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SYRIA: THE PATH AHEAD

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BYMAN: Good morning and welcome. I hope you all have recovered one way or another from the jubilation or anger you felt on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning.

We have all woken up, however, in a world that seems, shockingly enough, remarkably the same despite the outcome of the U.S. election.

Traditionally, a second term is when the President turns more attention to foreign policy. WE don't know whether this will be the case with President Obama, but certainly if he does, one of the most obvious and most important and perhaps the most difficult challenge he's going to face is the question of what to do about Syria.

There are a host of unresolved issues regarding Syria. The civil war, to say it rages on is an understatement. It seems to be getting worse and worse. You have neighboring involvement, and of also great concern, you have spillover into neighboring states. You have the risk that Syria itself will turn into a failed state. And to cap all this off, U.S. policy seems to have stalled.

There were various bats and efforts the Obama Administration placed in the initial parts of this conflict, and these have not borne fruit. And so there's a real question on what to do next.

I'm delighted this morning that we have two excellent speakers to enlighten all of us on different paths forward in Syria. In Doha we have Salman Shaikh, who is one of the senior Syria watchers, I would say, in the world, and we're delighted that he is coming in from Doha because, as I suspect almost all this audience knows, the opposition meetings, the importance of Qatar and Doha in determining the nature of the Syrian opposition is overwhelming. And we're hoping he'll give us an understanding of this as well as his broader thoughts.

And here in Washington, D.C. we have Mike Doran. Mike is also one of our established Syria watchers, someone who has written several very strong and provocative pieces critiquing the Administration's policy, and also we're hoping that he'll give his thoughts on the way forward.

I think we're going to begin in Doha and then we'll move to Washington. So, Salman, if I could ask you to kick us off please.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you, Dan, and it's a pleasure to be with you here from Doha. We've got a very nice set of people here also including people who I deeply respect from Syria, some of whom have been attending the opposition conference, some who have not, and I'd particularly like to welcome Ibrahim Pasha, who is one of the elders of the Kurdish community and also a head of the social committee of the Kurdish National Council.

And let me also say, I'm humbled to speak about Syria in front of Syrians, but this, I will try to do.

You know, as you said, Dan, the situation in Syria has gone from bad to worse. What was a peaceful uprising was militarized almost from day one by the regime itself and that militarization of that conflict has continued unabated and in more intensity, perhaps, through the start of this year.

In fact, when it comes to the international community's efforts, I would say that Kofi Annan oversaw a period, not entirely his fault, but he oversaw a period whereby which we reached the point of no return when it came to the militarization of this conflict, and that Lafta Brahimi is probably overseeing a period where the conflict takes a life of its own.

The effects on Syria, first and foremost, are dire. We're seeing a process of fragmentation inside Syria as the government loses control of territory and the

people who are in liberated areas or so-called liberated areas and elsewhere are finding very little support in putting together the governance and administrative structures that are needed to look after their people.

Also on the ground we're seeing a proliferation of military groups partly because of the varying funds of sources of support that they've been getting, both inside the country, across their borders on the black market, and internationally, we're not seeing, yet, a unified military rebel effort. We're still seeing a fairly fragmented one.

In amongst all of that, there has been a lot of talk about the radical groups and extremists. Well, that has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, partly assisted by the regime, but which may well take a life of its own in the future.

And, of course, there has been a lot of talk about the sectarianization of the Syrian crisis.

Let me say, first and foremost, Syria is not Iraq, Syria is not Lebanon, Syria has a very proud tradition and a history of people living together from different communities, and some would say it's been a wonder that we haven't seen more sectarian bloodletting as we, for example, saw in Iraq from 2003 -- after 2003 in a period of two, three years up to 2006.

That is testimony, by and large, but for sure the seeds of sectarian discord have been laid, again, largely by the regime and the longer the situation goes on, the more likely we're going to see that sectarian bloodletting does take over.

In sum, what my paper says, as you've referred, losing Syria is the crumbling of the Syrian nation-state and that is something I think we should all be extremely concerned about, not least, of course, we talk about the situation internally because of the regional spillover effect.

The regional spillover effect has now been going on for quite some time

and if we hadn't any reason to be worried, we should not that Syria is a safety valve for this entire region, and when it blows, it will affect the entire region.

I've talked about an arc of conflict, which stretches from the eastern Mediterranean shore all the way into the Gulf. In many ways, a civil war in Lebanon, in Syria, and in Iraq, with devastating impact also on the wider Gulf, cannot be ruled out at this point in time.

I just ask a simple question in my paper: if there, for example, was a civil war in Lebanon, this may not be, some would say, around the corner, I would say it's probably a bigger possibility, but if there was a civil war in Lebanon, who would stop it at this point in time?

We, of course, we can talk about the regional aspects more. What I would say to you is in amongst five of the most sensitive borders in the world, none of those borders is immune from that regional spillover and we've seen that even with regards to the Golan and Israel.

I would say that all of these borders, including Israel's border, will continue to be compromised in the period ahead.

There has been much talk about a political solution. There is a -- what I would say is an orthodox thinking, and I guess that is the model that is being pursued by the UN-Arab League Envoys, that you have to get the opposition and the regime together in dialogue. You have to get them together in dialogue and forge some sort of a transition. I would say to you that that is a flawed idea.

Many Syrians, most Syrians, don't believe and have never believed, that this regime would be sincere in dialogue. In fact, as I said, its militarization of the conflict almost from day one has taught them that it's not going to.

And yet, we have, on the table, the Geneva Initiative, which talks about

effectively a regime-led transition in Syria. The time for a regime-led transition in Syria -- let me say this clearly -- was 2001 -- 2000 and 2001 when we had senior Baath party and regime figures sitting, some of them, in the salons of Aleppo and Damascus and elsewhere, discussing with those -- some of whom are in this room -- transition and change and reform of the regime and its system.

And yet look what we saw. We saw a brutal crackdown at that point and we have seen one ever since to those who have wanted peaceful change including in this uprising.

And we've also seen that a political solution in Syria does not lie in some sort of a deal where the different communities are brought into some sort of a sectarian balance of power. That, of course, is what we saw in Lebanon. That is what, de facto, we have been seeing in Iraq. I would ask you the question, how well are those doing? Not well.

And Syria, again, is not a society whereby which we should be seeking to institutionalize sectarianism and to build with regional power interests some sort of a new balance of forces. This would inherently, in my view, create an unstable Syria and it's very un-Syrian.

No, I believe that a political solution lies in one thing and one thing only, which is to take on the very difficult task, as it has been proving, of building a viable national platform, a national project that binds Syrians of all communities to a common vision for the future and to start discussing that future. And you know what, that takes into account -- that must take into account the social fabric of Syrian societies.

Where we have been going wrong in the initiatives that we've seen so far and starting with the SNC is that we have not been able -- or Syrians, more importantly, have not managed up to this point to recognize the constituencies, the heavyweight constituencies that comprise the Syrian social structure. That includes the key tribal

elements, that includes the Kurds, that includes the old families, Christian, Alawi, Suuni, et cetera. That includes the independent religious figures. It includes the economic elites who are part of some of those old families.

Up until now, as we speak, a political solution has not been forged between them, and yet, in my view, that is what is required and there is no shortcut to that because not only would it hasten the demise of the Assad regime, it would also give us some confidence that the future of Syria can be built and a stable and prosperous Syria can be brought about with the help of the international community.

We have now reached the stage, though, where Syrians will require much greater assistance, and one particular demand that the Syrians have been asking for is protection. And let me raise this right now.

We cannot have a situation whereby which an entire population is at the mercy of the aircraft and the artillery and the tanks of its government and that goes on for month after month after month. We cannot have a situation where we have barrel bombs being rolled out onto bread queues -- and I can tell you, 14 bakeries or more have been attacked in Aleppo alone -- and yet the international community does nothing.

This is a stain on all of humanity, I would say, and it requires now, as we perhaps look at a path forward with a new period with regards to the United States electoral cycle, where we have to look at it much more seriously.

Now, there are varying ideas about no-fly zones, about buffer zones, and borders. First of all, we have de facto a liberated or buffer area, and many Syrians will tell you that they can walk into Syria, even get their passport stamped by rebel controlled border guards and enter into the country and go all the way into Aleppo. In fact, I won't point him out, but there is somebody here from Idlib who has been managing that kind of process inside the country, but what they are fearful of, of course, is the regime's aircraft,

which is attacking them.

Also, as I told you before, there is increasing, still, fragmentation on the ground with regards to the rebel units. There still remains no unified channel of support to those fighting elements.

Let me combine the two ideas, then. It is high time that the United States led a train and assist mission of the Syrian rebels on the ground and it can be done up until today. It may not be possible in a few months' time because the whole situation may well take a dynamic on its own where certain groups, particularly Islamist groups, and extremist Islamist groups would hold sway who may not have any interest in engaging with Western forces.

It can be done today because by and large, rebel groups are still on a subsistence allowance. They only receive certain amount of weapons and cash and support. They can be influenced at this point in time.

It can also be done because the regional players are waiting for the West in this respect. There have been reports, as you know, in the press, *The New York Times* was one, where there is effectively a say on the U.S. side with regards to the kinds of advance weapons that the rebels need.

I believe that is correct and it shows you that the regional powers, especially the Gulf States, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have been deferential to Western and American concerns. Why? Because they know that they are in a difficult situation, they're in a difficult battle, and it would be, were are in effect, in a regional proxy war and they would not want to be in this alone. They do require U.S. assistance and help in this regard.

But more broadly, a training and assistance mission, only key powers led by the United States can bring about. It has the capabilities which regional states and

Gulf States do not have in order to provide the kind of training, of assistance, of expert advice, of logistical support, of intelligence, which should be part of the package of providing those kinds of weapons.

If we are able to do that now, we may well be laying the ground seeds for a viable national army in the future, and this is something, if so far what I have said about this subject has not convinced you, let me try one more tact, which is that if the Assad regime was to be blown up tomorrow, if he was to go tomorrow -- and I've heard this from senior defected officers who would say, we would find it hard to control the situation on the ground. And it would be made worse. Why? Because we are likely to see the 20- to 22,000 plus Alawi officers who form the backbone of the current national army, many of them desert, go and seek refuge or man the barricades in their current strongholds.

We may then, in fact, see, de facto, a situation we saw in Iraq, even if we don't want it, whereby we don't have a national force. Which is why working with the rebels right now is not just for now, it's not even to get rid of Assad, it's also working for the future.

Let me move on very quickly to a couple of the other recommendations that I make in my report. The Arab-Kurdish issue, this is an issue whereby which we at Brookings, Brookings Doha, we have conducted a number of workshops. Again, I have the privilege here of welcoming Ibrahim Ibrahim Pasha here to the Center. He and others have engaged in this discussion. This is not an issue that can be resolved tomorrow.

Arabs and Kurds do want to work together though there are continuous efforts by the regime to sow strife between them. And as Arab tribes and Kurdish figures have sought to enter into dialogue, I believe they've received scant support for those kinds of efforts by the international community.

What I propose in my report or a series -- is a mechanism whereby which

the hard discussion, the hard dialogue can -- a space for that can be created longer-term, which -- perhaps with regional involvement as well, perhaps an independent commission, whereby which these issues between Arabs and Kurds can be discussed and hopefully resolved.

Failure to do so, I'm afraid, will affect the transitional period, will affect the constitution writing period, and it will affect the efforts to build, long-term, a viable, strong, and prosperous Syria.

Finally, with regards to the international community, as I said before, the efforts of the international community have been too siloed, have been too divided. You have various countries providing support inside the country. That, whether it's on the civilian side or whether it's on the military side, is creating further fragmentation right now. That is why what we are seeing currently being discussed in Doha is positive -- the model, the idea is generating, I think, greater efforts by the international community present here to try and build one unified channel of support.

I hope that that is possible in the future. The last thing we want to see in the future are Western ambassadors going to the borders, distributing money, or Gulf States distributing money to favorite groups. This will not work. It will only create further fragmentation inside the country.

The final thing I will say is with regards to American policy. I'm sure we can discuss this more and I'm sure Mike will go into it much, much more. I would say to you that the United States really has not had a policy on Syria, and that has not been just in this period, it has been for much, much longer.

I would particularly point to the period since Bashar al-Assad. The policy, if there has been one, is, one, to try and ensure that fear -- I'm sorry -- that chaos and instability inside Syria and on its borders does not affect the regional balance. As a

result, successive U.S. Administrations, actually supported the status quo inside Syria for far too long.

Well, that status quo has been broken, has been broken by the people of Syria themselves and the international community has been struggling, and I would say the United States, has been struggling to find a policy whereby which it can deal with the new reality.

It is no longer possible to build a policy on fear, which tries to maintain the status quo, and I would say to you that the policy even now is a low-maintenance policy. It is time to step up. It is time to find new solutions. It is time to take tough decisions. Failing that, this situation, I'm afraid, in Syria, is going to get from bad to worse. Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you very much, Salman. And for those of you, like me, who are impressed with the power of what Salman has said, I cannot commend to you enough his recent paper, which is available on our website and has been distributed outside. It's a truly superb piece of work.

I also was remiss in not welcoming our Doha audience, and given the knowledge and expertise of that audience, I look forward to hearing their remarks in the discussion.

I'd now like to turn things over on the Washington end to Mike Doran to hear his thoughts.

MR. DORAN: Thanks, Dan. And thanks, Salman. That's a fantastic presentation.

One of the pleasures of working with Salman is that I agree about 98 percent with him, which, in my case, I rarely agree with anyone, even with myself 98 percent, so it's wonderful to have this.

I'll just expand -- his analysis, I think, is just about letter perfect and I'll just expand on a few points, putting a particular emphasis on U.S. policy.

If you've been following discussions among Syrians about what's going on, you may have noticed that there's a tremendous expectation that U.S. policy is going to change now because of the election, that policy was on hold until the election and now we're going to see a major initiative. That's not just among the Syrians, I think some of the regional partners, the Qataris, the Saudis, and the Turks have also had this expectation.

I'm actually very pessimistic about that and I'll give you some reasons why I'm pessimistic about that, but first let me talk about what I think is wrong with the current policy, as I say, especially from an American perspective on it.

The policy, you can look at it two ways. There's Salman's description just now that we don't really have a policy. And that may well be. The debate that matters the most in the Administration about the policy is the one in the President's head, and I don't know anyone who is really privy to that. So, it's really impossible to say how President Obama is framing the Syrian question.

So, what we have to go by is what the U.S. actually does on the ground, and so I will address myself to the way we are actually publicly explaining what we are doing, and I'll explain why, just like Salman, I think it doesn't really make a lot of sense.

And so, on the face of it, it kind of looks like we have a regime change policy because President Obama said, famously, that President Assad should step aside, but what we really have, if you look closely at what we're saying to the opposition and the positions that we've taken during the Annan initiative and now the Brahimi initiative and so on, what we're really saying is we want a regime-led transition, or we want an Assad change but not a regime change, because what we're doing is we're calling on the

opposition to unify and come up with a pan-Syrian platform, opposition platform, and then to negotiate with those elements of the regime who don't have blood on their hands. I don't know who those are, but that is the idea.

Now, this is not -- this is simply not going to work because as Salman said, the regime has an agenda, it has a militarized agenda, and it is impossible for the regime to reform. The regime is Assad, his family, his inner core. There is a very strong Alawite core to the regime.

If you change the guys at the top, then you are actually calling for -- you are calling for regime change. The regime cannot reform either politically or economically without putting an end to itself, and that's why it's been -- there hasn't been any sign, ever, of the regime really taking -- making a significant effort to reform. Anything that it has packaged as reform have been very transparent efforts to split elements in the opposition, not really to change the character of the regime in any way.

And there is a very strong sectarian component to this. From the regime's point of view, it's a zero sum gain. So, this call for a negotiation is going to be a non-starter, it has been a non-starter from the beginning.

In the meantime, we're turning to the opposition and telling the opposition to unify. We didn't like the Syrian National Congress, and so we now have the Syrian National Initiative in Doha and we're trying to create a more cohesive opposition organization, one that includes exiles and people on the ground who have some military power.

It's not -- conceptually, it's not a ridiculous idea, but it's not going to succeed, and I'll just give you a sense of several obvious problems that this initiative cannot address.

The obvious problem, number one, is Assad is still there and he's still

killing people. What's going on in Doha right now isn't going to create a more powerful fighting force or a force that can give protection to people or a force that is going to do anything to speed the departure of Assad. So, that's point one.

The second point, we now have powerful, self-funded, self-organized Jihadi organizations on the ground. There's two primary ones in Aleppo, the Nustro organization, the Tawheed organization, they're there, they've got money that comes in independently of anything that the United States does, and importantly, they're armed. They are actually carrying out the work of the armed opposition against the Assad regime.

I gather that part of this national initiative that we're carrying out, that we're urging in Doha, is to sideline, somehow, the Jihadis on the ground. I can't see how this is going to have any effect whatsoever.

What we have actually done, by leading but not leading, and calling for the Syrian National Initiative, is we have set up a lot of bickering and fighting among the opposition, so we've created, off on one side, a kind of new little conflict among the opposition, not an armed conflict, but a lot of political infighting, which does nothing to advance the goal of moving the -- of ousting Assad and creating conditions for a new Syria.

Then the third issue, as Salman mentioned, the Kurds. We don't have just Assad on the ground fighting, he also has his allies or elements that he's supporting in order to fragment and weaken the opposition, and one of the main ones is the PYD, the Kurdish organization -- the Syrian-Kurdish organization that is allied to the PKK in Turkey.

That Assad did is he pulled out of the Kurdish areas of Syria and then pumped up the PYD, which is now fighting with the non-PYD Kurds and there's been

some significant tension also between Kurds and the Free Syrian Army. It hasn't blown up completely, but there have been some significant tensions there.

Nothing that we're doing politically in Doha or elsewhere is doing anything about the guys in the PYD on the ground with guns. And this is the question that we have to ask ourselves, what are we going to do about the guys on the ground with guns? And there is nothing in the American policy that really significantly addresses that. The only thing that can, as Salman suggested, is arming the opposition, creating a U.S.-supported opposition group that has the power and the authority of the United States and its allies.

Now, that will become, necessarily, because of the nature of a fragmented Syria, it will become yet one more militia among a number of militias on the ground, but I think that we have the resources, the international authority, and so forth, to create the super militia, the one that's better than all others.

The kind of initiative that we've got -- Salman said 2001 was the time for this sort of initiative. You know, maybe we could have tried something like this very early on to try to create a more cohesive opposition organization and carry out some kind of political transition. I never believed in that personally, but the time for it is really long past because we now have these armed groups on the ground that are acting completely independent of the political processes that we are spinning up.

So, I'll stop there with the critique of what we're doing and say why I don't think it's going to change.

I hate to be pessimistic. I agree with everything that Salman said and there's -- we've distributed here something that I wrote in *The New York Times* calling for a kind of Libya-style intervention in Syria and I strongly do favor that approach, but the reason I don't think it's going to happen is the following: I don't believe -- and the reason

I'm emphasizing this right now is because I see in Syrian circles a very strong expectation that we're looking at a big change in U.S. policy now. I would be cautious about that.

Number one, long before it was election season we had a tremendous fear of getting deeply involved in Syria. This is something that's been running through the Obama policy and actually, having served in the Bush Administration, I can say that I can see continuities back in to the Bush Administration as well.

It's a very sad fact about Syria that it is often important enough to engage the attention of senior leaders for a short period of time, but never important enough to be their strategic focus, and I think that that continues to be true.

I am imagining now that President Obama, in the next few days and weeks, is going to sit down with his national security team -- actually, that's not even true, now that I've said it. We're going to have some significant personnel changes in the national security team, so it won't be for a few weeks, a few months, before he sits down with a new team and says, okay, what are we going to do now? And then when he does that, he's going to talk about, what's my legacy? That's the question that's going to be on everybody's mind. When I leave after these next four years, what's my foreign policy legacy?

And there's one issue that's going to be at the very top there, and that's Iran nukes, that's the number one issue. The number two issue, I suspect, I'm not sure about this, but I suspect is going to be Israeli-Palestinian peace process. And the question is, where is the Syrian thing going to fall, in that framework, once he starts framing the issue that way? And here you're going to run into the same problems you've run into all along.

In order to get a deal that's going to be -- that he's going to be able to

sell here at home on Iranian nukes, he's going to say to himself, I need the Russians. I need the Russians to help me with this. I also need the Russians, by the way, to supply my troops in Afghanistan. If I carry out an aggressive regime change policy in Syria, I'm going to alienate the Russians.

Plus, I have no proof that if I do what these guys, Doran and Shaikh are saying, and I start creating a powerful, American-backed opposition, armed opposition, that in the end I'm not going to be -- I'm not going to find myself responsible for a problem in Syria that's very analogous to the problem that the Bush Administration had in post-Saddam Iraq. Isn't it better that I just hang back from that?

One last thing here is that when I look at -- when I personally look at the Syria problem, I always frame it in terms of the Iran problem. I believe that our goal, strategically, in the Middle East, should be to put as much pressure on Iran as possible in all arenas of the region.

In Washington, in the White House, it often -- that does not naturally happen and it would require the President to aggressively force the national security bureaucracy to see the Middle East like that, to read the chess board in that way.

I don't believe they are reading it that way and I don't believe that they actually will, so what you get in the end is a lack of strategic purpose in our policy in Syria, whether you could say it the way Salman did that there's no policy, or there's a policy that like a lot of things we do, has gauzy, really moralistic sounding purpose, like we want there to be peace and love and harmony between all the different ethnic groups and we're working to achieve that and so on, and it makes us feel good about ourselves, but it doesn't really have any positive effect or any effect whatsoever on the ground.

So, I agree with Salman about what needs to happen. I intend to continue advocating for that as much as possible. I'm not totally pessimistic, but I think

the hurdle is going to be very great.

MR. BYMAN: That's a rather, kind of, depressing set of talks, I'll say. I think Salman ended slightly more optimistic about the future, but both were, I would say, quite pessimistic about the situation today.

I'll start Q&A shortly and actually we have questions in Doha and then some questions in Washington back and forth.

However, before I turn things over to Salman to ask questions in Doha, I'd like to ask both of our speakers to comment on, not an Iraq analogy, but really a Libya analogy, which is, both are calling for more decisive intervention, both are calling for aggressively getting behind either all or part of the Syrian opposition, but I think in Administration circles and perhaps even among the American people, there's a real sense from Libya of being burned. That here the United States was part of a very decisive intervention and here there was success, a dictator fell, and yet here, we saw recently, there was tremendous violence that led to the deaths of several Americans, and there is a sense that this did not pay off.

The United States sacrificed, the United States may not have led but was certainly part of a broad international effort, and yet the payoff was continued anti-Americanism, and that, therefore, why do a much more difficult effort, one that militarily is much harder, when, in fact, the end result from a cold, narrow, American point of view, may be a Syria that is still very hostile to the United States?

I'd welcome both speakers' thoughts, and Salman, if I could begin with you, please.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. Actually, I think Libya gives us one very important lesson, which is that -- a couple, but one in particular, which is that support from individual countries to groups on the ground, when it's not unified, will actually

necessarily create different or strengthen different militias.

In the case of Libya, I understand, there was support provided from Gulf and European countries, but it was done more in a bilateral fashion than in any unified way, and in fact what I'm advocating is that -- and I still believe it's possible -- that the United States leads a regional and international effort to train and assist the rebels on the ground.

And remember, we have hundreds if not thousands of defected soldiers and their commanders, some of them languishing in Turkey and Jordan, in Cairo and elsewhere, and it's not as if we're necessarily starting from scratch, but they need to feel as if there is the support and the capability being brought to bear for that kind of very difficult effort.

Libya, again, for me, is an example where the U.S. stepped forward, it helped to save, in my view, thousands of lives, but then it stepped back, and as the conflict wore on, it didn't take the kind of role that was required, particularly with regard to the arming of those civilian and tribal elements on the ground.

Also, Libya teaches us, and there was much more preparation for the transition, that you will have a weak interim administration. And in the case of Syria, it would likely be even weaker. So, the other lesson I would have is that the international community needs to think much more as to how it can enter into a very serious partnership with Syrians, especially those who will be leading in that transition.

And, again, that effort needs to start now, which is why we do need to continue to work on building a common national platform.

With regards to anti-Americanism, Dan, most Libyans are not anti-American, I think. When Ambassador Chris Stevens and his colleagues were killed -- and, by the way, Chris was somebody who I know, as you know, personally, like some of

you, who I considered a friend -- you saw how Libyans came out.

Now, the one thing that the United States should be aware of is that there is rising anti-Americanism in Syria, rising anti-Americanism, that the United States, as well as Western powers, have not stepped forward when it comes to their protection, and this, I'm afraid, will indicate that it will be much more harder going for the United States in the future to exert any influence in shaping the future of that very -- of this very important strategic country.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Mike?

MR. DORAN: So, I think we Americans, as a people, we suffer from a disease of wanting to be loved, and I don't think that anti-Americanism is something that should be a great strategic concern to the United States. I mean, obviously, where we can actually do things to alleviate it is great, but our concern, I think, has to be state sponsors of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist groups with global reach, and in particular, the nexus between those three things is the strategic threat.

And Syria offers us a fantastic opportunity, not only to be -- not only to do the proper humanitarian thing, the moral thing, and to help people who are being murdered by a rapacious dictatorship, but it also allows us to strike a blow at some of our strategic foes. In particular, I think -- I mean, the question in Syria is, what is the number one strategic threat in Syria to the United States? Is it Iran or is it al-Qaeda?

For me, personally -- let me start with Iran and then I'll go to al-Qaeda. For me, personally, it's Iran. That's the way we should be reading the whole chess board of the Middle East. We need to be looking at every arena and asking ourselves how do we roll up Iran or roll back Iran and put pressure on it in order to get the kind of deal from it that we need in the end.

If we topple Assad, we take away from Iran their primary outlet to the -- or their primary inroad into the Arab world. That's huge. Assad is the greatest ally that Iran has and that's why Iran is not giving it up.

Now, Salman said something earlier in this initial presentation, he said, we're in a proxy war in Syria. It's my belief that the Iranians see it as a proxy war very clearly. And they are fighting a proxy war. And they are arming their ally. And they're training their ally. And they're giving their ally all kinds of assistance. And the Russians are arming and assisting their ally. And the United States is giving democracy seminars in Istanbul and hectoring the opposition to love each other and to bring Alawis in.

So, if you're a Syrian sitting on the ground and you say, wow, this is a funny way that Americans conduct a proxy war here, right, with these lectures about good governance. I don't think we're actually fighting a proxy war and I believe -- I have a strong suspicion that in the White House, they're afraid that if we do get involved, there will be a proxy war. That those are the terms in which they're talking about it. They're not saying to themselves, Iran's fighting a proxy war and we have to get into the game.

Secondly, on al-Qaeda, I think there's a tremendous fear, especially after the Benghazi business, that if we get more deeply involved, we're going to have the same kind of problems that we have in post-Libya and that we're going to exacerbate the al-Qaeda problem in Syria.

I think it's exactly the reverse. I think our policy has created or helped to create the al-Qaeda problem in Syria because we've left a vacuum there that al-Qaeda and related movements are exploiting. That's number one. So, I mean, if you're in Syria, on the ground, and you want to carry out opposition against the regime, in some cases you have no choice but to work with the Jihadis on the ground because they have the arms and they have the finances for the fight.

There's something else, though, as well. The role of the United States in the Middle East is to be the guy that can organize all of the disparate elements in its alliance. I mean, we are friends with the Turks, we're friends with the Saudis, we're friends with the Qataris, we're friends with the Israelis. They all share similar interests in Syria, or at least a program could be put together in which their interests would all be served.

We are the only power that can actually coordinate all of those different powers, can come up with roles and missions, and come up with a serious policy that could actually bring about an effect that would be in all of their interests. The Turks can't do it on their own, the Saudis can't do it on their own, certainly the Israelis can't. So, we really are the indispensable player here.

When we pull back and we say, oh, we're not going to touch it, the others don't stop pursuing their interests, but they use what they have at their disposal, so what's happening is a lot of Gulf money is now going into Syria and it's going through Jihadi organizations. I mean, the Saudis and the Qataris are projecting power the only way they can, which is through money and through irregular organizations, which are Jihadi organizations.

So, our attempt not to exacerbate the problem has actually created the problem. That's the way I see it. So, regardless of whether you think the strategic goal is Iran or whether you think the strategic goal is Sunni Jihadism, our policy right now isn't addressing either one.

And just one last point here on helping out our allies. If we're talking about a more aggressive policy toward the Assad regime, we have to be clear in our minds what we're calling for. We're calling for war between Turkey and Syria. That's basically what we're doing. The Turks, I gather, are much more eager to have a more

aggressive policy than they have been in the past, but they need our help. Again, we're the indispensable power.

If they go to war with Syria, they're going to war with the ally of Iran and Russia. The Iranians are going to respond primarily, but not exclusively, through their Kurdish proxies to carry out a guerrilla war against the Turks. They may also cut off the natural gas from Iran to Turkey.

The Russians also supply gas to Turkey and they have other ways of putting pressure on the Turks, so what the Turks need from us more than anything is they need our back, they need us to say, we'll give you the intel support you need, we'll give you the -- we'll help you impose a no-fly zone to begin with, and we'll help you out diplomatically with the Russians.

And I suspect -- I can't prove this and I don't know it for a fact -- but I strongly suspect that that's the point -- when the White House starts looking at that it says, oh, I don't want to have a fight with Putin.

Remember the hot mic episode where President Obama said to Putin, "After the election, boy, then we can really do business." Right? So, all of the Syrians now who were thinking that after the election that Obama is going to come to their aid, remember what he was telling Putin. That's the one thing that we have from the President's mouth.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you both. Now I'd like to open it up for questions and let's take two from Doha and then we'll come back to Washington. Salman, please.

MR. SHAIKH: Actually, if you don't mind we'll reverse it because our mic is not hotwired to you, so what I'm going to actually take this occasion to do is that if you have a question here in Doha, if you wouldn't mind scribbling it down, and then I would be able to relay it to you, because otherwise nobody's going to be able to hear us in

Washington.

And perhaps, if that's not satisfactory, we can continue afterwards.

MR. BYMAN: As I was saying, I'd like to begin in Washington and then we'll take some questions in Doha. Please. Yes, sir.

And please speak into the mic and identify yourself first, please.

SPEAKER: Okay, my name is Doan and I am here in Washington, D.C. with the Peace and Democracy Party, but my question would rather be independent of the Peace and Democracy Party.

Okay, Michael, I read your piece, and Salman, your five-point plan for post-Assad era, and there is a question of Turkey as being directly involved in post-Assad era in restructuring Syria, and given that Turkey's past behavior and its own problem with the Kurdish minority, and currently there are great hunger strikes in Turkish prisons and thousands of political prisoners, and has been joined by two members of parliament this morning. So, given all these issues and also the Kurds of Syria, their distrust with the Arab community and Assad regime, 1962, more than 300,000 Kurds, at this very second, even they are not recognized by the Syrian government.

So, what do you think of Turkish involvement in this process to be objective and participate in a democratic and just solution that also addresses that the Kurdish community's concern? And also, how do you see that PYD, and specific to Michael, you made a comment on that one. Now PYD is representing the largest portion of the Kurdish community in Syria.

So, how do you think (inaudible) or somehow despising or taking out of this new plan that you want to have Kurds to be unified as well, and then they are reconciled with the Arab opposition and that take part justly in this post-Assad era? I thank you very much for your comment.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Mike?

MR. DORAN: So, the PYD, though, is working with Assad right now, so the -- in my view, the strategic priority of the United States is to topple Assad. That's the number one question. And all of the political efforts that we're making in Doha right now, laudable though they may be, they're not advancing that effort. And once Assad is gone, a totally new political reality is going to arise anyway, so the political structures that are built before Assad are going to have to be completely revamped afterwards.

But my problem with the PYD is that it is aligned with Assad. It is pursuing its own interests, I have no doubt, but it sees those interests as being best pursued with the Assad regime.

Turkey, Turkey is the most powerful neighbor of Syria. It's going to be involved and it has deep interests. It's going to be involved in this transition. I believe that we should do everything we can to ensure the rights of the Kurdish minority in Syria. That should be a principle of the U.S. policy and we should talk very forthrightly and consistently with our Turkish allies about that. But there's also a responsibility of the Kurds in Syria to stop fighting with each other as well.

MR. BYMAN: Salman?

MR. SHAIKH: I won't add too much here. I agree with what Mike is saying. I'd underscore, again, the importance of getting Arabs and Kurds to dialogue with each other in this period and even through the transition. I think it's extremely important, and also supporting those dialogue efforts.

Mike is absolutely right, in my view, the PYD is a proxy in many ways of the regime, it's being supported by the regime, it's being armed by the Iranians, it is a card so sow chaos. Meanwhile, the Arab tribes are being told by the regime that the Kurds are trying to enslave you, so we have a potentially big problem here. It can only be

resolved in trying to support those constructive forces who are trying to maintain social harmony inside Syria and who want to dialogue with others in the region, not least the Turks.

It's absolutely essential that we find a mechanism whereby which that occurs, but this, you see, goes again to the broader point of building an independent national platform that binds Syrians. I agree with Mike, there is a lot of emphasis and wasted talk about uniting the opposition. I'm not necessarily talking about that. What I'm talking about is that if the regime was to go, we hope -- we know that the institutions will have to be rebuilt, let's not hope that the whole of Syrian society has to be rebuilt.

These little pieces would then have to be put together, which is why it's so important we try to support the different social and national constituencies inside Syria now, otherwise, I'm afraid, it is going to be an extremely difficult period.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Mike, you wanted to chime in a bit?

MR. DORAN: Yeah, I just wanted to say -- I wanted to make sure that I was clear because I realize I spoke in a way that would suggest that I thought that these political efforts are meaningless and that's not what I meant. What is troubling me about American policy is the tendency to say to the opposition, when you guys love each other and when you guys pull in the Alawites and the Christians and you represent the wonderful rainbow that is Syrian society, then we'll consider arming the opposition. And it's completely the wrong priority.

There should be an emphasis on creating unity among the opposition, creating a viable political framework in which problems like the conflicts between the Kurds and between the Kurds and their tribal neighbors and so on, can be worked out, but the American emphasis should be on toppling Assad. And as I said, once that happens, the whole political context is going to change anyway.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Another question from Washington, please?
In the front, please.

SPEAKER: Thank you, gentlemen, for your time today. (Inaudible)
Heritage Foundation intern. I have currently been studying Mali, and I was wondering, the whole conflict in Mali started with rebels getting arms from Libya as a result of some of them joining Kaddafi's forces. I was wondering, if we do choose to arm the rebels, how can we ensure that we don't have something similar to Mali happen in Syria and have more Islamist takeovers and procurement of such arms? Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Salman, if I could ask you to start off with that one, please?

MR. SHAIKH: For sure. It's great for international envoys to remind us about what could happen and a breakdown of the state, but I do wonder what efforts are being exerted to stop that other than to wait for an opportunity to start a transition.

Look, as I said to you, the situation in Syria and the efforts of the regime are creating a self-fulfilling prophecy, but we have -- which is why, of course, first and foremost, we have to shorten the timeframe of this regime and get working on a transition whereby which a power and security vacuum doesn't develop.

I can tell you that, from at least my discussions, the overwhelming -- I mean, all Syrians don't want extremism in their midst, and it will be Syrian society that would ensure that that does not happen, but we're in a situation right now whereby which Syrians are looking for help almost from anywhere and they will -- some will grow more desperate for that help in the future, especially if we have a situation of chaos, that would be an environment whereby which we would see these kinds of forces exert themselves.

At this stage, you know, 20 months into this crisis, that is not something that we think will happen because we still, I think, have the opportunity to turn this

situation around, but a power and security vacuum will be exploited in the future and this is something that I think we're all warning about and that's why I'm talking about losing Syria in this context.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Mike?

MR. DORAN: So, the Middle East -- in life, if you don't know this, you probably do know it, in life, the solution to every problem brings new problems. And in the Middle East, that's sort of doubly true. There's no problem you can solve in the Middle East that's not going to give you a really thorny problem. So, we're going to have that problem, but as Salman says, we're going to have that problem whether we do something or whether we don't do something, because you can see it, we have it already.

So, the question is -- I mean, chaos has a form. There's going to be some chaos in Syria. Which form of chaos is preferable to the United States? And the form of chaos that is preferable to the United States is the one that gives the most pain to Iran.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Salman, now I will try turning it over and I hope there has been time to gather some of the questions from our Doha audience.

MR. SHAIKH: Sure. One thing that Ibrahim Ibrahim Talil Pasha wants to say to us, it's unfortunate that technical difficulties don't allow him to come and say it directly, he's underscoring that there is not a Kurdish-Arab conflict. He said, "Who said there's a Kurdish-Arab conflict? We are brothers. We Kurds have a problem with the regime, but we don't have any issues with any components of Syrian society." Again, he's underscoring the efforts of the regime to sow strife between Arabs and Kurds, Arabs and Kurds who have lived together and where Ibrahim Pasha is from (inaudible) in Jazira and Hasakah and places like this, there has been a long history of Arabs and Kurds living side-by-side as brothers.

He also says, "Who said Syrians asked for military intervention from America or Europe? We only want weapons and anti-aircraft weapons to free the land. Our problem is the aircraft." So, I think that was important that I gave you that.

But then just a couple of questions. One, is to Michael, you mentioned that containing Iran is a top priority for the U.S. How come the U.S. could not prevent the rise of pro-Iranian attitude of the Maliki government in Iraq?

And then another one regarding U.S. intervention, why did you assume that troops on the ground -- this is not a good idea for either U.S. or Syrian people. What about a no-fly zone or providing legitimate -- the FSA with Stinger missiles? Again, that's the same point.

And I'll also just add in one more, I guess to me, how do you see the role of Egypt in the path ahead of Syria? And to Michael, do you think that there will be for a huge change in the U.S. foreign policy or is this all about the start of a nothing-to-lose Obama era?

MR. BYMAN: Mike, there is quite a bit to tackle there, so go forth as you will.

MR. DORAN: Okay, I'll start with the last one. Obviously, we all have to wait and see. I'm expecting more of a nothing-to-lose Obama era than a massive change in the policy. I'll be happily surprised and I will do everything I can with what limited resources I have to suggest a different path, but I'm expecting the nothing-to-lose policy.

With regard to U.S. forces on the ground, I'm not actually advocating that, I was advocating a Libya-style intervention where we provide a no-fly zone and arm and train the opposition, and the arming and training doesn't necessarily even have to take place on Syrian soil. But we have to be clear with ourselves about what that means. It means war between Turkey and Syria. It's a serious proposition that requires -- it can't

be done on the sly or on the cheap or while telling ourselves we're doing something else.

On the question of relations between Kurds and Arabs, I'm sure that on the ground between Kurds and Arabs who live in neighboring villages or even within the same villages and so on, there's a long history of cooperation, but there is also, with all due respect, a history of deep conflict and disagreement between the Syrian Arabs and the Kurds about the legitimate rights of the Kurds regarding their language, citizenship, and so forth, in the Syrian polity, and that's a real thorny issue for any opposition group -- within any umbrella -- opposition umbrella, that's looking to build a new Syria.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Let me turn back to Washington, please.

Yes, in the back with the hand up.

MR. LARABY: Steve Laraby, RAND. This is to Mike. Basically it seems to me what you are -- if I can sum up what I think I heard, is that the situation of non-intervention, basically, on the part of the United States, is making this situation worse because in the vacuum, the Saudis and the Qataris are using Jihadist organizations in some way to funnel money through there. And our not being involved, rather than keeping the Jihadis out, has in some way -- in many ways, fostered and allowed them to come in.

Second point, which you seemed to stress, which I would agree with too, is that the longer this goes on, the more difficult it will be to establish any kind of stable transition because the more violence and reprisals that go on, the more difficult it will be just to get people to work together.

Having said that, I still don't see -- the basic problem still seems to me that the opposition is so weak and disorganized that -- and fractured, that even if we did the right things that you suggest, it's hard for me to see how you're going to put together any kind of stable or semi-stable transition, so the question really is, given -- if accept

your premises, which I do, how then are you going to be able to put together some sort of a stable transition?

MR. BYMAN: I think we had some technical difficulties, so I'm going to very, very briefly repeat the questions just in a nutshell. The first was about non-intervention possibly making the situation worse, especially with regard to the Jihadist component, and the second was the point about the lack of unity among the opposition and the complications this causes.

I'll ask Mike to begin and then I'll ask Salman to comment as well.
Please.

MR. DORAN: Before I do that, I just want -- there was a previous question I neglected, the one about the Maliki government in Iraq. I'm advocating that we read the chess board with an emphasis on Iran. I don't believe that the Obama Administration has done that. I don't believe that its policy toward Iraq, policy towards Syria, has been designed primarily to counter the Iranians. So, I agree that one of the consequences of our policy has been to increase the cooperation between Maliki and Iran, and even the cooperation between Maliki and Iran in Syria, which is a very worrying development.

With regard to the gentlemen from Rand's questions, yes, you repeated my premises. Those are my premises. The fact of the matter is, the transition in Syria is going to be very difficult no matter what and there is no simple silver bullet to that problem.

My point was, do we want that very difficult transition problem with Assad or without Assad, and it is -- however difficult it's going to be, it's going to be that much more difficult with Assad or some lump Syrian, lump Alawite militia, however it plays itself out, and as I keep repeating, there's the strategic question. I mean, we keep talking

about the difficulty of transition in Syria, the difficulty of transition in Syria, as if our purpose in Syria is to help the Syrians transition to something more stable.

That's definitely one of our purposes, but the main reason we're there is to look after U.S. interests, and our number one interest is to roll back the Iranians.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Salman, did you want to comment on these points as well?

MR. SHAIKH: Yes, yes. I mean, I'd like to underscore, first and foremost, our main problem is not a divided opposition, it's the regime, and it's a regime which refuses to stop killing its people and supporters, first and foremost, the Iranians, who continue to help them in doing so. That is our biggest problem and it is their efforts which is tearing this -- potentially, is tearing this society apart even as people try to resist it.

As I said, a divided opposition is not our main problem, but a political solution has to be that Syrians can come together around a common independent national platform and work on the future of their country. And I still believe that's possible because there are Syrians who have not yet been tapped in the sort of opposition talks or circus, some would say, who are standing, waiting in the wings, who are disgruntled and very upset with this regime, but who have not yet joined this effort. And our challenge is to bring these people and these heavy constituencies that they have of influence together and to start working on the future of this country.

Our problem is not the Gulf States, let me be clear here. The Gulf States have been coming, for many people, to the rescue of Syrians, but it's -- what I would say is that you cannot leave this situation to the region alone. They will pursue their interests and they don't necessarily have the capabilities and they welcome a more joined up international effort with the U.S. playing a much heavier role.

So, I want to say those things clearly.

Sorry, one thing I was asked about was Egypt, and I think Egypt can be an important part of the -- in putting forward a solution in Syria, but that's not necessarily the regional quartet which is suggested with Iran. I think Egypt, combined with other Arab countries, can help present -- like Morocco or the UAE as well as the other Gulf states, can help forge a third way that can very much give support to this idea of a national project.

If Egypt is looking to forge a solution with Iran, I think that would not be welcomed inside the country, but here let me throw up a black swan for you. Iran can benefit, first and foremost, from a situation of chaos. It did that very effectively in Iraq and it can do so now.

It can also shut out the West in a deal with -- particularly with Islamists inside Syria in the future. If Iran promises to deliver Assad's head on a platter and work with Islamists inside the future Syria, the price that it would ask is that the West, and particularly the United States, be frozen out. If that was the case, I think the United States, in particular, would have clutched defeat from the jaws of victory and would have lost a very important strategic opportunity to isolate further the Iranian regime.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you.

MR. APPS: Pete Apps from Reuters. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on the Turkish request for Patriot missiles, which, as I understand it, would -- might lead to U.S. troops being within a few miles of the Syrian border, if not on the ground itself. And also just your thoughts on whether a Romney Administration would be handling this differently or whether you think it would have made the same calls the Obama Administration is making.

MR. BYMAN: I think you meant the future Rubio Administration. Please

go ahead, Mike.

MR. DORAN: I've seen the reports on the Patriot battery. I don't have any more information than you do. I was immediately skeptical about the idea that this was a sign of greater U.S. -- a more aggressive U.S. policy. I suspect -- we'll have to wait and see, but I suspect it's just the opposite, that this is the equivalent of giving Israel Patriot missiles when the Scuds from Saddam came, you know, it's sit down and shut up, here's some Patriots, and I think that that's the way I'm interpreting it until I have other information.

A Romney Administration, of course, would have solved this problem by now. I think that's obvious to everybody. No, I -- one of the things I'm trying to say is that I think there's a kind of continuity in the way the United States deals with Syria. It's always kind of a second tier issue, or it's always in the "too hard" category. If you follow the way the Obama Administration has argued this, they say, we can't -- if we get more involved, there will be chaos. Then there's chaos, right, and they say, look, there's so much chaos we can't get involved, right.

So, it's the same argument -- the same non-involvement argument in a different form each time no matter what happens and I see a real continuity between Republican and Democratic administrations that way.

And you can see right now too, and there's not a lot of appetite in the U.S. public for foreign adventure, so I suspect that a Romney Administration would see -- would frame the Syrian problem more as I'm doing, as an Iran problem, and would be willing to talk about more aggressive actions with the Saudis and the Turks, but would draw the line at any kind of U.S. intervention on the ground in Syria.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Salman, I'm going to turn things back over to you, both to comment on this, if you'd like and in any event, to bring some more

questions in from our Doha audience.

MR. SHAIKH: Sure. No, I'd agree with Mike. It's probably a limited sort of shut up, sit down, you've got some Patriots, but it may be significant only in that the Turks are asking NATO to get involved, and as you know, the Turks have been hesitant, really, to ask NATO to get involved by placing Patriots on its border. Some military analysts have also heard talk about how these Patriot batteries could effectively create or provide air protection inside Syria, some 40 kilometers deep in, but again I would have thought that that would need to be part of a broader military strategy to establish a no-fly zone.

Let me read to you, just because it's a little bit unfair that people can't make short comments, let me just read to you a couple of quick comments as well as questions.

"If dialogue between the regime and the opposition is a flawed concept, then logically the only solution is to speed up the process of overthrowing Assad. Don't you think we need broader, bolder proposals of arming the opposition?" I think that's kind of consistent with what we've both been saying.

Another comment is that with regards to international efforts, some speaker -- I'm sorry, a panelist -- an audience member here correctly points out that UK Prime Minister Cameron declared he will support the opposition, urged Obama to do the same. Is this because of the reelection of Obama or because of pressure from the Gulf after his recent visit? So, that's an interesting question there, is the UK shifting, and a close ally of the U.S. and could that have some impact with perhaps the French and others as well continuing to call for greater action on behalf of the United States.

And then a question, "What do you think of the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu's suggestion of accepting Syrian vice-president as a negotiation partner

since he's a Sunni who did not become a part of the massacre?"

And then one more question for you, "In your opinion, how likely is it for Russia to take a more proactive stance on the Syrian crisis with the reelection of Obama?"

MR. BYMAN: Mike, why don't you start off and then Salman, I suspect you'll have some excellent thoughts on those questions.

MR. DORAN: So, most of the comments, I think, were consistent with what Salman and I have been saying. With regard to Putin, I think that Putin reads the Syria problem as almost a zero sum gain with the United States. I don't -- Syria is what's left of their -- the Middle Eastern component of their empire, if I could call it that, and I think they're going to zealously guard it.

I'm not a Russia expert but I do know something about human nature, and Putin grew up in the KGB. He used to wake up every morning thinking that a good day was causing pain to the United States. He regards the fall of the Berlin Wall as the greatest geostrategic disaster of the last century, and he now knows he lives in a new world and he knows that he has overlapping interests with the United States and needs to cooperate with them, and so on, but let me tell you, when something goes bad for the United States, it makes him feel good, especially when he's got an asset that he regards as a Russian asset, he's not going to give it up to make the -- to improve relations with the United States.

I haven't seen any evidence that that's the case, and his behavior is completely consistent with somebody who sees this as a chunk of the Russian security system, which he's going to hold on to dearly.

Was there another question in there? I can't remember.

MR. BYMAN: Just comments. We can move -- Salman, did you want to

comment as well on the various opinions expressed?

MR. SHAIKH: Just quickly on Putin first. Mike's right, Putin's immovable from everything I've heard from Russians very, very recently, and I don't think we're going to arrive at a progress from the -- sort of the Geneva Agreement, which the Russians continue to insist on, but where particularly the Syrians will not agree with a dialogue with this opposition to some sort of a transitional government.

Also, as has been pointed out to me recently by Russians, that, you know, everyone told Putin and the Russians that you're going to be isolated in the region, you're increasingly not being liked. Well, what they say is, that may be the case, but Russia just sold \$4.2 billion worth of arms to Iraq and there's prospect that it's likely to sell even more. And that, in fact, has emboldened some within the Kremlin, that their policy is still correct, they don't yet feel that Assad is leaving anytime soon, and that there is, in any case, no viable alternative to him, so it's better to stick it out.

I would just say just trying to be constructive, what do we do here with regards to the Russians? I think maybe one lesson we could learn -- I think we need to forge ahead, as I said, in trying to get rid of this regime, but also to build for the future. In building for the future, I think the Russians can still be an important element and an important partner, and it may be that that's not possible right now, but unlikely and maybe unlike Iraq, I think an effort should be made by the great powers to try to come together and to work on that transition.

In Libya and Iraq, Russia was frozen out and they haven't forgotten that, and so with respect to Syria, I think maybe those signals should continue to be sent. The other thing is in terms of moving Putin, again, when he looks at the opposition that is being presented to him, his people tell him, these are not serious people. That may be a bit unfair. It's only when he's presented with serious people in a more united national

platform, as I keep going on about, that perhaps the Russians will realize that the game is up for Assad. I certainly hope so.

With regards to Ahmed Davutoglu talking about Syrian Vice-President Farouk al-Sharaa, well, Farouk al-Sharaa we have to ask Syrians about at this point. What I would say as a principle is that those who have even defected from the regime, whether it's (inaudible), they've all got a lot of work to do to build credibility again with their people.

Farouk al-Sharaa is somebody who's not central to the regime. Most, I guess, Syrians, I may be wrong here, say he doesn't have blood on his hands, but neither should he be seen as just in sectarian terms as a Sunni leader.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. We have time for one more question here and in the back please. Yes.

SPEAKER: This is a quick question. With the Syrians -- this is for Doha -- is there a possibility of having an internationally monitored election or UN Security Forces as part of a solution -- election in Syria for them -- because a lot of people from Syria have talked about that?

MR. BYMAN: I think I'll try to piggyback a second question on top of that one as well, so the gentleman in the far back, please.

SPEAKER: It's somewhat related. If I missed earlier, I apologize. Regarding the UN Charter, which has responsibility to respect plank, written, to my knowledge, by Samantha Power, who is an influential advisor in the past Administration and I assume will continue to be, so in this one, comments, and in particular context, Kofi Annan's recent book had a dedicated chapter under that specific title. Thanks.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Salman, why don't you start this off, please?

MR. SHAIKH: Well, first of all I'd note that Kofi Annan, soon after he left

his position, actually said that Assad must go. I wish he'd put that in his six points right from the get go and seen if the community would respond.

Secondly, I'd also note that the guy who was working for him at the UN Observer Mission, General Mood, he has also come out clearly saying that we need more protection and a no-fly zone subsequently. These guys have been in the thick of it. Unfortunately, their positions didn't allow them to say that.

With regards to the responsibility to protect, I was actually there in the 2005 UN summit when I used to work for the UN when this whole issue was discussed, we had long speeches from world leaders on the responsibility to protect, and yet it seems that the international community has totally failed when it comes to the responsibility to protect Syrian civilians.

I hope that within the Obama Administration, and I note that Samantha Powers is now back from maternity leave, which I think is probably a good thing here, that more creative thinking is going on with regards to this vital norm.

The problem we've got with regards to responsibility to protect is that it still does require an international mandate, and the UN Security Council will remain deadlocked on this. So then the question arises, are there other ways to pursue this, and one thought is humanitarian intervention may well be one way to do this. Another is to show that the overwhelming majority of the international community through a UN General Assembly Resolution or the like, is behind change.

In any case, we can't wait any longer for the divisions in the Security Council to abdicate the responsibility to protect, in my view.

Sorry, just with regards to elections and UN Security Forces, well, I don't think any Syrians can credibly -- the Syrian regime has held elections over the last 18 months, but no one has taken them seriously. I don't think under these conditions -- if the

questioner is asking about elections now, I don't think under these conditions we can have free, fair, and credible elections.

And UN Security Forces, I'd love to know which country is going to contribute UN Forces at this point in order to try and stabilize the situation inside Syria.

UN Forces or some sort of a protection or stabilization force, I believe, will be needed in the transition, and that effort will be made much easier if there was a semblance of a Syrian National Army to work with, which is, again, the important reason as to why we should be trying to help train and assist and lay the groundwork for such an Army.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. And I'd like to thank our audiences in Washington and Doha for joining us today.

Before everyone leaves, please join me in a round of applause for both Salman and Mike for excellent presentations.

(Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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