
A VIEW FROM LT. GEN. DAN HALOUTZ

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. POLLACK: Good morning. Welcome to the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. I am Ken Pollack, I am a senior fellow of the Saban Center and welcome on this very solemn anniversary.

We're here today to deal with another topic of immense importance to America's national security, one very different from the anniversary that we're celebrating, but one that obviously portends to have a similar impact if it goes the wrong way, and of course, one of the great issues that we're wrestling with is exactly what does it mean for it to go the wrong way? What constitutes the wrong way?

Here in the United States and in the Middle East, there is enormous debate over how to handle Iran's pursuit of a nuclear enrichment capability, a capability which would give Iran the ability to manufacture nuclear weapons if it chose to do so. And obviously, this is an issue that's been with us for a very long time.

I remember I first encountered it in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991 when Israel purchased 25 long-range F-15E strike fighters, and those fighters were designated not F-15Es, but F-15Is and the manufacturer said that the "I" was for Israel. But if you spoke to Israeli air force pilots and commanders what they uniformly would say to you is, no, no, no, the "I" is for Iran.

This is an issue, this is a problem, it is a threat that the Israelis have been thinking about for a very long time. They have spent a great deal of

effort trying to figure out how to develop a military option to disarm Iran, to destroy its nuclear program if they ever chose to do so, and they have been working very assiduously at that.

But by the same token, you will have noticed that while this has been a topic of active conversation, in some senses going all the way back to 1991, at the very least since 2002, Israel has not yet exercised that option and it has not done so for good reason. There are all kinds of good reasons not to strike and all kinds of bad reasons involved in a strike, and this has created a conundrum for Israel and it has created a conundrum for Israel's allies in the region and out, and it is why, to this day, as Iran continues to move forward in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolutions, Israelis and their friends, first among them the United States of America, continues to debate what the right course of action is.

Today we are absolutely delighted to have with us Lieutenant General Danny Haloutz. General Haloutz, I believe, is well known to most in this audience. You have his full bio in front of you. I will simply point out that after a long career in the Israeli Air Force, General Haloutz rose to be the chief of staff, first of the IAF and then later of the IDF, the Israeli Air Force and then the Israeli Defense Forces. And in those two jobs, he served as two of the senior most Israeli military officers responsible for making decisions related to things like a strike on Iran.

For that reason, his experience makes him uniquely qualified to offer insights into this issue, and we are absolutely delighted to have General

Haloutz with us today.

I'd like to start by welcoming General Haloutz to the podium, he'll make some remark, then he and I will have a bit of a conversation, and then we'll open things up to all of you.

Before I do that, though, let me just ask everyone to please set your phasers to stun, please turn your cell phones off or at least to silence so that we can have a good conversation and everyone can hear what General Haloutz has to say.

General, please, the floor is yours.

(Applause.)

GENERAL HALOUTZ: I have to shut my phone as well.

Well, first of all, 11 years ago we woke up to a new era after the very tragic terror attack on the Twins in New York, and I think that the world was completely changed since then. And the major goal of every one of us is to try and do the maximum in order to prevent such events from happening again. So, all the sympathy to the families and to the victims of this great nation.

Well, a few remarks about the hot potato. First of all, the "I" is for independence, independence in all aspect, even to take decisions. I would say that the most bothering thing in my view, that the Iranian case became a political issue instead of stay as a pure security/defense issue that should be addressed regardless of your political views, and if such a thing, I think the most interesting issue at the top of news, at the top of the concerns of many nations, becomes a question of Likud or a labor party or Democrats and the Republicans, I'm

bothered in a way. It means that if someone is going to be elected, he's not going to do anything or he's going to do nothing about it, and if the other one will be elected, he will do everything.

So, it's not about everything and not about nothing, it's about doing the right thing. And what is the right thing to do that is the question.

I think that too much was said publicly and the discussion over the Iranian case exposed too much of the operational abilities, plans, not to the details, but they gave a very general description of what can be done, what should be done, et cetera, and in a way, it's a kind of end responsibility of those who spoke so much about it, and I'm not going to address none of those issues, not about airplanes, not about bombs, not about penetration, not about anything.

I think that in this forum and many other forums, besides the forums behind closed doors, we have to keep our mouths shut a little bit and to deal with the strategic points of this problem.

The alliance with U.S. is the most important and strategic asset to Israel and that we have to keep in mind, and I think while saying it, that any decision, if and when it will be taken -- should take into consideration this top priority thing of keeping the alliance with the U.S. strong and reliable.

Reliable takes me to the most interesting problem that I see, that reliability is not the strongest point between the sides right now, which one is suspecting the other side -- each side is suspecting the other side that is not putting all the cards on the table and doing things behind the back, et cetera, and I think that we have to rebuild the understanding between the sides, to rebuild in

order to enable us all to get to the right decision on the right timing, and it's all about timing, because we have two scales, the Israeli scale and the American scale, and those two scales are not meeting for the time being unless one watch will stop, then the other one will reach the same time.

But so far, as long as both of them are rolling in different speeds, there is a big argument about the timetable or the time left to take the right things or the right measures vis-à-vis the Iranian case.

I think that the policy, based on three phases -- three phases: diplomacy, sanctions, and use of force -- is the right policy. The question is if we are doing it in a row or we are doing some of it in parallel.

In order to save time, we should do some things in parallel and not to do it in a row. And more than that, we have to elaborate a little bit, what is diplomacy? What is sanctions? To what extent? We can see the Canadian example about diplomacy and we can see some other examples about diplomacy. What is the right diplomacy?

I think that the right diplomacy is, first of all, to isolate the one you want to use those means against him, and international isolation is the most important thing, and it's followed by sanctions and sanctions should impact, first of all, the regime because we have nothing against the Iranian people. By saying "we", I think that I am covering everyone, not against the Iranian people.

I remember, myself, in 1972, spending two weeks together with Iranian pilots in Tehran using F-4 simulator, because the Iranian was the only one then that had the money to buy the most expensive simulator that the

Americans produced, so we were sent there to have some training. And I found that they are human beings like us, very well-educated, very polite, smart people, and want to live.

And the rest comes from my father who is from Iranian origin, and he told me the stories about his background in this country.

Unfortunately, nowadays, we can't visit there, but I hope that in the future we will be able.

Anyhow, sanctions. Diplomacy, sanctions, and use of force. Use of force is not just saying that the stick should be on the table. That's a very nice slogan, but we have to give it more explanation. What do we mean when we are saying stick on the table? Absolutely, it should be the last, last, last, last option, in my view. Never use force before you must use force. But when it comes to the use of force, you should be prepared, and I think that the use of stick or put a stick on the table has some real activities that can be done before using the force.

For example, force projection, exercises, training together with others just to show that each one is backing the other. I think that reducing the volume or the size of exercise between the Israeli forces and the American forces is an indication in the wrong direction. Instead of increasing the volume, to decrease it, and it's training, nothing but training.

Force projection, I don't have to explain here what is the meaning, but someone on the other side should see visually, through media and by other means, that we mean business, because I can't see how you can convince the

Iranians only through diplomacy to come to the table, negotiate, and agree on something. The coffee in Vienna is a great coffee, but meeting in Vienna every month to drink coffee doesn't bring solution to the problem.

We have to find other ways and other ways a combination of diplomacy, strong diplomacy, and diplomacy is not related only to the Iranians. When we are speaking of diplomacy, we have to build the front, the relevant front, and the relevant front includes China, includes Russia, includes India, includes many other forces, which have meaningful weight on the decision-making process.

It's not a problem of U.S. and Israel, it's a problem of the entire world because the Iranian case is not Israeli case, is not American case, it's not Saudi Arabia case, it's Middle East, it's Europe, and it's the entire Western community, free society. All those who are interested in free society should be interested in preventing the Iranians from having nuclear weapons because once they are going to have it; it will open a nuclear weapon race in the Middle East, in my view. Then the Turks will follow and the Egyptians will follow and the Saudis will follow. No one will leave them alone in this region to be the regional superpower with the power. No one.

And we have to ask ourselves if that's what we want to achieve. My answer, of course, is negative, no, we don't want it.

Red line policy, I think that red lines are red at the moment that you are drawing them, but when you come to take the decision according to the red lines, you may find out that the color is not red anymore. It can be black, it

can be green, it can be blue, because situation is changing. We are living in a very dynamic world, very dynamic. Every morning, new news. And you cannot be stuck to a decision that was taken in a specific time and act accordingly later on because you have to re-judge all the factors, all the facts, all the ingredients, all the elements, and come to a decision, real time decision, that shows that you're addressing the real time problem and not a problem that you faced a few months ago, a few years ago.

More than that, I think that giving lines, enabling the other side to bypass the lines, in a way, so don't draw the lines in order to enable them to know exactly where are the borders. No. Keep some uncertainty, and uncertainty is confusing the other side, is not confusing yourself, if you are taking a decision to keep some uncertainty, leave the confusion to the other side.

We must create a decision-making process that will integrate the interest of all participants. Here, in this case, I envy the Vatican, how they are electing the new Pope. They are sitting in a room, nothing supplied to them until the white smoke is coming out of the window, so I'm looking for those windows and for the white smoke of those organizations, nations, people, who should sit together, agree upon the facts, first of all, agree upon the facts, and once agreeing upon the facts, then agree upon the decision.

But as long as we don't agree about the facts, no doubt that we'll find ourselves with a big gap regarding decisions that should be taken.

I wrote down, what are the issues that we agree upon? We agree upon that nuclear Iran is unacceptable. We agree upon that the Iranians are still

moving on with their program, that nuclear Iran will enhance other Middle East countries to enter into this race. We agree on diplomacy and sanctions first. We didn't agree yet, and I will come to it, what is the meaning of sanctions.

And we agree that use of force should be prepared, displayed, but not used, but as the last resort -- last, last, last, last -- many lasts should be added before using the force, because using the force is not promising anyone that it will end, forever, the Iranian nuclear program. It depends, of course, on the achievements, and I am not going to enter into it, but I want to say one thing which is very important to all decision-makers: never underestimate the Israeli capabilities, with "I", without "I"; I think that Israel is a strong country with a lot of options and capabilities.

On what we are not agreeing so far, on timetable, first, who should do it, and how to handle the decision-making process. Those are the three elements, in my view, which are the most important. To agree about timetable, that's a challenge: who should do it, I think we should put it aside for the time being, and how to handle the decision-making process, which is very important. Who are the participants? And I believe that the participants around this virtual table should be more than Israelis and Americans because, as much partners as can be recruited to this job, to this mission, as better the results will be -- will be from all aspects, from the direct results, but from the international results and the PR results or the -- how it looks to the world, which I think happened.

I will stop now with the 15 minutes you gave me and to join you?

MR. POLLACK: Please.

(Applause.)

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, General. I think you've set the stage nicely. There were a number of points that I wanted to pick up upon before we open it up to the questions from the audience, and the first one was this: you said, "force should only be the last, last, last, last, last resort", I think I got all the lasts in there.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Yeah, about five.

MR. POLLACK: Somebody can correct me if I missed the last, but you also said that the talks so far are not producing anything useful, just a lot of people drinking good Viennese coffee, so there's a gap that you've pointed out. What needs to go into that gap? What more would you like to see the United States, the international community doing to produce, perhaps, the better negotiations that you seem to have in mind? What is it that we're not doing now that we ought to be to fill that gap?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Well, I believe, first of all, that diplomacy and sanctions are connected in a way. First of all, in order to have more effective sanctions, you have to recruit more partners to impose sanctions. So far, where the Iranians are trying to export their oil and there are buyers, we have to look, who are those buyers, and maybe to convince them to buy the oil from different resources or other resources, and to buy them into the treaty that you impose sanctions, that's first.

Second sanction, what are sanctions? You know, two days ago it is mentioned that the Iranian currency was dropped by 8 percent compared to

the dollar. And I asked myself, how many Iranians are keeping tons of dollars in their safes that they are bothered from the 8 percent collapse of the rial? Very few. Those that are concerned, by the way, are the Minister of Treasury, their Minister of Finance, et cetera, but the average Iranian is looking for his family, how to feed them, and we have to bring the Iranians to the dilemma of bread or nuclear, there, to this point, without starving anyone of course, we have to do it in the most human way.

But unless we'll bring them to this dilemma, the leadership -- because once you bring them to this dilemma, then you will see that the people are saying something. So far the people are saying nothing in Iran.

So, we have to motivate the people to look around and then to see what's going on with them because their regime decided to go on with a project, which is unacceptable to the world.

Sanctions are not only oil and materials for nuclear weapons. Sanctions, there is a list -- long list, thousands of items that can be added to the sanctions list.

I don't want to mention -- I don't want to go through this list, but I'll mention one thing, okay. For example, the Iranian Airlines, if they are continuing to fly through the Western countries, which are part of the negotiation in Vienna, okay, do something about it. Iranian ships which are shipping across the oceans, under flags of un-existing countries or existing countries, but unknown countries. That's something that can be done, et cetera, et cetera.

And the list is long, the list is impacting a lot of the Iranian

population, and that's the problem, that's the dilemma, because if I would have known of a specific thing which are pinpoint the regime itself and only, it would have been the best, but such a list doesn't exist.

We have to be more sharp with the sanctions and, as I said, together with diplomacy -- the diplomacy has two different phases, one is the country that already agreed, like Canada, and did what it did, how many will join? That's first. Second is to collect other forces, which are not part, so far, to be part of it. And I am addressing, mainly, the three leading countries and some in South America as well; I would like to see Brazil there, to see Russia, to see China, to see India, et cetera, et cetera.

The leader of the world economy be part of sanctions, because if the leaders are not going to be part of it, the sanctions will take time to be effective, will take a lot of time.

MR. POLLACK: There's another idea out there, it's more than an idea, it's a reality, you know, you may have noticed, general, that someone seems to be killing a lot of Iranian scientists and a lot of Iranian computers seem to be malfunctioning and there are a lot of people who seem to believe that there are some countries out there that are deliberately doing this.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: It was mentioned somewhere?

MR. POLLACK: People have all of these wild conspiracy theories, as you know, in the Middle East, but let's take this as an idea. You know, there's a debate related to these covert operations, whether they make war less likely by creating an alternative source of pressure on the regime, that's one argument,

another argument is that it's the kind of thing that could provoke the Iranian regime and start an unintended clash.

What's your feeling about whether or not this is a useful way to try to close that gap that you were describing?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: First of all, I think that the underworld campaign is part of the campaign and it's not secret that the Iranians are already ten years -- two years ahead of nuclear bomb. And the delay was achieved according to some activities that were done by I don't know who, and it was, so far, successful.

But there is an end to the success. In the end of the day, the Iranian students who are attending the Western universities in high quantities will be well-educated how to develop methods and systems to prevent, that's another area of sanctions.

I will never offer to anyone to pinpoint any leader that was elected by his people and to see him as a target in order to -- I will not offer it because then we are opening a new game, and in this game, there are many players, and I don't think that in our world we should look at it as a trivial solution to pinpoint the leaders, unless they are doing something which is strongly against the international law.

Yeah, in this case, we have the option, we can do it, but we have to prove it, otherwise, we are leaving it to the interpretation of individuals or countries, et cetera, and, you know, you may find opponent to any leader in the world in the world, so let's stay within the limits, within the cultural limits that we

have been raised upon.

MR. POLLACK: Let me, if I may, move back to this narrower question of use of force. You didn't rule it out, you put it at the very end of the spectrum, but you didn't rule it out, and you've made clear your views on red lines, I think that that makes imminent good sense. Anyone who's been in these kind of positions knows that what looks very clear at one moment in time can look very blurry at another point, but I would like you to kind of help an American audience understand a bit better how an Israeli leadership might think about when you've reached that last, last, last, last, last resort.

So, without going into any specifics, and obviously at some level, this is a matter of cost/benefit analysis. When does the benefit outweigh the cost and risks of the operation?

So, give us, if you could, some sense of events out there, things that could happen, that would shift that calculus to the extent where you think that a conversation about the use of force would be warranted. In other words, if you were back in your job as IDF Chief of Staff, when would you go to the Prime Minister and say, you know, Mr. Prime Minister, we have to strike. I don't think you'd ever say that, but, you know what, Mr. Prime Minister now is a moment when we ought to have a conversation about whether our current course continues to make sense or whether we need to shift to a different course because of something that happened?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Well, first of all, when I say last, last, last, it has nothing to do with timetable. Last, last, last represents, mainly, the level of

effort that was done in each area. If we came, within a week, we finish all the diplomacy efforts successfully, okay, then the sanctions are very effective and nothing achieved, maybe in two weeks we'll come to the decision.

Last, last, last means that you are maximizing the efforts in the other areas. In parallel to it, you are building the force; you are building the abilities, not just saying it. Saying it is not enough. And I'm sure, by the way, that all those involved have the plans -- I'm sure, because otherwise they are not paying their salary.

Regarding the second part of your question, I think that any answer I will give will be too much. One will be the point that I would go to if I was in -- I would say that the basic problem right now is the past experience of the different organizations which are taking care of the information to be provided to the leaders so that they can take decision.

In the U.S., you have the memory of Saddam with the unconventional weapon, so I assume that they will come and say, there is a green light, the only way they will be sure, 100 percent, but there is no 100 percent. And in the Israeli case, maybe it's different.

So -- but in Israel, it's our case, and I'm sure that no 100 percent is needed -- 100 percent -- 99 is enough, okay? And I speak without knowing what's going on now in those establishments, but I assume, as a human being, that once an organization gave information that led into operation and information was found to be not the most accurate one, it create -- it put a kind of a hesitation on next time.

So, generally speaking, the feeling is that the sword is on the throat, that's the time. But there is no one formula to define what is sword on the throat, and that's a problem.

MR. POLLACK: This point about the formula, though, let me see if I can push you a little bit on that. We talk about -- whenever we think of a threat, we talk about capabilities and intentions.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Yeah.

MR. POLLACK: When you think about Iran and you think about that last resort, which side -- do you weight one side or the other more heavily? Is it the intentions that are more troubling to you? The capabilities? And, again, this gets back to my previous question of which might cause Israel to shift and decide, you know, we need to move ahead? Is it more something related to Iran's capabilities? Or more something related to Iranian intentions?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Well, it's the combination. The problem is the current combination. The combination will change in the future. It's a new ballgame.

Right now the combination that we have a very extremist regime, with very extreme declarations, statements, et cetera, vis-à-vis Israel and vis-à-vis others, by the way, but for the others, they are not claiming for elimination, they only eliminated one for the time being, for the Iranians, is Israel, they want to see us out of the map.

So, extreme regime with weapon of mass destruction is a combination that very few are ready to live under such a combination.

I'm not saying by that that the first thing in the morning after they will have, god forbid, a nuclear weapon, they will wake up and Ahmadinejad or Hamin-Ali (ph. 0:37:33.6) will push the red button nearby the bed. No, that's not -
- I think it's still dramatic.

But I would say that in different combination, a very stable regime, logical one, moderate one, such a weapon -- and it exists in some other places in the world -- but we rely on the decision makers, we rely on the system. The problem is that we don't rely on the decision makers and the system there to take the right decision and the right time. That's the problem.

So, we can change the regime or delay the project.

MR. POLLACK: I want to ask you two more questions and the first one is a direct follow on to what you just said. In some ways it's a bit of an unfair question, but I do want to push you on this.

The Iranians have announced they're going to have presidential elections on June 14th. Imagine two wildly different scenarios, neither of which I expect to happen, but again, just to kind of, perhaps, push your thinking a little bit to give us a better sense of how you're thinking about this.

Imagine that on June 14th somehow, miraculously, Mohammad Khatami is reelected president of Iran and he announces that he -- the first act is going to be a rapprochement with the international community to see the sanctions lifted by addressing the international community's fears about nuclear weapons.

And the alternative, imagine on June 14th, Qasem Soleimani is

elected president and Qasem Soleimani announces that he will do everything in Iran's power to see Iran protected.

How do those two changes affect Israel's calculus?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: First of all, the positive thing in this scenario that until May, we have time. That's first. But let's -- option one, okay, I think that even myself I will vote for him if he is going to do --

MR. POLLACK: Do you think that's going to help his chances?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Background, so the only passport that maybe I can get is Iranian passport. Option two will speed up the need to take the aggressive measures. That's all. Of course, it should be carefully checked, carefully assessed, et cetera, et cetera. Words, as I said, before election, in most of the cases, are not used afterwards.

I still remember -- there is American embassy in Jerusalem for the last --

MR. POLLACK: I thought you were going to say that.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Okay, so, those are words, and we have to believe the words that hold respect, but limited respect when they are used for politics. Microphone, that's his technology, not mine.

MR. POLLACK: Folks, if you could up the level on General Haloutz's microphone so that people can hear him better, we'd appreciate it. Please continue.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: So, anyhow, I'd say that we have to be careful with the publicity that comes before election in order to be elected and the

deeds that someone will do after election. It's not always 100 percent correlated.

MR. POLLACK: Last question. This is a big one. It's an issue that I think we all here in Washington recognize as being related, but we very rarely talk about it in terms of the actual relationship, and that's Syria and how it plays into this entire calculus. Obviously, Syria is an enormous issue for Israel all by itself, but there is also a very important connection to the Iranian issue, and I was hoping, you know, given your extensive background, take us through a little bit how Israel is thinking, how the Israeli leadership is thinking about Syria, the threats, the opportunities there, and how it is related to this Iranian issue that we've been talking about.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Well, the chain of -- the known chain of Iran, Syria, Lebanon Hezbollah -- and I believe that once the Syrian block is going to be taken from this wall, from this chain, it will influence dramatically over the Iranian strengths in the Middle East, while their ability to use their proxy, the Hezbollah, real time or by remote whenever they want, it will change Hezbollah situation in Lebanon without having the big brother, the Syrian support on a daily basis.

All those, based on the assumption that the replacement to Assad is completely different replacement. Who knows? One thing should be said, that Iran is the only Shi'a country in the world and Hezbollah is a Shi'a organization, but in a multi-religion country like Lebanon, and as it looks now, most of those who are protesting and fighting the Syrian regime are Sunnis.

So, in this respect I believe that if -- it's not if -- when the Syrian

regime will be replaced, we'll see something new. Is it going to be better? The same? Or worse? In any case, it gives you at least 33 percent of chance for both, and I'm looking for this 33 percent as an option and it's high chance, by the way. There is not lottery with 33 percent.

Anyhow, no doubt it will -- it's connected to the entire Iranian problem because if they are going to lose their foot stamp in Syria and partially in Lebanon, I think that they will reconsider their position. I don't know if it will reflect into the nuclear -- it will reflect onto their nuclear program, but it will do something to the Iranian leadership and they will have to reshape their policy and their diplomacy. To what extent? God knows. Allah knows.

MR. POLLACK: Very good. All right, let's open things up to the audience. If you'll raise your hands, I'm going to call on people in pairs, actually, maybe we'll go with trios because I want to get -- there are a lot of hands up there and I want to get a lot of people in, so I'll take three at a time. If everyone could identify their name and their affiliation so General Haloutz just knows who you're from, and then please ask a question, a single question, and please make sure it is a question as opposed to a statement where you simply inflect your voice at the end as if it were a question.

Okay, so I will start right down here.

MR. ARAKAT: Thank you, Ken. General Haloutz, my name is Said Arakat from *Al-Quds* daily newspaper and my question to you, General, it is alleged that the Iranian nuclear program is spread over thousands of sites across a country that is three times the size of Iraq. That would require a sustained

bombing that would go on, not for weeks, but perhaps months. Does Israel have the capability to go that alone? Thank you, sir.

MR. POLLACK: Okay. And we'll take right down here, up front.

SPEAKER: My name is Hassan, I was born in Tehran. I'm very happy that Persian Empire gave a free pass to your ancestors to come to Iran and your grandfather or father was from Iran --

GENERAL HALOUTZ: From Shiraz.

SPEAKER: Shiraz, oh, that's the land of love. Okay.

(Laughter.)

SPEAKER: The question is this: that we have seven billion people in the world right now, the population since January 2012 and the Middle East or the portion of -- well, it may be 300 million or very small portion of what the world population is. But how could we, as a kind of a minority population, kind of form the big events of the world if a war happens in that area will affect seven billion people? Could we not, all of us, be able to sit face-to-face and see what is hurting us or what is aching us and then come up to some kind of a solution which every human being is looking for which is pursuit of happiness and freedom and providing for their children? Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: And we'll go right to the gentleman here in the turquoise shirt.

MR. PASSAK: Thanks. My name is Mike Passak. I represent the Religious Action Center Reform Judaism. My question, you were talking about the importance of mobilizing Iranian citizens against their regime, but we saw

recently that that wasn't quite so effective in Iranian protests and I'm wondering how you think citizens might actually be able to revolt against the government and if they could be successful this time?

MR. POLLACK: General, why don't we take some responses from you?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Okay, the Iranian learned the lesson of the Iraqis and, yeah, Iran is a huge country, very nice country, and with a very interesting terrain, and the Iranians are doing all their efforts in order to spread their program and to locate it in very difficult places from the attacker point of view.

I will speak about Israel. I spoke about use of force and I say that one of the things that the use of force just in case -- remember, I'm not pushing anyone to attack Iran today and even not tomorrow. Use of force by all those who are interested in preventing Iran from having nuclear capability. I think that all those have the capability to do it. All those.

Regarding face-to-face, our face is ready; the question is if the other faces are ready to sit around the table and to discuss everything. You know, when you are coming into the discussion, it's a give and take. The question is what someone has to offer in order to give and what he wants in order to take, and that's the problem. If the take is, go away from the Middle East, for us there is no reason to enter into the same room and sit around the table.

If we want to discuss seriously, yeah, and it's not a secret that we

were sitting and we are sitting with many of our neighbors around the table and we had a few achievements. We had peace agreement with Egypt, we had -- we signed peace agreement with Jordan. I hope that in the future -- I hope it will be in the near future -- the Palestinians will sit together with the Israelis and we'll be able to reach agreement.

Things are going on, but in this case, I think that the gap with the Iranians is so big not because we had any direct conflict, just to remind our self that 34 years ago, under the Shah, the relation between Israel and Iran were of the best in -- were the best in the Middle East, okay. And we were partnering many, many activities and many, many things.

And if the wheel of history still works and it's still rotating, maybe the future will bring us better news. So far, it looks that the gap is huge and we need the intermediators.

Regarding the Iranian people, you know, that's something beyond my knowledge and beyond my expertise. We saw last year -- a year ago -- little over a year, that Iranian opposition in Iran tried to -- tried to do something, which was too little and they didn't have enough energy to keep the momentum and I don't know what was, if at all, the external assistance or help that they were getting or they received, I don't know.

No doubt that there are forces in Iran who are objecting the attitude of the current regime. I think that Iran, as I remember it, was on the way to be a more Western oriented country, more open, liberal country, and everything was stopped very sharp in '78.

I believe -- I'm optimistic, I believe that the future will change it, but I don't know how much it will take, and Ayatollah control of Iran is not a new phenomenon. It was in the past. We see it now from '78, but if we go 200 years -- '79 -- if we go back to history of Iran, we'll see that it happened already in the past, that clerks or religion people controlled the country.

So, let's hope for the Iranians.

MR. POLLACK: In back, we'll go with Margaret.

MS. WARNER: Margaret Warner from the PBS Newshour.

Today, Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "Those who refuse to draw red line to Iran don't have the moral right to put a red light to Israel." Why do you think he is demanding publically that President Obama set a red line to Iran? And are you saying you think that's a mistake?

MR. POLLACK: We'll take Trudy behind her.

MS. RUBIN: Trudy Rubin, *the Philadelphia Inquirer*. Following onto Margaret's question, I'd like to ask you what your analysis is and what you think the predominant feeling is inside the Israeli security community about what is the real nature of the threat that Iran presents to Israel. The Prime Minister has put it in apocalyptic terms, and of course Iranian rhetoric makes it easy to adopt that position, but many Israeli security experts, as you know, believe that the real Iranian intent is to have breakout capacity and that they couldn't dare to hit Israel because, A, they'd destroy Jerusalem, Al-Quds, two million Palestinians, and ensure that part of their country was obliterated. How do you see that and do you think the predominant feeling among security experts within

Israel tends one way or the other?

MR. POLLACK: And last, we'll take Attan.

SPEAKER: Thanks, Attan Sacks (ph. 0:56:00.8) from the Saban Center here. In previous cases, both on the Iranian issue in the past decade and with the other threats reportedly dealt with by Israel, we'd never seen this kind of discord that we see in the past year. So, what is it you think that has changed? We hear so many voices coming out of Israel discussing not only the politics and the decisions that were mentioned, the possible decisions, but also the security aspects of a potential Israeli operation. What has changed from three years ago when the Iranian question was also paramount in your experience?

MR. POLLACK: Three great questions.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: What changed? Three years. Three years time, time was used, and this time they made progress, and, you know, what Iranians are looking for in their policy of walking on the edge, that was a successful policy for the last ten years, they gained ten years of doing and doing and doing and doing. In the end, they will complete what they have in mind.

So, that's the reason why the voices or the volume is higher.

If the right words are said, that's another story. Now, I'm not here to criticize my Prime Minister. I'm saying it very loud and clear, he is my Prime Minister and his decision will impact me as others and regardless, if I vote for him or not, he is the Israeli Prime Minister, he was elected in a democratic way, and as long as he is sitting on his chair, he has the right to take the decisions and to implement.

No doubt, the Iranian case is very unique one. I said what I think about red lines and if Brookings Institute will make a survey about red line policy, you'll find out that in the world there may be one example of red line that was successful, maybe, even in this case I'm not sure.

From the Israeli side I say that twice we put a red line and twice we failed with the red line. We put a red line to Lebanon when we first withdraw from Lebanon in 2000 and we didn't act accordingly, and we put a kind of red line when we withdraw from Gaza, the disengagement from Gaza, and we didn't act accordingly the day after because red line is red when it's drawn. The day after, the color is changed and red becomes pink and pink becomes white and white becomes --

I think that -- as I said, I'm not criticizing my Prime Minister because he is my Prime Minister and -- but I am criticizing red line policies. I think that to come to the U.S., the elephant, and to ask him to put a red line to the end is something not logic. And as the famous actor in the Republican conference said, "When you have to shoot, shoot. Don't talk." Don't put red lines if you have any intention -- if you have intention, say it -- do, not say, do.

I don't think that -- by the way, red lines can be said in closed rooms. In closed room, yeah, call the other side and tell them, look, you know the balance of forces, you know what can happen if you are not going to do A, B, C, but in closed room, because when things are done publicly, we are human beings. The fact that someone is a leader doesn't change his human characters. On the contrary, in some cases it increases -- increasing his human character.

He's a human person and if you are drawing red lines in the *Washington Post* or in the NBC or CNN, the other side will be, first of all, insulted, then he will react emotionally and not rationally, and we are looking at the brain of those people, not at the hearts of those people.

MR. POLLACK: All right, let's shift over. There's a question in back. There's a gray arm raised, but I'm not quite certain who it belongs to. In the back there.

MR. KITFIELD: Hi, James Kitfield from *National Journal Magazine*. Thanks for doing this. You mentioned that you were disappointed that the issue of U.S.-Israeli relations have gotten caught up in politics and I think we've seen that in this election to a degree I can't remember seeing, and I'm curious whether you think that the Israeli leadership, because we can blame our own politicians, but I'm curious why you think the Israeli leadership has some blame in that? And do you worry that if this is allowed to go unchecked that it will affect the nature and the character of our relationship?

MR. POLLACK: There was a hand to the right too. Try in the back -- is that Michael, maybe, who has a hand up?

MR. ADLER: Michael Adler from the Wilson Center, and thank you for coming. To follow up on that question, you spoke about the importance of the U.S.-Israeli alliance. Given this Iranian crisis, how -- at what point would Israel step away from that? In other words, how much discord could there be if Israel felt it had to act and the United States was still saying, please don't act?

MR. POLLACK: And then the gentleman here in the pink.

SPEAKER: Thank you. (Inaudible), from Carnegie, and I was wondering if you could comment on the kind of slew of issues coming out in the publications that an Iranian strike could be possible October surprise within the upcoming presidential elections here.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: What was that?

MR. POLLACK: An October surprise for the American presidential elections, that you would have a little surprise for Barack.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Okay. Regarding the relation, yeah, I said, I will say it again, the importance of the relation, the good relations, between the American people and the American Administration to the Israeli people and Israeli Administration, is of the highest importance to Israel. Period.

Now, I don't think that the blame should be put on one side only -- both sides took part in climbing too high, and you know, as high as you climb, as hurt as the falling from the tree that you climbed on. There is a way to reduce the tension and the way is like two mature people should sit together in the room, discuss it openly, and agree on what we agree, and disagree on what we disagree. Even in good relations, there are some disagreements and disagreements are not cancelling all the background, all the history, and all the good relations that do exist in other areas.

We have to defer between different establishments and I think that in some areas the relations are excellent, and in some areas, mainly the political level, high political level, it suffers from declaration and counter-declaration that made here and there, some of them are serving the internal politics of each

country, some of them are serving the case itself.

Even though I think that the mutual interest of all participants are stronger than the dispute between the sides, than the gaps, small gaps or cracks that we have in the wall of good relations.

Once again, I don't think that the words of -- to be used to blame this side in this percentage and the other side in the other percent of the whole 100, one time, one side is carrying all the responsibility and one time the other side is carrying all the responsibility, and I think that both sides make mistakes and things that should have been said in closed rooms, were said publically and openly and strong -- too strong.

October, I don't know what kind of surprise someone would expect in October. My surprise in October: if my wife will ask me to go to a vacation. That's the only surprise that I am going to face. No other surprises, to my knowledge, but you know, surprises are surprises even if you know that they are going to happen.

My personal assessment, it's based on no real-time information and my feeling is that no one is going to surprise no one in the near future, but it's a feeling, it's not knowledge. Feeling based on knowing the systems and how decisions are taken and et cetera, et cetera. But God knows.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, we'll take a few more questions.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Yes.

MR. POLLACK: Why don't we bring it down here? We'll take the gentleman right here in the blue.

MR. GUGGENHEIM: Hi, my name is Joe Guggenheim (ph. 1:07:47.5). I'm just an individual citizen. As you said, General, there are always some little disputes as to what the actual facts are with respect to the Iranian nuclear program. As far as I understand, the U.S. government is saying that everything that's been done so far by the Iranians is consistent with just peaceful uses and they have not made any decision or taken any steps towards a nuclear weapon.

In that regard, also, the Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah, has said that it would be a fatwa for Iran to have a nuclear bomb and it would be a curse on all -- or a sin for Muslims to have a nuclear bomb. How do you evaluate that? How do you see the Israeli public evaluate that? And how do you think it might affect negotiations?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, give it to Sam, right in front of you.
Ambassador Lewis.

MR. LEWIS: Sam Lewis. General, I think we met a long time ago. I admire your deft handling of the domestic political questions. They're very tricky right now and I don't think it's -- I agree with you totally. If we would only stop talking about this issue, it would be a lot easier to deal with it, but that's not going to work in either country, so let me ask you this question, though. Can you imagine ten years from now after perhaps a war with Iran, perhaps not, a lot of other things we can't imagine right now -- can you imagine Israel and the United States relationship having deteriorated to the point where we're still friends, we have links, but we no longer can in any sense be called allies?

MR. POLLACK: Okay, yes.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write the Mitchell Report and I want to raise a subject that may be slightly off topic and/or that you may have covered before I got here 30 minutes late thanks to having spent an hour and a half with tens of thousands of my best friends commuting this morning. And the question is this: it appears as though the near-term and probably medium-term result of the Arab Awakening, as it's called here, is that the Islamists will become the primary players in politics in those countries surrounding you.

My question is first from the Israeli perspective and second from the American perspective; do you view that as a positive, a negative, or somewhere in between?

MR. POLLACK: General?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: I can't -- Ambassador Lewis, I can't imagine -- in ten years I can't imagine, and it means that we -- I'm talking about the Israel side have a lot to do about -- and of course the American side as well, but I can't imagine because by saying that in my view it's a strategic asset -- it's not only on the material side of it.

So, I don't want to think about such a development and if I'll be aware that we are taking our way to this direction, I'll do everything possible to shift it back to the right place because it's very important beyond, as I said, any material aspect of it. That's first.

You know the fact that the Islamic world contains right now 1.25

billion people, it's a fact, it's a known fact. And we have to get used to it and we have to find the golden path to live with this fact. Most of them -- most of them want to live like us -- most of them. And we may find extremists among all of us. We don't have to go to Iran to find extremists; we can go to Oklahoma from time-to-time or to Jerusalem or to the West Bank to find extremists.

The problem is not with the religion, the problem is with the ambitions of those -- leadership of those countries. Some of them want to impose their belief on the rest of the world, some of them, and we have to fight those. And I think that there is a way or I don't think that there is no way to live together in a peaceful way.

You know, we are speaking about Muslims taking over, we have many examples out of the -- I think it's 53 Muslim countries worldwide. They are not one unity. They are sharing the same religion, but they are not one unit. They're from different origin, from different culture, the Indonesian are one, the Malaysian are second, the Indians who are Muslim, the Chinese who are Muslims, the Uzbeks -- okay, there are many Christians worldwide, but they are not one unit. They even have different languages, et cetera, et cetera.

It's not frightening me. It's encouraging me to find the right ways how to deal with those different nations and to find the ways. From the Israel perspective, we are facing a different thing because when religion and political ambitions are combined, that creates the problem for us.

And I will say now, and I will re-say it whenever I will be asked, Israel is not yet accepted in the Middle East, is not yet accepted in the Middle

East. And that's the reason why we have to be strong, that's the reason why we have to fight any sign of changing the balances, that's the reason. Once we'll be accepted and embraced by our neighborhood, it will be a completely different story.

Now, about the American standpoint regarding the Iranian, what they are doing with their nuclear, it's news for me. I know that even the American establishment knows that the Iranians have nuclear military program in parallel to the other. That's first.

And regarding fatwa, I really respect the Koran and I read it in order to know it, but there are fatwas and there are anti fatwas or counter fatwas. It depends who is the Ayatollah who wrote the fatwa, and you can find fatwa and the contrary another fatwa of another one, one is living in Egypt and one is living in Iran, and they are not fully correlated regarding the fatwas.

The same with rabbis and the same with archbishops, they are writing, but I am not sure that they are internetting when they are writing it, and addressing it to the rest of the believers that will be able to react. So, I don't rely on those fatwas, I rely on actions.

When you see it, you can believe it. When you read it, it's not enough.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, let's take four quick questions and I'm going to ask for them to be brief so that we can get some brief answers and wrap things up at 11. We'll take Marvin first.

MR. KALB: Marvin Kalb. I'm a guest scholar here at Brookings.

You have been asked the Iran question many, many times. I'm still not quite sure I understand the rhythm of your answers. Do you trust the United States to do the right thing?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Yes.

MR. KALB: You do? Okay.

MR. POLLACK: There's a gentleman in a beige shirt with a beard right there. We'll take him, he's been long suffering.

SPEAKER: Thank you for your speech. I'm from the Syrian Expatriates Organization. My name is Shomo, and my question is about Syria. You said how the fall of the Assad regime, which is probably happening, will be a major blow to Iran, but there is only a 33 percent chance that it will work in our favor.

What would you say about increasing support to the opposition to increase the chance it would work in the favor of the U.S. and of Israel?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Increasing -- once again about the last --

SPEAKER: Increasing support for the opposition, especially arms support for the Syrian opposition.

MR. POLLACK: Okay, we'll take the gentleman right here in the lavender shirt.

SPEAKER: My name is Alex (inaudible). I am working for the Russian service of the Voice of America, and my (inaudible) question refers to the role of Russia. How would you characterize the motivation for the Russian government to block the resolutions? I mean, how complex are facts, I mean,

regarding Iran and Syria? Thank you.

MR. POLLACK: And then the lady here in black who has also been waiting very patiently.

SPEAKER: Thank you, General. My name is Genie (inaudible) with Voice of Vietnamese Americans. Following his question I'd like to ask, what do you see the role of China in the diplomacy and sanctions?

MR. POLLACK: Why don't we take some brief answers on that and wrap things up?

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Okay, I (inaudible) very sure, and I say DS, and I am still with DS, but one thing that I want to add to it, because it was too short and I have to be polite, I say that, yes, but it shouldn't be done secretly, it should be discussed with the other side to build their confidence that DCS (ph.), as I believe, is a real one. It should be discussed. It's not something that should be done behind closed doors. You have to rebuild the confidence of the Israelis and I think it's a matter of confidence. That's all. But personally I believe he, as an American, I believe that what they are saying they are going to do, and they're going to (inaudible.)

Syria, you know, there is a big question, who is leading the Syrian revolution? There are many forces over there. Personally, I am not recognizing a leader over there. There are groups, some of them are very extremist, which is regarding the 33 percent chance of each, that belongs to the bad 33 percent because they were imported from -- some of them from Afghanistan, some of them from Iraq, some of them -- I don't know what they are preparing for

everyone or for us.

The old traditional opposition that mainly stayed in Europe, in France, and in England, I don't know what their power and -- because just to be equipped and supported by the West, by the Americans, by the French, by (inaudible) are not the original opposition, because they are the fighters -- the original opposition, I don't know if they are fighting. They are the foreign ministry of the revolution.

So, I have no recommendation in this respect. I don't think that direct involvement -- direct involvement of the West will help to solve the situation. On the other hand, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey are involved in this campaign and I think that they can do the right job and they know better who are the leading forces over there. They can do better once they are aligned with the Western community, with Europe and with the U.S.

Russia and China, I think that from my point of view, there is no doubt that Russia and China has a major role vis-à-vis many things, but vis-à-vis the Iranian case, and if the Russian Foreign Ministry is saying that sanctions over Iran is harming the Russian economy, well, in this case, I lost my words. I don't know how it's harming the Russian economy, but I take it as it was said, but I think that Russia, China, they both are super powers economy-wise and they have strong power on diplomacy end and military.

So, they are the right combination to join the other forces if they believe -- and I do think that they believe -- that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction should be stopped. If that's the case, I can't understand why they are

sitting on the fence or from time-to-time they are sitting over the fence, one leg here and the other leg on the other side.

I would like to see the Russians and the Chinese more proactive in this respect and I think that they are, in my view, they are the key, a kind of key element to convince the Iranians because the relations between China and Iran and Russia and Iran are better than the relation between Israel and Iran and U.S. and Iran. So, I hope to see them in this campaign.

Thank you very much and I enjoyed it.

(Applause.)

MR. POLLACK: And allow me to just say a word of thanks to our friends at J Street who made it possible for General Haloutz to appear today and to thank General Haloutz himself. This is an incredibly important moment and it is such a wonderful opportunity for Americans to have the benefit of your views, of your experience, and of your insight. So, thank you very much, General.

GENERAL HALOUTZ: Thank you, thank you.

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