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IS THERE A WIDENING SUNNI-SHIA SCHISM?

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. BADANI: Thank you everyone for joining us today. My name is Durriya Badani. I'm the deputy director for the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World here at the Brookings Institution. It's quite a mouthful as all of you see. I want to thank you for braving the wintry weather and coming in and joining us on a Friday afternoon.

For those of you who follow this conflict, many of you know that the tensions between the Sunni and the Shia communities have become escalated recently. While we've been continually aware of this conflict in Saudi Arabia, in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Bahrain, in Syria and in Pakistan, what's been surprising lately has really been the level of violence and the acuteness as it's unfolded recently particularly in Pakistan. It's a subject that hasn't received a great deal of attention here in Washington in part I think because it's very complex in the way that it manifests itself in different countries, the internal dynamics of each of those countries and the interplay as this unfolds across the MENA and even in South Asia. I'm especially pleased that we've been able to convene this discussion here today and for all of us to be able to learn more from this very distinguished panel.

I'm pleased to be able to introduce Bruce Reidel, the director of our newly launched Intelligence Project here at the Brookings Institution, a senior fellow at the Saban Center and the author of a brand

new book *Avoiding Armageddon: America, India and Pakistan to the Brink and Back*. We also have with us Genieve Abdo, a fellow at the Middle East Program at the Stimson Center specializing in issues related to Sunni-Shia communities and political Islam. Genieve is also authoring a forthcoming paper with the Saban Center focused on this very issue of sectarian conflict and post-Arab uprising.

Moderating our discussion today is Suzanne Maloney, senior fellow at the Saban Center who many of you know well who focuses on Iran. Thank you again for joining us. I'm very much looking forward to this discussion, and with that I'm going to turn it over to Suzanne.

MS. MALONEY: Thanks so much, Durriya, and thanks to all of you. I will echo Durriya's gratitude to this large and I hope enthusiastic and vigorous crowd for coming out on an epic Washington weather Friday afternoon with sleet and rain and potentially snow by the time you leave these doorways.

I will not belabor my role as moderator and then things over very quickly to both Bruce and Genieve who have years and years of experience on this particular issue in looking very closely at some of the countries where the doctrinal split and the strategic implications of the frictions between these two communities is so important not simply for regional and international security but of course with direct relevance for U.S. policy. With that let me turn things over to Bruce. Each of our

speakers will say a few words, I will ask a few questions and hope to bring out some of the differences and commonalities between their remarks and then we'll turn things over to you and hope to have a really good and interesting discussion on this Friday. Thanks.

MR. RIEDEL: Thank you, Suzanne and thank you, Durriya. It's a pleasure to be with you today. It's particularly a pleasure to be here with Genieve. Genieve and I usually meet driving around in limousines in the empty quarter of the Arabian Peninsula, so it's different for us to actually be in Washington at the same time.

On the 10th of January this year in a snooker hall in Quetta a bomb went off and killed 100 Hazari Shia Pakistani citizens. On the 16th of this month at least one and probably more than one bomb went off in a market in the city of Quetta and in Baluchistan and killed at least 80 and probably over 100 more Pakistani Shias. Pakistan is a country that has known sectarian Sunni-Shia violence for a long time, but even by the standards of contemporary Pakistan this has been an horrific start to the year. Violence against the Shia minority community has been edging up. The trends are alarming to put it mildly. In Baluchistan there was a reported 20 sectarian attacks in 2011 and 45 last year. In the Sindh, particularly around the port city of Karachi, there were 40 sectarian attacks in 2011 and over 75 last year. Violence against the Shia community there has become particularly extreme. The Pakistani case which I'm going to

focus on though is not just relevant to Pakistan. I think as I will try to make the point, much about the Pakistani case can be applied to broader trends in the Islamic world, and the driving forces behind what is happening in Pakistan can be seen as being part of a much wider conflict that has gripped the Islamic world particularly since the beginning of the 1980s.

At first glance though, Pakistan would seem to be an odd country to have such intense sectarian violence. Mohammed Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was after all himself a Shia, an -- not a particularly devout one. He wasn't a particularly devout man at all. He smoked 50 cigarettes a day and liked more than one drink at the end of the night, but he was a Shia. The first Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquit Ali Khan, was also a Shia. Benazir Bhutto, arguably the most famous Pakistani of modern times, had a Shia mother and a Sunni father. She is in many ways Shia, although she often dissimulated in how she acted in public. And her husband, the President of Pakistan, is a Shia today. Twenty- to twenty-five percent of the population is Shia. This was created as a country for the defense of Muslims, and when Jinnah created it, it was supposed to be a country for the defense of all Muslims. But like most of Pakistan history, looking back we can see that there was a dividing line in the 1980s and we can see that most of the Pakistan's sectarian warfare flows from that dividing line and it flows from Pakistan's third military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, a Sunni, I would say a jihadist, in fact I would go so far

as to say Zia-ul-Haq is the godfather of the modern global jihad. He was also America's best friend in Pakistan for over a decade. Zia came to power in the late 1970s just as the Iranian revolution was occurring in Iran and the reverberations of change in Iran were seen pretty quickly in Pakistani politics. The first overtly Shia political party in Pakistan dates from 1980, right after the success of the revolution. At first Zia tried to co-opt the new Shia political passions. He failed to do so. Some would argue he probably didn't try seriously. Then he moved to finding a new ally, Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis supported the development of a Wahhabi oriented subculture in Pakistan. Part of this was manifested in the incredible growth in the number of madrassas that happened in Pakistan in the 1980s, and second part of it was in the creation of anti-Shia militia groups. In 1985, Sipah-e-Sahaba, the Army of the Prophet's Creation, was created largely with Saudi money intended to offset pro-Iranian groups. You can date the beginning of the modern Sunni-Shia sectarian violence to 1985 and this process. It quickly escalated. Violence became more and more endemic, nowhere on the scale that it is today. The head of Sipah-e-Sahaba was assassinated by rival Shias in 1990, and a new group was created a few years later called Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is named after the founder, Mr. Jhangvi. It's also named after the district in the Punjab where he comes from. The group was very mysterious about its origins. It put out a well-practiced

Pakistani tradition of saying we have nothing to do with the group we've emerged from when in fact it was the military wing. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi emerges around 1996. It's a much more extreme and violent anti-Shia group. It has been linked to a series of attacks since then. For example, the first ever suicide attack in Pakistan in March 2002, an attack on a Protestant church in Islamabad. It was linked to the attack on the Sri Lanka cricket team. It's been linked to the attack on French technicians in Karachi in May 2002. And it's been linked to the attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in September 2008. Like a lot of Pakistani terrorist groups, it has been officially banned since 2001, but it has also enjoyed the support of the Pakistani Intelligence Service. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is in many ways an arm of the Pakistani Intelligence Service and has been for a long time. The Pakistani Intelligence Service finds Lashkar-e-Jhangvi a very useful tool for nonattributable acts of violence against the enemies of the Pakistan state. It has been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the United States, by the United Kingdom, by Canada, by the European Union and by Australia, and as I said, it is officially illegal but it is very powerful and it claimed credit for the two attacks that happened at the beginning of this year which I mentioned earlier. The extent of its connections today to the ISI is very difficult to know. Obviously neither Lashkar-e-Jhangvi nor the ISI has any particular interest in advertising its connections. But if you follow the Pakistani internal political debate, many

Pakistanis are demanding that the government do something about it and demanding that the army come clear about its relationship with the group. So far the army is refusing to do that.

Why has it become particularly worse recently? Probably because of the release from prison of a man named Malik Mohammed Ishak. He is one of the founders of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. He has been accused and indicted on 44 separate cases of murder over the course of the last 16 years. He was acquitted in 34 of those 44 cases because the prosecution was unable to produce a witness to come forward in trial in most cases because the witnesses died between the point of indictment and the point of the trial. He did serve 14 years in prison from 1997 until early 2011, when he was released from prison on lack of evidence for additional crimes, and I think there is a good correlation between this man's release and the revival that we've seen in anti-Shia violence in Pakistan. He is now a senior official in what is called the Defense of Pakistan Council which is a collection of Islamist organizations including Lashkar-e-Taiba which is clearly funded and supported by the ISI. The Defense of Pakistan Council holds massive demonstrations in Pakistani cities in which people like Hafez Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba, give very emotional speeches attacking the United States, attacking India, attacking Israel and also attacking the Shias. The Hazari community in Baluchistan is particularly vulnerable. Many of them are if not Afghan

refugees themselves, the sons and daughters or cousins and nephews and grandsons and granddaughters of Afghan refugees. They're unpopular in the Baluchi community so they are particularly vulnerable. Karachi of course is the murder capital of the world so you can do almost anything you want to do in Karachi.

The extent to which the Saudi government is still involved in supporting terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is also unclear. I think it is safe to say Saudis continue to fund Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Whether the Saudi government is involved is much harder to say. But I think in a country in which the division between public and private funds is murky at best, one shouldn't give the Saudis a get out of jail card on this front. There are some unknowns about the extent to which both the ISI and the Saudis will continue to support this, but I think the burden of evidence so far is they probably are. Here I think the Saudi-Iranian connection is very important in looking at other cases as we'll see in Bahrain in a minute.

I think it's going to get worse. Pakistan faces a whole series of political decisions this year. The good news is for the first time in Pakistan's history an elected civilian government is going to fill out its full term in office. That is a huge accomplishment for the Pakistani people. But the elections to produce a new government are likely to produce a wave of violence and the Shia community will be probably a victim of that. We're also going to get a new Pakistani chief of army staff, General

Kayani is going to retire this year and it is an open question whether his successor will be more like the former Brookings affiliate General Karamat, what I'd call a pretty progressive Pakistani general, or be the 21st century reincarnation of Zia-ul-Haq. If it's the latter, we're in for a very, very difficult time in sectarian conflict in Pakistan, but we'll be in for a lot of other trouble as well. Let me finish with that.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you very much, Bruce, for a rich and interesting and as always slightly frightening presentation. Before I turn things over to Genieve, let me encourage those of you who are very patiently standing at the back, there are a number of seats up front and we'd encourage you to come down and rest your feet if you so choose. With that, Genieve?

MS. ABDO: Thank you very much to Durriya and to the Saban Center for organizing this. It's a privilege to be here. While Bruce might be frightening, I think I'm probably going to be a bit depressing, so if I could start with that note.

As Durriya mentioned, I've just completed a study for the Saban Center on looking at some of the indicators of sectarianism primarily in two countries, in Bahrain and in Lebanon, so my remarks will -- some will be sort of generalizations about sectarianism in the Arab world, and then I'll get to the specifics about these two countries and what are the driving forces, and I'm looking particularly at the trends post-Arab

uprisings.

While obviously we know that Shia-Sunni animosity is nothing new to the Middle East, since the Arab uprisings there are different characteristics that now have developed and those are primarily the result of the collapse of authoritarian rule in some countries. Now we have a struggle for political power, we have a struggle for economic power and we also have a struggle of which interpretation of Islam will prevail as these countries try to chart their own form of governance. As part of this process, identity politics is a main driver in many Arab societies. And with all of this in the background, the question is always asked is sectarianism fueled by a striving for political power, economic power or by doctrinal differences? What my findings indicate is it's driven by all of the above.

In many states after the Arab uprisings began, the sectarian divide began as a struggle for political power and then now 2 years on we are seeing that these doctrinal differences are becoming more apparent and coming to the surface. In states such as Bahrain and Lebanon where the Shia comprise 70 and 40 percent of the population respectively, so there are 70 percent Shia, 40 percent Shia in Lebanon, the prospects of democratic governance alarm the Sunni. As a result, democracy and the supposed reason for the Arab uprisings, is viewed as part of a subversive Shia agenda. Rather than creating a universal principle which would advance modernity and development in those countries, some of the

Sunni authoritarian rulers still standing primarily in the Gulf view the Shia drive for democracy as a threat rather than an improvement toward modernity.

From my findings, the rise of sectarianism is driven primarily by three factors. First, a Sunni Islamist ascendancy in Tunisia and particularly in Egypt has caused a lot of alarm among Shia populations. The Islamist nature of these two governments is a source of empowerment for the Sunnis and a thorn in the side of the Shia. Some Shia view the new Sunni Islamist governments in both of these countries as a beginning to what could become a Sunni dominated region if Bashar al Assad falls to a Sunni led government. So you have a situation where the Shia were feeling quite triumphant in 2006 given everything that happened in Iraq and given what seemed to be Iran's increasing domination over the region, and now they feel that power is slipping from their grasp. Also not to mention you have a situation in Lebanon where the Shia perceive Hezbollah to be the potential loser should Assad fall from power in Syria. You also have now Iraq where we are seeing demonstrations in various parts of Iraq. It seems also that the government of the Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is also in trouble. As the Sunnis feel increasingly empowered, the Shia feel all the more threatened.

Second, the civil war in Syria has sparked renewed conflict over Arab and Islamic identities in neighboring countries especially in

Lebanon, and even in some states untouched directly by the Syrian war such as Bahrain and Kuwait. Not only is Assad's likely fall a blow to potential Shia ascendance which began with al-Maliki's government, but the atrocities being committed against the Sunni in Syria are a glaring blight on all the Shia in the region and in this way at least the perceptions among these two sects is sort of taking on a transnational nature. You don't have just the Shia in Bahrain fighting for their rights in Bahrain. In their mind with the Syrian narrative as the focal point of what's happening in the Middle East, they are fighting for all Shia in the region and the same is true for the Sunnis in Lebanon and I'll get to some of the rise of the Salafist movement. They feel that because of what's happening in Syria, they're fighting for all Sunnis so that the Syrian conflict has caused this sectarianism to take on a transnational sort of nature.

Third, the popular perceptions of outside intervention and outside factors have created a virtual proxy war which Bruce just talked about with Iran, Syria and Hezbollah on one side and Saudi Arabia, the United States and Turkey on the other and this is particularly the case in Bahrain. As many of you know, shortly after the uprising began, the Saudis and the GCC sent troops into Bahrain. This was of course highly controversial, not to mention the fact that it occurred about 2 days after a U.S. delegation had left Bahrain trying to broker some sort of agreement between the mainstream opposition and the government so that you have

in Bahrain an outside force, Saudi Arabia, that has always considered the Shia in Bahrain a domestic issue. They are by definition an external force, yet they operate in Bahrain as if they were an internal force because they fear that their own Shia population in the eastern province will be highly affected by the uprising in Bahrain and indeed the Shia population in Saudi Arabia has been. There have been protests in Saudi Arabia and many people predict that that could be the next Arab uprising. That's speculation, but we'll soon find out.

The case of Bahrain is a very complicated one. There is a long history of Shia marginalization in Bahrain which laid the foundation for the uprising that developed in 2011, and I wanted to give you some idea of this institutionalized marginalization of the Shia. The institutionalization of marginalizing of the Shia has been well documented in a massive investigation that was conducted by the legal scholar Sharif Bassiouni shortly after the uprising began. It's been documented by the State Department's Commission on International Religious Freedom. But in short, the Shia for example are banned from positions in the security forces, the military and other sensitive posts, and even in less-sensitive government posts such as the Ministry of Education. In Islamic schools the authorities discourage religious content from being taught which involves Shiaism. Geographically Shia and Sunni are segregated in Bahrain. According to one study that was published in 2009, only 12

percent of Shia live in Sunni-dominated neighborhoods so that even geographically there is a separation.

Shia tend to hold lower-paying jobs than the Sunni. They have less economic buying power. These are some of the conditions which we could categorize as driven by socioeconomic causes. What happened when the uprising began is these kinds of very pragmatic, concrete reasons that the Shia feel marginalized, the conflict turned into more of a sectarian conflict because of a few reasons one of which was the government pursued a narrative that Iran was responsible for the uprising and that it was an Iranian conspiracy. This was reported in the state-run media. It was promoted on television. Iran didn't help the situation either because Iran seized upon the moment as it did when all the uprisings began to declare that this was a pan-Islamic awakening that was happening throughout the Middle East and that Iran would be the benefactor of this pan-Islamic awakening. Iran specifically has always championed the Shia in Bahrain and did so when the uprising began and has continued to do so. The government had the perfect narrative to characterize this uprising as an attempt by the Shia to overthrow the government when in fact the main opposition group Al-Wefaq stated clearly that their central demand was to form a constitutional monarchy and not to overthrow the regime.

Since then however the opposition has grown more

radicalized. We have youth movements that now are calling and have been calling for regime change in Bahrain for many months. You also have the radicalization on the Sunni side. In that sense the government to a great degree has lost on both ends because now the Sunni opposition is also accusing the government of not being tough enough on the Shia. There is continuing violence in Bahrain that is acted out every night on the streets on a low level but nonetheless. Violence continues by Shia protestors. You have a very dangerous situation that is escalating and I think that according to many people I interviewed including Professor Bassiouni and people in the U.S. government, there is pretty much a consensus that if there isn't some sort of reconciliation in the next few years it is very possible that Iran could begin funding some of the opposition groups that are now fighting against the government. That's something that we really need to pay attention. People ask how would Iran fund these opposition groups? They would provide funding. They would provide expertise and the opportunity certainly exists. I think that that's why we need to pay attention to Bahrain.

Going back to this question of whether this is about doctrinal differences, I wanted to share with you a small anecdote. I was in Cairo 2 weeks ago and at the time I was there, President Ahmadinejad was visiting Cairo, always a colorful figure and we will miss him when he's gone or leaves the presidency. He had a meeting at Al-Azhar which is the

seat of learning for Sunni Muslims, it's a mosque and university complex and he went to meet the grand sheikh. Al-Azhar has a tradition of being very ecumenical and being very balanced. Of course it's a scholarly institution, but when he met the grand sheikh of Al-Azhar, he accused him of spreading Shiaism in Sunni countries. After their meeting one of the top aides of the grand sheikh went as far as to accuse Ahmadinejad in public of creating a tirade against Sunnis everywhere. He said that some Shiites insult the companions of the prophet. He got into this sort of discussion about doctrine with Ahmadinejad and accused Iran of trying to take over Sunni societies and turn the Sunnis into Shias. I'll briefly go on to Lebanon.

In Lebanon you have a different situation. You have a country that has a long history of sectarianism, but again the war in Syria has definitely exacerbated this tension. There has been two concrete results of the war in Syria. One is that the violence is being mirrored across the border in the Tripoli area of Lebanon where Shia and Sunni live side by side and this has created daily violence in Lebanon. Every time there is some incident in Syria or every time say Sunni fighters cross the border, there is violence in Lebanon, and that has resulted not only in the violence in the Tripoli area but the assassination of a very prominent intelligence chief which happened in October in the middle of Beirut. The second result of the Syrian war has been the rise of the Salafists in

Lebanon. This is a very important development and a very important phenomenon. Salafists have existed in Lebanon at least since the 1960s, but this particular strand of Salafism is very interesting because they are now becoming involved in politics. When I was in Lebanon in September interviewing some of the sheikhs, they announced to me that they were forming a political party and would run candidates in the next parliamentary election in Lebanon. This for Lebanon is unprecedented. Most of the Salafists that have been involved in Lebanon, even if they were involved against Israel in favor of the Palestinian occupation, they never ran political parties so it will be very interesting to see now we will have Salafist parties in Lebanon, we will have Salafist parties in Tunisia and Egypt, so it's very interesting that again a whole Islamic tradition that shied away from politics historically is now developing political parties so that they can develop political power in a very serious way in many countries.

I want to end on one point which is that the reason we need to pay attention to sectarianism for all the reasons that we are discussing today is also that I believe that as time goes on, this particular conflict will replace the Palestinian conflict as the central mobilizing force in Arab political life. I think that we will see less of a focus on Israel and more of an internal Islamic debate happening in many countries that will be about religion, it will be about political power and I think that that will be the

defining characteristic and one of the greatest outcomes of the Arab uprisings. Thank you.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you, Genieve. You did live up to your point in providing a layered, detailed and incredibly interesting but also very depressing overview of events between Shia and Sunni Muslims primarily in the Arab world and I thank you both for starting I think a unique discussion among the policy community here in Washington. We spend a lot of time looking at crises, we spend a lot of time looking at individual events and elections and other sorts of developments, but these kinds of trends which are much talked about and provoke an enormous amount of concern both at a personal and a policy level often are too easy to simply push off into the background.

Something struck me of course coming from where I sit which is someone who has the luxury of spending almost all of her time looking at Iran and U.S. policy toward Iran, the theme of Iran in both of your talks really struck me. I wanted to press you both a little bit on to what extent this conflict at least in its current form, and as you both indicated it's certainly not a new phenomenon, but the current state of the conflict, to what extent is it provoked by the Iranians, to what extent is it a reaction to either Iran's perceived ascendance or perceived weakness? How do we as players, the United States, as important players in this drama, avoid being used instrumentally by either side, either by the

Iranians asserting a sort of role and influence in Shia communities that they may or may not actually have at present or by some of their adversaries seeking to attribute all sorts of social and political activism to Iranian malfeasance? How do we distinguish among those?

MR. REIDEL: In the Pakistan case, the very example of the Islamic revolution was very transformative. The Shia community in Pakistan is historically much less separate physically, politically from the Sunni community. Benazir Bhutto is not unusual to have Sunni and Shia marry. That happens. When you introduce the notion of a Shia identity in politics, it was a very disturbing new element. The Iranian government, also the revolutionary government of Ayatollah Khomeini, sponsored political groups in Pakistan hoping to create perhaps something akin to Hezbollah and they engaged in violence and Iranian intelligence services supported these groups. If in Bahrain this is a future danger, in Pakistan it's a well-established danger. It's been going on now since the 1980s. Of course, when you do something like this, don't be surprised if you lose control over it after a while. If you hire fanatics to go kill people, they will in time go out and kill more people than you intended them to do. The extent of Iran's current activity in sponsoring Shia death squads in Pakistan is very hard to get any handle on. I would say in general one of the problems in researching for this event is that there are so many terrorist groups in Pakistan that get far more attention than Lashkar-e-

Jhangvi, that you find there is very little data about Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and even less data about the Shia groups because Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Pakistan Taliban and Josh Mohammed and Sipah-e-Sahaba get so much more attention from the American and Western academic community. But in the case of Pakistan, I think the answer has to be that the Iranians have played in troubled waters. They've tried to make it worse. They definitely see this as a place for them to put pressure on the government of Pakistan and today it has produced an inevitable backlash.

One last thing I wanted to say about Lashkar-e-Jhangvi that I was reminded of in Genieve's remarks. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is also very, very close to Al Qaeda. This is a group that has a long tradition of working with them. The assassination of Daniel Pearl for example was a joint Al Qaeda/Lashkar-e-Jhangvi event and probably other groups as well operation. If you're looking for who was helping to hide Osama bin Laden, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi would be a very likely candidate in the past, and if you're looking for who is hiding Ayman Zawahiri today, don't be surprised if it isn't found that he's in a Lashkar-e-Jhangvi safe house or sanctuary somewhere.

MS. ABDO: I'll start with Lebanon. Obviously Iran's footprint has been a direct footprint in Lebanon since Hezbollah was formed shortly after the Iranian revolution. What is more interesting though, not more interesting, but as interesting I found when I was conducting research for

this paper is that the Iranians also tried to create Sunni associations of clerics after the revolution. I went to interview probably the only living cleric that was part of an association, ulima association, that the Iranians established among Sunnis right after the revolution but of course Hezbollah has taken off and became very powerful and influential in Lebanon. The question is always asked, What is going to happen with Hezbollah and its relationship with Iran of Assad falls? For the last year now Hezbollah has not agreed to be interviewed by anyone, at least high-ranking Hezbollah officials, so I interviewed some of the more low-ranking members of the group and also experts. What I learned I guess from spending a lot of time in Lebanon over the last 6 months is that I think that we have to sort of redefine our idea about what Hezbollah is. I think that what they're doing in the context of Syria is they're keeping their eye on the big prize which is Lebanon and I think that they are trying to maintain their strength in the parliament and within the government and we might see them become more dependent upon Iran financially should Assad fall, but I don't think that we should continue to view them as a puppet of Iran. They have their own political agenda in Lebanon. They've lost a lot of support among the Sunni even though there are no accurate opinion polls that might give us more scientific data, but they have been able as far as anyone can tell to hold onto the base. But their focus now is on maintaining their strength in Lebanon, so even if Assad falls, I think that

Hezbollah will still be a great political in Lebanon, maybe not to the degree we see it today, but nonetheless. I don't think that the party is necessarily in danger. So I think that as long as Hezbollah if we can assume that they will remain in power in Lebanon, as long as they exist of course there will be the Iranian dimension in Lebanon.

But I have to say that what I have observed not only in these two countries but in Kuwait and other places I've visited is that the currency of the resistant movement is dying. As I said before, I think that the Sunni-Shia conflict is going to replace the Palestinian conflict as the focal point for Arab political activity. I think that people are a lot less interested in the so-called ideology of the resistance and this is a very sort of ridiculous example. But I was up in Tripoli interviewing one of the Shia fighters who are fighting some of the Sunni there and I asked him, what is support for Hezbollah? How can we assess this today? He said nobody cares about the resistance anymore. We just care about whether we have electricity to kill the mosquitoes, because Hezbollah is in charge of the government now and they've completely mismanaged everything. Nobody has electricity. It's in economic crisis in the north in particular. So I think that that's something that we should definitely watch going forward to what degree there is this kind of focus on an importance placed on the so-called ideology of the resistance.

On to Bahrain. I think that the situation in Bahrain is that the

U.S. government will tell you, Arab intelligence will tell you, there is no evidence to date of direct Iranian involvement in Bahrain. They could be supporting some of the opposition groups one or two of which are now located in Beirut, but in terms of the kind of support that we're seeing in Syria or Pakistan or some of the other countries where Iran is directly involved, we're not seeing that yet in Bahrain. The Saudis as I mentioned and the Bahrainian government make the opposite case, that Iran is behind every corner, that the opposition is on the pockets of Iran. So in this way it's almost to some degree if you look in terms of the domestic conflict, whether or not Iran is involved is almost irrelevant because the perception has become the reality. So Iran is not directly involved, but everyone is convinced Iran is involved so you have Shia and Sunni fighting it out because everyone assumes Iran is involved. So it's this very unfortunate situation where between the Saudis and the Bahrainian government driving this and Iran using its own media in Arabic and Farsi to drive home this narrative, it's considered now a reality in Bahrain that Iran is behind the uprising.

MS. MALONEY: I'm glad you brought up the issue of Syria and went into greater depth on that because what also came away to me from both of your talks about this transnational phenomenon is the extent to which it has flared at times of specific conflicts that are effectively national or communal conflicts within nation-states whether it's

Afghanistan, Iraq, Bahrain and Syria. To what extent is the solution or at least the way of managing what you I think very presciently suggest may be the defining political narrative in at least the Arab Muslim world for the foreseeable future? To what extent is the solution contingent upon some viable resolution to these conflicts? And by the same token, if we're going to be facing a Bahrain where there is no tolerable solution or solutions tolerable to the Shia opposition but also to the Saudi and Bahraini dominant forces, if there is no viable peace that can be brought to Afghanistan and to Syria if we're looking at potentially the emergence of ungovernable areas in both of these potentially failed states, then what does that mean for the viability of this kind of a narrative in the danger of even an intensification of the sectarian conflict?

MR. RIEDEL: I'm struck in listening to this that it is Saudi-Iran. That's what this is about. That's an oversimplification clearly. Shias and Sunnis have been squabbling for 1,400 years but much of this current phenomenon flows from that. I think the news there is pretty bad. Suzanne, you know better than the rest of us that the prospects for a resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue are slim to nil. The likelihood is an intensification of this. And below the international Iran world crisis there is the subregional Saudi-Iran crisis. Both sides are intensifying. Prince Bandar was made of head of Saudi intelligence to get the Iranians and to get Bashir Assad. That's his job. He is supposed to deliver the head of

Bashir Assad to the king. The intervention in Bahrain is unprecedented in Saudi history to send troops into another country and there is no sign they're leaving as far as I can see. The Iranians in turn are escalating the conflict too. It didn't get as much attention as I think it should have, but last year somebody put a cyber weapon into the Saudi Aramco system and destroyed 30,000 work stations in one night. That somebody is the government of Iran probably using Saudi Shia to actually physically put it into the system. They did the same thing to the Qataris. In the case in Bahrain, the Iranians have so far shown I think remarkable restraint. Look at the case of Yemen. For years and years the government of Yemen said that the Iranians are supporting the Houthi rebels and for years and years the American government said there is no evidence. This year guess what? There's evidence. They tried to get a shipload of weapons to the Houthis. So if this Saudi-Iranian conflict continues, it cannot be divorced from a Sunni-Shia conflict, particularly I won't speak for the Iranian side, but on the Saudi side you cannot divorce this. That is the essence of the conflict. Saudi concerns about Iran have to do more with the fact that Iran is a Shia country than the fact that there are Shia theologians running the country. They didn't like the shah.

MS. MALONEY: Do you want to comment on this?

MS. ABDO: I think you've thoroughly covered the many points, but, yes, I agree completely that you can't divorce the Saudi-Iran

conflict with the Sunni-Shia conflict. The only thing I'll add is that this is in Iran's favor to pursue this conflict. Historically Iran has always operated best in an atmosphere of instability and chaos. They capitalize on this. They embrace it. They master it. So chaos works in Iran's favor. And I think that if you look also from Iran's vantage point today, they're feeling a bit nervous. Things don't look too good for Iran. So to me that's even more of an incentive to fuel these kinds of conflicts because Iran is running out of recourse if Syria falls, they're in trouble in Iraq, and so I think that we will see more of this Iran-Saudi conflict if for no other reason than this kind of conflict advances some of Iran's ambitions in the region.

MS. MALONEY: I'm going to abuse my role as moderator and add one quick comment, one final question and then turn things over to you. I agree wholeheartedly with everything you've both said. I will note that there are countervailing interests from the Iranian side which is that obviously they would prefer to pitch themselves as a sort of pan-Muslim revolution and one with appeal far beyond the Shia world. The numbers of course are not at their advantage in that respect so there is some degree of restraint. What always surprises me in the detailed history of the really fierce Saudi-Iranian rivalry that took place throughout the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s is the extent to which there were periods of cooperation between the two governments even as they might have been involved in virtual or proxy shooting wars with one another and that there

has been a fairly bipartisan or broadly cross-factional agreement within the Iranian establishment since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini who of course was dogmatically, viciously opposed to the al-Saud in particular and to the Saudi monarchy more broadly. There has been bipartisan support for a sort of rapprochement with the Saudis that has certainly withstood a lot of pressure and the frictions have escalated considerably but has still stood. There are still diplomatic relations between the two countries even today despite what has gone on over the course of the past decade in Iraq and now Bahrain and Syria. I would I guess harbor some hope that there is a self-limiting mechanism to the possibilities of conflict between these two rival powers in the Gulf.

With that let me bring things back to the United States very quickly and again turn things over to the audience for our last half-hour or so. It strikes me that this conflict puts Washington in an excruciatingly difficult position. If it is true, and I think it was a terrific phrase as Genieve said, that democracy is viewed by so many of these countries as a subversive agenda intended to put in place a sect rather than a sort of democratic or representative movement, if it is empowering this virtual proxy war, if it is destabilizing further a country like Pakistan which is so vital to regional and international security, what is it that the United States, that Washington can do to mitigate, to contain this sort of escalation that is actually within our power to accomplish?

MS. ABDO: As part of this paper that I wrote, I was required to write policy recommendations and my first instinct was to write nothing to answer your question, but since that's not acceptable I had to come up with some policy recommendations. It's really difficult. Let's speak concretely about Bahrain. What leverage does the United States have? We have a naval base in Bahrain. Many people have suggested that the United States threatened the Bahraini government with removing the naval base. The problem with that is that from what I've heard and been told, that's not really something that the United States wants to do. It's not something in the United States interests. It's also not in the interest of the Bahraini population because there are a lot of Shia employed at the naval base who have fairly good jobs so it's also a source of employment for the Shia in Bahrain who wouldn't otherwise be employed at such great jobs. Then if you take away the naval base as leverage, what leverage is there? The United States has tried several things one of which is tried to through the crown prince reach some of the more hardline voices within the Bahraini government. This is not something I explored, but the Bahraini government is very fragmented. You have people who are very much willing to enact some sort of political reform, and then you have hardliners around the prime minister who are very much influenced by the hardliners within the Saudi government who absolutely are not interested in reform and who want to maintain the status quo. So the United States has a

problem in the sense that they're dealing with a fragmented state. If they deal with the crown prince, that doesn't get them to the point of making any headway with political reform because his power at least as it was explained to me since the uprising began has diminished because he's sort of on the losing end of what happened with the uprising as it was crushed for the most part. I don't see in a country like Bahrain that the United States has many options.

I think that some people have suggested that the United States become more public about its outreach to the opposition. I think that might help. The problem with that is that it also creates problems for the opposition at home. It's like any country, as soon as the United States embraces the Muslim Brotherhood, they become tainted. As soon as the United States embraces the reformists in Iran, they become tainted so that it becomes a domestic issue. I don't really know what we could do in Bahrain. Maybe Bruce has some ideas, but I don't really see how the United States has much leverage there.

MR. REIDEL: I don't either. I suspect that if the White House told the United States Navy to shut the Bahrain port fleet complex down, the United States Navy would say forget it. We're not leaving. We like it here. I think that the problem is that if this goes on, the U.S. naval facility and U.S. personnel will become the target for we'll all it the Bahrain Hezbollah and that will mean that we are driven into a fortress naval

complex and that will mean it's not the nice port call that it used to be and that's a very tragic ending.

In the case of Pakistan, there are so many irritants. Irritants is a nice way to put it. There are so many messed up parts of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, I would counsel let's not include the Shia problem, what is today already a colossal nightmare. And I doubt that there are very many Pakistani Shia who would like the United States cavalry to come to the rescue. I think that would be a prescription for more violence and not less. My answer to your question because Genieve is right, it is the obligatory response of think tanks to have a solution, is maybe to think a little bit more about how we deescalate the international conflict with Iran. I would like to see the United States government not make the Iran nuclear issue the top priority of its foreign policy. I think we're going to lose if we make it that. I don't think we're going to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon if it is determined to do so. So I would tone down the rhetoric about that and tone down the demonization of Iran. I'm not saying the Iranians aren't demons, but I don't think we need to raise it to levels of hyperbole and we saw a lot of that in the American election. Iran is not the most dangerous country in the world. I don't even think it's in the top three. And if we perhaps tone down a little bit of the Iran is the proof of the international community's commitment to nonproliferation, we might help to -- we're not going to resolve Sunni-Shia differences clearly,

but we might help to tone down the conflict a little bit.

MS. MALONEY: I already see hands going up. I'm going to select a few people as we go, maybe do two questions at a time in the interests of time and all of your patience in getting to this point. I will ask you each to identify yourselves and to please pose a question rather than a statement with a question mark at the end. Garrett and over here.

SPEAKER: I'm -- so what I'll tell you is that there are sects within the sects within the community and as far as spiritual leaders, the Aga Khan who claims to be the direct descent of the prophet which is -- a lot of trouble from Shias and from Sunnis, and the only time we felt safe is when we were under Christian rule -- this is a spread of what I'm trying to make of variations within the Shia community anyway. We are hard wired to violence in Muslim societies. We're safer in America and England.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm Garrett Mitchell and I write "The Mitchell Report." I was thinking listening to this that it may be a good idea for Brookings to add a new element to its programming in which is that we should get some sort of rating system for sessions like this, PG13, X, et cetera. I'm glad I didn't bring any small children to this one. One way to think about this is to not think about it because there don't appear to be any sort of policy solutions. Let me try a slightly different way of coming at the question that Suzanne asked and that is there any case that can be made for saying that as difficult and dire as this set of circumstances is in

the Middle East and in South Asia? That's the bad news. The good news is that it's about doctrinal differences. It's not about East versus West, Islam versus the West, et cetera. And so I'd like to know whether there's any possibility that that might be the case, and if that's the case, then it maybe perhaps speaks to Suzanne's question about what should America's policy responses be which is arguably the old Ronald Reagan don't just do something, stand there.

MR. RIEDEL: My recommendation by the way to Brookings is not a rating system, but there will be a separate cash bar and particularly hope that we can fund ourselves through sales at the end of events. One point. You're absolutely right. For purposes of simplification, we have lumped all Shia into one world and that's a mistake and nowhere is that more true than in Pakistan which has virtually every flavor of Shiaism and flavors that are unique to Pakistan and flavors that other Shias would not agree are Shias.

SPEAKER: --

MR. RIEDEL: Yes. Right. You can argue that -- are the Mormons of the -- if we do that, we will be hopelessly bogged down. I want to go to the other question. I think we can make the situation worse; I'm not convinced we can make it better, and I think that the point is not to make it worse. The United States does not need to get involved in the Sunni-Shia conflict. What we need to do in Bahrain is stand behind our

values as a democracy, not try to portray ourselves as having suddenly found the virtues of Ali. No one is going to believe it and it's the wrong approach. Rule number one, do no harm. Don't make the situation worse than it is. And rule number two is as far as we can, support our values, and if you ask me, I would close the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain. I don't think that we should continue to have that presence there. Do I think that that will solve the problem? No, I don't. I think if they're forced to choose between the United States Navy and the House of Saud, it's a no-brainer for the caliphs. I don't even think they get a choice.

MS. ABDO: Just to quickly add that I agree completely that the United States should pursue its own values and interests. The problem is even in a country like Egypt, now the United States is perceived as supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and that's a perception that is widely embraced across the region. Then that's where the United States inadvertently is drawn into the Shia-Sunni stuff because the Shia now think the United States -- there's a whole conspiracy theory that the United States invaded Iraq so that the Shia could ride to power so that then they could fall to be overthrown by the Sunnis. That's the conspiracy theory about Iraq. And there is definitely a perception that the United States put the Muslim Brotherhood in power in Egypt, that they convinced the Egyptian military that they had to surrender their power, give Morsi the presidency, and so that plays into the Shia narrative. The United States

can pursue its own interests, but a lot of this is completely out of the United States control in terms of how it's perceived on the ground, how the U.S. involvement in the region now today is perceived on the ground. It's completely outside the United States power to influence this, so that's sort of the intended consequences of all of this.

MS. MALONEY: I've got a lot of hands up especially in this swath right up front. I want to avoid the conspiracy theory that we're biased in favor those whose faces we can actually see, and let me just take a couple of questions. I see two at the far back and then we'll come back up. I promise and to the middle too.

SPEAKER: My name is -- and I work for the Council -- Affairs. My question is if you can talk about the differences and similarities between sectarian violence and ethnic extremism and specifically talking about the Baluch people who live in Pakistan and Iran and fighting both governments to try to create their own independent state, and from what I understand they're mostly Sunni people. Thank you.

MS. MALONEY: I think there was another question back here too.

MS. ANSARI: Gila Ansari from the Council on Hemispheric Affairs. With due respect, you really have worked hard in your careers, but when you speak about U.S. democracy and standing for our virtues, I almost laugh because what we've done in terms of harm in Iraq is just

immeasurable. And this whole sectarian violence completely plays in favor of U.S. foreign policy in terms of deflecting attention away from Israel. How could you not even in your talks remotely point to the fact that it is good for the United States to have all sorts of sectarian violence in that part of the world and not necessarily in favor of Iran's interests? Post-revolutionary Iran certainly wanted to have a very good relationship with the Sunnis because that would coalesce against Israelis.

MR. REIDEL: I'll start with the Baluch question. You're absolutely right. You've added another layer of the complication of Pakistani politics. One of the reasons why the army supports and has traditionally supported groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is to use as weapons against the Baluch separatists or independence movement and also to draw attention away from repression of Baluchi rights to other issues. Again I think that the smart prospect for the United States is to not get drawn into yet another very complex Pakistani political process. On the second question, I don't think any of us up here -- written things arguing that the American promotion of democracy and human rights has been a strong point of American foreign policy and I've written I think quite a lot that the United States has sacrificed its values in Pakistan over and over again. Let me deal with what I think was a very good question that you've hinted at which is is it in our interests to have sectarian conflict? Do we want to have the Islamic world embroiled in a self-consuming

conflict? If you were the prince you could make that case. I think that's wrong. I think what we've seen in practical terms as this sectarian Shia conflict has escalated since the Iranian revolution, that Americans have become prisoners and victims of it. We become the target so often. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, they don't differentiate all that much between Shias and Americans as the enemy. Shias are just a lot easier to get at. Blowing up the American embassy in Islamabad is a formidable task these days. You can't get anywhere near it. Blowing up a snooker club in Quetta is child's play. So I think it's a mistake to think of it in those terms and I would certainly hope that anyone who's saying let's try to play the Shia crescent against this whole concept of we should align ourselves with the Qatari-Saudi-Turkish entente against the Shia world I think will produce disaster.

MS. ABDO: I agree. I don't think that the U.S. looks at the conflict in those terms, but I do think that there are some governments that do benefit from it, one of which is the Bahraini government. This is why they're pursuing this whole sort of narrative of a sectarian conflict which has now sort of become reality because they do benefit from it. If you're an authoritarian state, you benefit from internal fragmentation of society as long as you can keep some degree of control. Mubarak survived this way for 30 years. There was conflict in society, and Bahrain is going down the same road. The government in Bahrain definitely benefits from

sectarianism. I don't think the United States does though so I agree with Bruce.

MS. MALONEY: I will comment that so often what appears to be a conspiracy on the part of U.S. policy is really a manifestation of U.S. lack of keen awareness, and I will note that both Genieve and I were in the room with a former now senior U.S. official when that person commented their shock at the sort of rhetoric they were hearing from some of our Gulf allies about the Shia in Bahrain and how much it reminded that person of some of the racial epithets that one might have heard in the U.S. South a generation ago. I think there is a stunning lack of awareness despite the fact that there is so much of what we're seeing today that has played out again and again at different points at different historical moments. With that, let me go back to the questions. There is a gentleman in the center and one right up here and then I will get to those of you who are very patiently waiting.

SPEAKER: Robert -- with the Managing Uncertainty consulting firm. Given the escalation of violence between the Shias and the Sunnis, in your judgment what are the best opportunities from a geopolitical standpoint for al-Qaeda and its affiliates to make real mischief in the Middle East and North Africa?

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. It was really a very great learning experience listening to such -- scholars. My question is that

Bruce has -- out the picture of Pakistan in a very extended way and I'm amazed about his knowledge, depth and the delicate details he goes into. But in Pakistan the cause is not simply sectarian. They have attacked mosques, even the shrines every place and so in addition to sectarian, the other people who have compounded this problem is those who want to destabilize Pakistan. And in destabilizing Pakistan, some people believe Iran is also contributing financially and encouraging people. Saudi Arabia is encouraging Pakistan and supporting financially. Iran wants to be a regional player. Iran is a genuine threat to the region because they want to devise their glorious period when they used to be once up a time -- my question is, you have mentioned that Iran should not be brought into this issue. Until Iran is stopped from becoming nuclear, how can there be peace in the region? Every country feels insecure. Everywhere wherever Shias are there, people naturally align them with Iran. And if Iran becomes nuclear -- Saudis would like to be? Even Egypt would like to be. So I think this issue has to be addressed and those options on the table, all the options on the table, that has to be aligned with -- it should be exercised. And I think what is ultimately the end game of this divide which is becoming deeper and deeper and more deadly every next day?

MR. RIEDEL: I'll start with the al-Qaeda question. Al-Qaeda thrives on this. Al-Qaeda is among the most extreme sectarian groups in history. It doesn't believe Shias are misguided. It believes Shias are the

devil incarnate. Abu Musab Zarqawi in Iraq took this to levels of hatred. Read his stuff. Other al-Qaeda figures have not reached his level of vitriol, but they're not far behind. In Syria they found an area which plays to their advantage. Al-Qaeda could never win in Iraq. The majority of Iraqis are not Sunni. The notion that al-Qaeda was going to be the victor in Iraq showed what was your very nice term, Suzanne, situational unawareness. In Syria the numbers are reversed. Yes, the Sunni will prevail probably in the long term and al-Qaeda is riding a winning horse. That I think is very dangerous.

On the Iranian nuclear problem, I don't want to shanghai us to Suzanne's favorite and steal her thunder. I think if Iran if it is determined to get a nuclear weapon will get a nuclear weapon. I don't believe the United States is prepared to occupy Iran. And I think anyone who advocates that as former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates said should have their head examined. I favor a political solution if one can be found, a diplomatic solution. I support slowing down the Iranian program if we can through all kinds of means. But I don't think we should draw the Iranian nuclear issue as a line in the sand which the United States has no choice but to use force. I think that would be a mistake. Will Iran with nuclear weapons be a bad thing? No doubt about it. Is it the end of the human race and the Apocalypse? No, I don't think so. Will the Saudis build a bomb? The Saudis could not build a bomb. They don't have the

infrastructure to do so. They will turn to a different solution. They will buy the bomb.

MS. MALONEY: Let's do a quick lightening round. We have about 11 minutes and I see all kinds of hands up. If we could perhaps find a way to do two questions from this side and two questions from this side. I apologize to all those of you we can't work in. We'll finish up with statements from each of our speakers.

SPEAKER: My name is -- I come from Gilgit-Baltistan, a region north of Pakistan where we had more than 100 Shias killed last year, and now that the Taliban has talked about the revival of jihad and expanding into India, we see more and more jihadis -- militants and Taliban arriving in Gilgit-Baltistan. My question is to Dr. Reidel. Do you see any relationship between NATO withdrawing in Pakistan and revival of jihad in Pakistan, especially the activities of the Pakistan Defense Council, the mushrooming training camps of Lashkar-e-Taiba in Baluchistan for instance, as well as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi? My second observation is that even today most of the Pakistanis both Shia and Sunni would like to coexist in a peaceful environment, and as you said, most of these killings are happening because the ISI has a strong hand in it, the Pakistani military has a strong hand in it, and -- has a strong hand in it. So should we still keep calling it sectarian instead of targeted killing? Because if the Pakistani government is directly responsible, then if we do not use the

right term then maybe we are absolving the Pakistani government of the responsibility that they should be taking. Thank you so much.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you.

SPEAKER: My name is -- and I'm just an interested citizen with a couple of noncontroversial questions. One is if you could talk a little bit more about the situation in Syria and how that relates to the Shia-Sunni schisms there. Secondly, about U.S. policy there. My own bias is that we should spend more time in Syria trying to get a cease-fire to stop the bloodshed rather than sort of helping the insurgents. I want to get a comment on that as well from the speakers.

MR. BEECROFT: My name is Robert Beecroft. I'm with the Office of the Inspector General at the State Department where I'm known as the Robert Beecroft who is not the ambassador in Iraq. A question about Turkey which has been mentioned only in passing a couple of times. The only NATO country which borders Syria, Iran and Iraq, the only Muslim NATO country, the only Muslim country that borders two E.U. members in the Balkans and with a long history in the region. If I were sitting in Ankara right now if I were with Erdogan or any of his people, what would I be recommending? What should Turkey do or not do first and foremost in Syria but not only in Syria?

MR. MATER: My name is Mater Ibrahim Mater, a former M.P. from Bahrain. First a quick clarification that the -- for Shia -- Fifth

Fleet is not counted in any assessment for whether the Fifth Fleet should stay or leave. The second issue is the fear that the opposition and the Shia will lose their credibility if the U.S. embraces them. This is also not an issue. The Bahrainis are looking that the U.S. government needs to talk clearly about the situation and all the violations that are going on. Regarding the Fifth Fleet, the Bahrainis are looking to see the Fifth Fleet having a constructive role, but at the end they prefer that the U.S. to be not involved at all, either to have a constructive role or not to be involved. It's good for the U.S. government to be not involved in the sectarian issue in all the region including Bahrain or to have a constructive role. This is how we look at the issues.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you all. I would ask each of our speakers to make some closing comments and try to bring in responses to any and all of those questions in 6 minutes or less.

MR. REIDEL: In 6 minutes or less. I will take on the Afghanistan question because I think the Afghanistan question is very important in Pakistan and your observation that there are more camps, there are more activities going on, the Defense of Pakistan Council, an extraordinary development. We've seen efforts in the past to try to build a pan-jihadi movement in Pakistan that had never succeeded. This one is doing better. I won't say it's succeeded yet, but it's doing better than anything we have in the past. Part of it I think is simply this: the smell of

blood in the water. There is a perception in Pakistan and a perception in Afghanistan that the United States is about to cut and run, that we are about to dump this problem. And with that perception is the perception that the jihad is on the verge of its greatest victory ever, that the defeat of the Soviet Union was one thing, the defeat of America is something even bigger. And that in the aftermath of that, we can go on to other conflicts and that we can take over and hijack the state of Pakistan. I think a lot of this is far-fetched. I think it's fantastical. But it doesn't matter what I think, it matters what people who are willing to blow themselves up and kill other people think and they seem to think this which is why as painful as it is, I think that the president has embarked on the right project in Afghanistan which is to depart in a prudent, cautious and careful way and not to just cut and run. I know it's not popular, I know there is war weariness, but we should not leave Afghanistan as recklessly as we went in and we should do it with prudence and care and I think we can do that at a price that is within the bounds of what even a broke America can afford and I think the consequences of not doing it right will be worse than the last time we did it in 1989. The broader question of U.S. involvement in supporting the Arab awakening or opposing it, I've always felt the problem that the U.S. faces there is that we want to be on both sides. We support the revolution. We believe in democracy, we believe in the rule of law and we support the counterrevolution. The House of Saud has been good to us for a long,

long time. American foreign policy is often hypocritical. In this case we have to design an American foreign policy that is hypocritical. But we should think as we do that about the long term, the sustainability of what we've been doing in this area. It is not sustainable. We need to realize that the remaining Mukhabarat states of the Arab world's future is finite. Whether that's a decade, a year or months, their future is finite and we don't need to go down with them. We need to figure out how this transition can happen in ways that are consistent with our interests. That's easy to say, and Bahrain is the classic example of it's easy to say and awfully hard to translate into reality.

MS. ABDO: I wanted to elaborate a bit on Mater's point about the United States. Perhaps I wasn't clear. I think there's a difference between the United States highlighting the human rights violations in a country such as Bahrain and endorsing the activities of opposition groups. I think in the case of Bahrain, the United States has not been vocal enough about the human rights violations. If you go to people in the State Department, they will tell you otherwise. They will point to all the statements that former Secretary of State Clinton has made and Assistant Secretary of State Michael Posner who has worked very hard in Bahrain as everyone who follows this issue is quite aware. But I think there hasn't been enough public denunciation of the situation in Bahrain which is quite -- it's a very serious and dark problem now and it's

been widely documented, extensively documented in the Bassiouni report and it continues to go on. Of all the recommendations involving human rights violations that the Bassiouni report proposed, to date only three of 24 have been implemented fully if I'm correct. I think that's one way that the United States can make a difference simply because we've seen that countries respond to international pressure. It's also true in Iran. When a lot of international pressure is placed on specific human rights cases, there is a positive result. I think that despite our pessimism as to what the United States can do, I think that there is still some work that can be done in Bahrain. Regarding the future and the whole issue of sectarianism that someone else raised, I think that as Bruce says, the United States needs to step back. This is an internal Islamic issue that needs to be sorted out. I think in the near future there is going to be far more instability than we're seeing now in some countries. I also agree that the status quo in the authoritarian states still standing is not sustainable. As I've made trips to Bahrain, I wonder why people aren't more nervous about the situation there because I do think that the status quo is not sustainable. I think that as we move forward we need to focus and concentrate more on the dictators that are still standing and figure out what possibly can be done in those countries.

SPEAKER: How about Turkey?

MS. ABDO: Turkey. I don't follow Turkey. I don't really feel

qualified to answer what the government in Ankara should do at this point. I don't even know if they know what they should do at this point.

MR. REIDEL: We did a war game on Syria at Brookings and we tried to persuade the Turkish team that Syria is their problem. It was a no sale. I think in this case our war game actually mirrored reality. Turkey doesn't want to solve the Syrian problem. Been there. Done that.

MS. MALONEY: With that as our final word, let me thank our speakers for two terrific spell-binding if not entirely uplifting presentations. And to all of you for nuanced, provocative and formative questions, I really appreciate it. It's been a great opportunity.

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