

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

A NEW MIDDLE EAST COLD WAR

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: Good evening. My name is Salman Shaikh, I'm the director of the Brookings Doha Center. Distinguished ambassadors, other eminences, ladies and gentlemen, friends of the Brookings Doha Center, it's wonderful to have you here in I'm sure what you'll agree is a very special event. I know I say this every time, but -- and I mean it every time, but we are very, very pleased and excited to have with us the panel that you see in front of you to discuss what we have provocatively called "A New Middle East Cold War".

Maybe we should have put a question mark, but that's our statement.

Let me go straight into our distinguished panelists here today. To my first left is, of course, Mr. Abbas Maleki, former Deputy Foreign Minister for Research and Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran from 1989 to '97. You currently hold the post of associate professor at the Sharif University of Technology and have taught in such diverse subjects as

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Iranian foreign policy, Islamic revolution and its roots, as well as relations between Iran and its neighbors.

There are numerous other activities, which I could go on for quite some time, but let me just mention a couple, which include Director General at the Institute for Caspian Studies since 1997 and also an associate researcher at the International Security Program, Belfast Center for Science and International Affairs as well as being at the Harvard Kennedy School since 2006.

It's really a pleasure to have you here, Dr. Maleki. We look forward to your contribution.

Let me then introduce Mr. Gregory Gause, one of our own. Gregory Gause, III is a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Doha Center. He specializes in domestic politics and international relations of the Gulf Countries with a particular focus on Saudi Arabia. You're the author of the International Relations Persian Gulf, which was published in 2010, as well as two other books and

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numerous articles.

You're a professor since 1995, and chair, since 2010, of the political science department at the University of Vermont, previously held positions at Columbia, also fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, and a visiting professor at the Kennedy School of Government. I could go on, but I'll stop there.

And then it's my great pleasure to have Dr. Anwar Eshki. He's chairman of the Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies. General Dr. Anwar bin Majed bin Anwar Eshki is chairman, as I said, of the Center for Studies. He's also a renowned scholar with a background of decades long career in the Kingdom's Royal Forces.

You have your PhD from the prestigious Golden State University in California, and a graduate in Military Staff College in Riyadh.

You're the author of some 30 books and 16 research papers on various topics related to military strategy, international relations and international

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law. Dr. Eshki, it's a pleasure to have you here from Saudi Arabia.

And certainly, not least, Dr. Bassel Salloukh. You're associate dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and associate professor of political science at the Social Sciences Department at the Lebanese American University. You're a senior, non-resident fellow also at the University Consortium for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies in Montreal, Canada.

Your research includes democratic transitions and authoritarian regime persistence and breakdown in the Arab world, international relations in the Middle East, and the domestic and foreign politics of Lebanon. You've recently completed the co-authored book, *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World*.

I honestly can say to you that I could go on for quite some time, given the credentials and experience of these gentlemen in front of you, but I'm eager for us to get into the discussion. Let me just

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point out a couple of quick things before we start this.

This event is being carried live on Al Jazeera Mubasher. We're very grateful that the audience has joined us and will listen in on this fascinating discussion.

Let me start with Greg, please. Greg, you in many ways have helped us shape this particular discussion with regards to a new Middle East cold war. Could you explain to us why you think this is more about state fragility and weakness than sectarianism?

MR. GAUSE: I think this is a cold war, very much on the model of the way regional politics worked in the 1950s and the 1960s, when Gamal Abdel Nasser challenged -- and the Arab Nationalist movement challenged regimes that were allied with the West that were more conservative, because that wasn't a war between armies, it wasn't a war between states confronting each other on the battle field.

It was a war that was played out in the domestic politics of the states of the region, as the

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various parties involved -- now Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Israel, back then Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United States, the Soviet Union -- supported groups within the domestic politics of states that were divided, of governments and state structures that were weak, in an effort to get a geopolitical advantage. And that's what's happening now.

We don't see the army of Saudi Arabia and the army of Iran confronting each other on a battlefield. That was the politics of the '80s in the Gulf region, when the armies of Iraq and Iran fought each other in a conventional war. But now we see various parties in the region, the states that I mentioned, drawn into vacuums, power vacuums, where governments have become weak, where societal divisions have become exacerbated.

I think in the region there's always been states that have had weak central governments in which foreigners could play into the domestic politics -- Lebanon, Yemen -- but what's unique about this period is we see two central states in the Arab world -- Iraq

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and Syria -- with very weak governments and divided societies, where local groups invite outside powers in to help them achieve their own local goals and outside powers are drawn into the vacuums that were created by the collapse of state authority in Iraq after the 2003 American invasion, by the eating away of the Syrian state by the civil war and the protests that began in 2011.

So, to me, this is a cold war, very much on the model of the '50s and '60s in the Arab world, but it's not an Arab cold war, it's a Middle East cold war because we have Iran, we have Turkey, as well as the global players -- the United States, Russia -- involved.

So, I think that's why it's a cold war and that's the best way to think about it.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. I'll come to you, Dr. Maleki. You heard Greg describe how he sees this as a cold war and what's driving it, which is essentially weak states and a new imbalance of power, which is -- and a power politics, which is struggling

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to find a certain new advantage or even equilibrium.

Is this how you see it?

DR. MALEKI: Thank you very much. I think the case of the Middle East is the issue as you mentioned the major powers, regional powers, and weaker states, and sometimes proxy wars among the regional or major powers.

The case of the sectarianism, I think, it is true, but I think it is something that the name is sectarianism, but the cream of the issue is the case of power, the access to the power.

Regarding Sunni and Shia, which you mentioned, I think Sunnis, they are 90 percent of the Muslim population, Shiites is about less than 10 percent. Therefore, the population, it is not balanced or closed together that they should be rival. But demographically, the Shias, they are important, the regions when they are leaving in Persian Gulf, for example, in southern part of Iran, in southern part of Iraq, in the eastern part of the Saudi Arabia, in other states in the Persian Gulf, therefore these are

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very important.

Regarding the case of is it really the cold war or the war between the ethnic groups or different sects, I think we must look at the development, especially after the second Persian Gulf War, the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, and development in Iraq, the case of Iranian revolution, Islamic revolution in 1979 and its impact on Lebanon, and the major -- the most important question is Arab-Israeli conflict, which is the motive of many, many movement in Arab countries and Muslim countries like Iran, Turkey, and the other countries in this region.

Anyhow, I want to say, if you want to solve all of these problems, the major problem is not the sectarian issues, the major problem is Arab-Israeli conflict, but in some countries like Iraq, which has shifted in the power or in Syria now and other countries, weaker states, there are some performance sectarian conflicts.

MR. SHAIKH: And yet, Dr. Maleki, we have, let's say in the case of Syria, increasingly, of

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course, not just the involvement of Hezbollah, but also, of course, of Iran and others, and a narrative which says that there -- in order to prevent harm being done to our community, we have to be preventive, we have to be preemptive, and that is some of the justification given. Now, that is very much along sectarian lines, is it not? And is it not fueling a sectarian conflict?

MR. MALEKI: Yes. I think my brother from Lebanon, Dr. Salloukh, can talk about the case of Hezbollah, is it preemptive action or the aggressive action in Syria, because it is very important. And we must look at this case in the framework of -- in the frame of Lebanese national interest.

But regarding Iran-Syria relations, really, Iran did not have good relations with Syria in the past because of the case that Syria was part of the east block, part of Soviet Union block, until 1979.

After 1979, also, Iran-Syria relation was not so good, but during Iran-Iraq war in 1982, when Iran tried to cut oil production of Iraqi regime

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Saddam Hussein, Iran tried to cut all of the oil production and oil export of Iraq. One of them was in Persian Gulf, (inaudible), Iranian naval forces, they did.

The second was the pipeline, which, from (inaudible) to Turkish Jahan terminal, the (inaudible) was (inaudible), if you remember. The President Hafez al-Assad proposed Iran he is ready to cut one million barrel per day oil production of Iraq instead of if Iran feeds Syria with 100,000 barrel per day oil -- crude oil, which was the (inaudible) rent of transit fee of Iraqi oil via Syria, and Iran accepted and Syria did.

From that time, Iran and Syria, they did close relations and then issues in Lebanon civil war and something in Palestine caused that they worked together.

I think now, the case is not only the case - - they are Alawite and Iranians, there are Shiite, these are something I think it is not covered in Iranian national interests.

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Iran is working with Syria because of different parameters. The first parameter is Israel. Israel is working with some countries along Iranian borders, Iran worked with countries near Israeli borders.

Second issue is that Iran needs that this is better to work with a government, which is, yes, the authoritarian substance of Syrian regime is very clear, but if you compare the Syrian regime with (inaudible) and other Salafis, other radicals, Iranian nationalist interest is better to work with this regime rather than to deal with some country with extremist and radicals. I don't want to say terrorists, but it is very clear that they are really extremists.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. We will come back to this. You mentioned a number of things, which I think we'll want to generate more of a discussion of.

But let me ask the more general question again to Dr. Eshki, is this imbalance what we're seeing today in the region, the competition, is this

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about power? Is it about politics? Or is it something, which is more driven by sectarian? Or is it something else all together?

MR. ESHKI: Please let me talk in Arabic language as long we have here translation because Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz, he said, anyone doesn't use any privileges, that mean he is idiot. For that reason, I would like to talk in Arabic.

(Speaking Arabic.)

(Through Translator.)

So, regarding the question that was posed in this topic, I would like to say that this cold war, as long as we have nuclear deterrents, we have to have a kind of a cold war. The question, why do we have this cold war in Syria in particular?

Syria has become today the center of clashes between different strategies, the strategy of the United States of America, the strategy of Iran, the strategy of Saudi Arabia, the strategy of Russia, and many, many other strategies. So, we have a kind of clashes taking place that is what has made the war

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cold, which means it is a war by proxy.

So, this war that is taking place in Syria, we find that Iran has ambitions it wants to reach the Mediterranean Sea as it did 500 years before Christ. So, that is the first and the second, they went to the Mediterranean Sea and they controlled Egypt, so Iran wants to be a great power and they can only do that and achieve that unless they reach the Mediterranean.

The United States of America wants to have a democratic Middle East. It wants to reform the Middle East and it is using -- or getting rid of authoritarian regimes and it's trying to get new democratic regimes. Why? Because the great Middle East or the new Middle East is essential land, so, whoever controls the essential land would be controlling the whole economy of the world. So, this is one thing. So, the United States of America wants to move the Arab Spring from the Middle East to the Middle Asia or Central Asia, so if this Arab Spring goes to Central Asia, that means that China would not be able to control this particular area, and Russia

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would not, as well, be able to control this area. It is now taken into account that society over there or the communities are Islamic, and the systems in these six countries are authoritarian regimes.

There's also Russia. So, whoever has set these basic strategies for Russia is Boutros the Great. He faced Sweden because it did not allow the ships to move through Baltic and Marmara and other regions and also the Mediterranean. So, that is why they fought against them and he wanted to find a better way to reach these waters so as to be able to reach (inaudible) near Karachi.

But Russia tried many times. They had many attempts. Even when they went to Afghanistan they had the same objective. So, now has Russia changed its policies today and Russia has become or is still concentrated on the Mediterranean now because with the victory of the new President, Nawaz Sharif, that means it would not be able to reach that area.

So, if Nawaz Sharif is victorious, they would not be able to reach this area, which is the

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Mediterranean, that is why they are making great endeavors and great efforts to reach the Mediterranean.

As for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it is a big ship that has one million -- one billion and two hundred million on board of it, so Saudi Arabia is not flexible enough because it is responsible for all Muslims on board of its ship. That is why Saudi Arabia does not want to have a kind of a Shiite crescent that they want to break and they do not want that because to have such a kind of Shiite crescent will lead to sectarian war between different countries and Saudi Arabia is the sponsor of interfaith dialogue and also the dialogue between the different cultures. This is the strategy of King Abdullah.

So, Saudi Arabia wants all Muslims to live in peace with Muslims and with the people of other faiths, Christians and Jews, because this is the best way for people to get their rights.

So, Turkey, in 1976 -- so, I was in charge in Lebanon on behalf of Saudi Arabia, and we have seen

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in that particular time, we were drafting the different policies, Arab policies in there. Before I came here I was in Turkey and I was participating in a peace conference and also the nuclear demilitarization in the Middle East and I found out that Turkey is a place in which the Middle East policies are being drafted. So, that is why Turkey is growing. That is why they want to use -- they want to reach the Pacific as well.

So, of course, Turkey wants to regain its victory during the Sultans or the victorious eras of the Sultans, so we can say that the Syrian war can continue for ten years, but if Russia and the United States agree together and the case is solved peacefully, we can reach peace.

Thank you very much.

MR. SHAIKH: (Inaudible) introduced the great power dimensions. You've mentioned, of course, the United States and Russia, but also Turkey as a resurgent power in the Middle East, as well as Israel. Now, this is something we'll come back to, but I just

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want to come back to you on one thing with regards to Saudi Arabia, yes, Dr. Eshki, and that is in this cold war, in this balance of power struggle, isn't Saudi Arabia losing?

And here let me say the changes in Iraq have led to a situation whereby which you have a government, if not a harmonious political system, which is perhaps more sympathetic to Iran. In Lebanon, you have, again, a difficult situation politically, but nevertheless, the strongest party is Hezbollah. And in Syria too, it looks as if the momentum is with the Assad regime rather than the other way around.

So, how does Saudi Arabia deal with this?

MR. ESHKI: (Speaking Arabic.)

(Through translator.)

That is a very good question. I do agree with you that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is losing, but it is not losing internally, it is losing because the other Arab states are losing.

So, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is aiming to

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retrieve Iraq to be part and parcel once again of the Arab group. It is aiming to have peace in Lebanon. When the Lebanese president visited Saudi Arabia last year, King Abdullah told him, dissociate yourself from the events taking place in Syria, and he has asked him to hold dialogue between the different categories and components of society because this will lead to peace.

So, Hezbollah, I think, is the loser now because when (inaudible) fell, this is -- there is a benefit in there, the benefit because we have guaranteed that we are not going to have separation within Syria. If Kossir didn't fall, maybe the Syrian government would have moved to the Alawite regions and would have established an Alawite state. This is what had happened, but Hezbollah today, with its intervention or interference, it has lost a lot of appreciation and respect from the Islamic world. We have seen him killing women, children. We wanted them to dissociate themselves from this situation, but why? We know Hezbollah and this operation, and they were surprised really, they were surprised as to when --

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when certain people protested against Syria, Jebal Messin was shot, was attacked, and there was -- I mean, fires from Tripoli, and (inaudible) Assir said, we have -- I mean, northern -- I mean, area, and if we look at this northern area, it goes to Ahkar, to (inaudible), which is the heart of the revolution. So, that means we are going -- that they would have a strategic center in Syria.

So, I think Hezbollah, their strategic center is very weak now because they have Sunnis from one side and Israelis from one side, so instead of strengthening the ties with the Alawites, they found themselves weak, so we do not want to have any sectarian problems in Saudi Arabia, we want all Muslims, all Arabs in all the world to live peacefully. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Dr. Salloukh, we're still kicking around this notion of change based on power, the balance of power, and yet we hear also the sectarian elements here.

Now, Lebanon, of course, can be a wonderful

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example of coexistence of the various groups and communities, and yet, in many ways, it's now a reflection of the -- both the power and the sectarian struggles, which are tugging it apart.

How do you see it, both in your country of Lebanon, but also in the region?

MR. SALLOUKH: Yeah, let me, sort of, before I answer you, let me step back a bit because I think this issue of the -- are we living another Arab cold war should be unpacked a bit.

I think we're missing something very important here. This part of the world, because of its strategic significance, has always been a penetrated part of the world. I mean, great power politics is part of the birth and the development of this region as a system, as a regional system, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

Now, what is, I think, different today than the classical Arab cold war is the Arab uprisings. When you look at the history of the (inaudible) of Arab nationalism for power politics and (inaudible),

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the legacy of the Saudi-Egyptian confrontation in the '50s and '60s and so on, the issue was geopolitics and how you use ideology to serve geopolitics in order, either, to change regime policies, say you disagree with what King Hussein was doing, you use Jordanian public opinion to change his foreign policy, or you change the regime.

Today, I think, what has changed after the Arab uprisings, is that there are some who are entertaining the change within states and not just change of regime, what has been referred to as soft Balkinization.

From 2003 onwards, we witnessed a classic geopolitical confrontation in the region between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and again, I want to reiterate, this is nothing new to the region. This is a continuous trend with the players, the main players changing. What the Arab uprisings have done is that it has extended this geopolitical confrontation to a very pivotal state, a state, Syria, which used to be a player in the regional politics, is now a playground,

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and more importantly, the Arab uprisings have opened up this possibility of people reimagining their place as citizens in these states that are being recreated.

So, I think this is very important. The classical Arab cold war, you were dealing mainly with authoritarian regimes, solely with authoritarian regimes. Today, after the Arab uprisings, when you add the geopolitical struggle to people reimagining their identity as citizens, you open up a bigger can of worms, and I think this is why the situation is so complicated.

Sectarianism is a consequence not of a primordial identity of the people of this region, sectarianism and the heightened views of sectarianism today is the consequence of the fact that sectarianism is being deployed as a tool of geopolitics, which means that really the main struggle is geopolitical, but it's being played out in different arenas and in different ways, and I think, again, what is structurally different this time is we are at a moment -- some people call it the end of (inaudible) -- at a

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moment where people are reimagining their places in these new states.

I'm not saying that the borders of the states will necessarily change, but certainly their internal make up will change, a la Iraq. You went from an authoritarian unitary state to a very loose confederal state today. So, I think this is very important.

To come back to Lebanon, and Lebanon is where all this is really magnified because of the weak structure of the state, because how local actors use external actors for their own domestic purposes, and because of the way external actors use local actors for their own geopolitical reasons.

Tragically, Lebanon today is exporting a very bad model to the Arab world, and this is the model of institutionalized sectarianism in the form of new power sharing formulas.

Maybe we can revisit this later if you like and talk about it some more.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much, and just a

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quick follow up question. So, if this is being, in many ways, the can of worms you said that has opened up by the Arab uprisings is also now people in reconfigurations within states, can these transformations actually contribute to building a resolution of the kinds of competition that we are seeing? Or is it inevitable that this will need to play out, both the transformations themselves and the building of political systems and new institutions, or is it inevitable that this will play out for many decades to come? Is this a long-term phenomenon now?

MR. SALLOUKH: Well, I think because different things are happening at the same time, people's uprising, geopolitics, regimes trying to survive authoritarian -- this has just complicated what really started as a genuine call for greater representation, accountability, and so on.

But again, to come back to what has already been mentioned, the tragedy of this part of the world is that we are an arena where global geopolitical interests collide, and I agree, I think when the

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Americans and the Russians and the big powers sit down, if they do, and decide on a settlement, that will make the chances of the settlement very good.

This is -- I say this, you know, with a lot of sadness because I would have hoped that after the Arab uprisings the Arab peoples would make their histories rather than external actors making the histories of the Arab peoples.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. That brings us perfectly to what I wanted to ask Greg. We've heard, as well as the regional discussion we've been having, we've been hearing about the powers, the great powers outside and their influence and their impact. And here I want to focus particularly on the United States and Russia. Can it really be that a solution can be imposed from the outside? Are we relying on great powers to build a new a balance and a new equilibrium? Or is it something else that we should be looking at?

And of course, feel free also to comment on perhaps a couple of the points that you would have heard from the others.

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MR. GAUSE: I think it's almost inevitable that people in the region see their fates being held in the hands of the great powers and the great powers seeing the region as being incredibly complicated and incredibly difficult to manage. And my sense is that the great powers, if there were an agreement, and I have no confidence that there will be any time soon -- if there were an agreement, that would certainly set a context in which it would be possible for domestic parties to come to the table, and if the great powers cut off some of the resources that they were supplying their clients, it would increase the incentives of those clients to get to the table. There's no question about that.

But I really do see the origins of these conflicts as being in the domestic politics of -- and let's take Syria as the example here. Syria wasn't always a weak state. Syria wasn't always, as Bassel said -- Syria -- one of the accomplishments of Havez al-Assad, although he was a dictatorial ruler, without a doubt, was to build a strong Syrian state and make

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Syria a player in regional politics and not a playground, as it had been previously.

But I think that the erosion of the power of the Syrian state and the reemergence of divisions in Syrian society mean that Syria is going to be a playground until Syrian elites can get back to a position where they can redefine what Syrian identity is. And I think that's going to be extremely hard.

Without a doubt, if the great powers would remove their hands and push the Syrian parties to do that, it would increase the chances, but I don't think that the origin of the current conflict in Syria is the great powers. I think the great powers take advantage and the regional powers also, right, be it Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, countries that see each other in a game of influence, and I think we're all agreed that that game of influence is a balance of power game. It's not a game directed by sectarian religious motives, it's a balance of power game.

As long as the Syrian state is a vacuum, as long as Syrian parties are contesting with each other,

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regional parties and the great powers will intervene to advance their own interests.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Then I just have a follow up question for you. How do we build a new equilibrium? Do we need new institutions? Do we need new regional institutions?

MR. GAUSE: I think Bassel's absolutely right that the most important institutions we need are new state institutions, you know, around which people in Iraq, people in Syria, people in Yemen, people in Bahrain, people in Lebanon, can redefine citizenship and can redefine a state that they can all live under with equal obligations and equal rights. If that can happen, then these states -- the parties in these states don't need to look outside for support.

Now, without a doubt, if regional and global powers push in that direction it makes that institution building more likely, but it has to start from the beginning. It doesn't have to start, but there has to be a will domestically for this to happen.

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I mean, Bassel and I have talked about this for a number of years now. We can't understand Lebanon without the regional powers and the global powers, but we also can't understand the dilemma of Lebanon without understanding that Lebanese themselves have had a very difficult time agreeing on what Lebanon should be.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. If I hear you correctly, though, this is not going to happen overnight. We're in a highly unstable situation for quite some time. I think this is a, perhaps, consensus we can all develop and with regards to the United States, it seems if we have a president who believes that the regions should sort out their own problems, first and foremost, but I'll come back to this.

Dr. Maleki, isn't this really all about Iran and the United States -- Iranian ambitions and the United States, perhaps pushed by Israel, and concerns about their security, which is really driving a lot of this?

MR. MALEKI: First, I want to ask you to not
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forget Bahrain situation also because Arab Spring or Arab Awakening or Islamic Awakening was a movement, which was started from Tunisia, but it is in Bahrain also and foreign troops in Bahrain and situation of majority of Bahranis also, this is very important, as my friend also said.

Second issue, really the case of U.S.-Iran relation is a very, very important thing and sometimes it is a rival, yes, Iran is very small regarding to -- comparing to United States, the case of GDP, the case of technology and others, but I think sometimes these two countries, they are playing the game and they are racing, especially in Middle East.

I want to say two things. First, Iran's foreign policy, which is structured by regionalism, regionalism is now, for Iran's foreign policy really is not as it was before the collapse of Soviet Union.

Before 1991, Iran had only a few neighbors - - Iraq, Turkey, Persian Gulf states and Pakistan, because Afghanistan also was under the control of Soviet Union, but after '91, Iran suddenly looked to

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the new opportunities in West Asia, in Central Asia, (inaudible) or Afghanistan, even in China and Russia, therefore Iran now is looking more itself as a country in West Asia rather than in Middle East first.

Second issue, you know the Iranian presidential election is set for June 14th, this Friday, and the candidate selected will take office in August. I think the main concept for every Iranian administration would be the presence of foreign troops in Middle East, especially in Persian Gulf. This is the most important thing for Iranian government, any president. And I think Iran will propose -- I don't know who is the next president, really, but I think each president --

MR. SHAIKH: I'm sorry, I can't resist saying, maybe somebody does?

MR. MALEKI: No, really, there are six candidates now after many, many discussions and other issues. Really I don't know, but I think Iran will propose a three-step proposal for Persian Gulf states, and first Iran will propose a wider GCC.

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You remember, in 1972, Shah of Iran, he proposed a collective security arrangement, something like Gulf Cooperation Concept and it was happened after Iranian revolution, but Iran will propose a wider GCC including six GCC states plus Iraq, Yemen, and Iran.

And second, Iran will propose recognition of (inaudible) in all of borders in Persian Gulf. It doesn't mean that any rights would be eliminated, no, but all of the countries, they can recognize these borders and the third issues for Iran is signing a non-aggression pact among the Persian Gulf countries.

I think these are -- it shows that Iranians, they are not looking to a chaotic situation in this region to fight other countries to do rivals with Saudi Arabia and other countries, the main concern, as I told you, is the foreign military presence, especially United States.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Dr. Eshki, you heard some proposals here in terms of a collective security arrangement -- from what could be elements of

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a buy around for building regional cooperation, harmony, or at least some understandings. So, you've heard proposals for collective security arrangement, recognition of borders, and a non-aggression pact.

Is that something that we think we can try to move towards with Iran in the current environment? How can we do it? And if not, why not?

MR. ESHKI: (Speaking Arabic.)

(Through translator.)

First of all, as for what's going on in the Arab countries, (inaudible), who is a Russian writer (inaudible), that it seems that (inaudible). So, we are now leaving the winter and spring is coming with the help of God to the Arab countries because democracy, justice, and these values will achieve peace. But one cannot have unity -- regional unity, without having peace.

Iran, we know, is our neighbor, a Muslim country, but we don't want Iran to be an extremist country. We don't want Iran to go into sectarian conflicts in the region. We don't want Iran to impose

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its influence on the GCC countries. If Iran announces today that (inaudible) to exercise any influence and will not be hostile towards the Arab countries and the GCC countries, I'm sure that the Crown Prince will go and visit Iran.

So, (inaudible) for Iran. In fact, I visited Iran the last days of the Shah and I found the Iranian people are very good and nice people, advanced people, and the working people, so I urge that Iran comes back to the Islamic family.

But I did not expect that it would come with an agenda that's different than ours. If the agendas are unified, everything could work well. Of course, we wish that Iran -- Iran is part of the Gulf and we hope that Iran is a country of the Gulf and it's linked and united with the GCC countries and including Iraq.

But with this approach, with this (inaudible), it's not (inaudible) difficult. Iran does not want to have any agreement about the three (inaudible). Iran does not want to stop intervention

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in the affairs of the Islamic countries. Iran listens to more of (inaudible) who say (inaudible) want to occupy Mecca and no statement is made against such a ting (inaudible).

So, there are so many other issues that create sensitivities. We don't want the Middle East or the Gulf region to be a conflict region. We want it to be a peace region. That's why when we say to Iran, change your policies and we will be with you, we don't care who will be leading the region -- Iran or Turkey -- the important thing is that it should lead it in peace.

Saudi Arabia is not looking for any influence, (inaudible) not to exercise influence in any country, but it sure wants always to achieve peace in these countries. Saudi Arabia has stopped anything that has to do with Iraq and Saudi Arabia and GCCs intervened in Yemen and where they found that Yemen is ready to achieve peace, they helped them, and Yemen is now going towards peace.

That's why I agree with him that we should

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be one group, unified, but before that, there must be a change in the agendas, change in the way they think, and we are optimistic if a new president comes to Iran, a moderate one, is moderate and he changes the policies, this will be with the help of God, a way to reach peace and achieve peace in the Middle East.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. I come to Dr. Salloukh. One element here, in terms of at least the constellations in the Middle East, is of course, Israel. And we've talked about other powers and the role of Israel.

I want to link it actually with the issue of resistance and one of the great sort of calling cards of Tehran or of the Assad regime or of Hezbollah, as well as Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian groups has been resistance and the axis of resistance. Some would say, this is on which hung the balance of power in the region.

Is that something, especially given Hamas has now moved away from Syria, and the Palestinian issue is still stuck and occupation continues, but

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nevertheless, perhaps many doubt the motivations of those in the axis of resistance. Is this something that we should factor in in terms of the changing dynamics in the region?

MR. SALLOUKH: Look, I think to understand the centrality of Israel to Iran and Hezbollah, one has to understand how they define themselves. Post-revolutionary Iran perceives Israel as an existential threat, at least discursively. Hezbollah is part of this worldview that sees Israel as not just a strategic threat, but an ideological and existential threat.

Does that define all of their geopolitical moves in the region? No. States have multiple interests. And by the way, I don't think it's shy to recognize that all states have interests and that no matter what they say publically, privately they will pursue their interests.

I think today the so-called axis of resistance is in tatters, it is fighting a rare guard battle, it's a battle to survive particularly by

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shoring up the Assad regime. Again, is that something based on their identity or on their geopolitical calculations?

I think interestingly, Iranian officials are the clearest in defining the centrality of Syria for their geopolitical objectives, when they say that defending the regime of Bashir al-Assad is like defending Tehran. I mean, that is a geopolitical perspective.

I think what is really strange is that if we are to entertain the possibility of a Saudi-Iranian rapprochement; it is as if we are engaging in thinking the unthinkable, when this goes back to what Greg was saying. If there is any hope for this part of the world, it has to start from the states of the regions and the actors in the region to build bridges and to decide to use the immense resources of the region for the well being of the peoples of the region.

That, I think, is not something that is going to happen in the immediate or foreseeable future because the main states are locked in this kind of

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geopolitical contest. Are we now going through, you know, the most difficult part of this geopolitical contest after which there can be some kind of resolution? I hope so. I hope so, because the alternatives are very bad, they are worse than the situation we are in here.

The last thing that I want to raise is that, again, I think we have to remember that after the Arab uprisings, the main challenge in the region is building democratic inclusive states. Everything not build on democratic representative accountable institutions will not last. This is the lesson of the Arab Spring.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. And thank you everyone for putting up with the award ceremony, which is going on next door. I'm told it's the chemical engineers who are meeting. So, obviously, well-deserved prizes being handed out, but I hope you can hear us.

Now, I'm actually going to open up the floor, I think. I'm sure many of you will have some

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things to say. I'd just ask you to just say your name and any affiliation if you have it. Of course, comments are welcome, but please keep them as brief as you can, and a question is even more welcome.

Sir, in the red tie.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much for this very interesting discussion. I would like to ask the following: when you are suggesting that states need to address this, you know, at the state level and build institutions and so on and so forth, that actually seems to be -- there seems to be a contradiction here.

What is happening is that it seems that the Syrian regime has cleverly turned the fight for freedom by its people into a regional conflict between Sunnis and Shiites. So, the problem was that it was convenient for three states -- you know, let's say not all states, but powers within these three states, for example, Iran, you know, had the green revolution earlier and the success of the freedom uprising in Syria could, you know, after all, this domino effect

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could then move to Iran.

Saudi Arabia, you know, had the beginnings of an issue and it is not in their best interest to see something like this happen. And, again, Israel, it's not in their best interest to see, you know, the change in the status quo in which they were able to manage dictators and now deal with the will of the people and so on and so forth.

So, these three states, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, some of them -- some within them, it seems in their best interest to prolong or to support this instability and this Sunni Shia thing. And yet we are asking them, or people like them, to say, okay, the solution starts from there.

That doesn't seem to me to be something that's going to happen ever. They will drag it and drag it and drag it.

So, we have to reframe the problem again. The problem really is an issue of the people looking for their freedom within Syria, within each and every country. It is not a regional issue, it is not a

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Sunni-Shia thing, and this is a manufactured thing that these people are using to distract (inaudible).

So, Dr. Bassel, I would like to start with you and then everybody else. Do you think this is a reasonable understanding that this is being substituted -- you know, the peoples' struggle is being substituted by a Sunni-Shia thing and then I would like to also hear from you and then everybody if possible. Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Hi. (Inaudible) from the Peninsula Newspaper. It's interesting how, you know, the panelists said that it's not really about sectarianism when you have scholars such as (inaudible) saying that, you know, going to Syria and fighting there is like Jihad. So, what role do you see scholars from this region playing out? And secondly, with respect to the cold war -- the Middle Eastern cold war, how do you think this is actually affecting the ties between GCC states when you know their involvement -- with their involvement in Syria? Do you think at some point these states would be

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affected and their relationships would also, you know, be affected by this? Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. So, I am going to speak in Arabic because my talk is to Mr. Eshki.

(Speaking Arabic.)

(Through translator.)

We always try to keep on crying on spilled milk. You say that we Arabs, we do not want to have Shiite crescent. Maybe we do not want that and maybe I agree with you, but we have killed Saddam Hussein, we have killed the ban that we had against this Shiite crescent and now we are killing the Syrian revolution, the Syrian resistance, by not helping them militarily and by giving them all the things they need.

I think that there is a collusion between Iran and the United States of America. If the United States of America was serious, they would have killed Hezbollah's fighters in their battle, but they gave a green light, so they went there to kill the revolutionaries in Syria. I think there is collusion, and I underline that, because it is in the interests

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of the United States of America to have two crescents, a Shiite and a Sunni crescent.

MR. SHAIKH: Let's start with Greg and the improbability -- in fact, it's not ever going to happen -- that regional actors will come together.

MR. GAUSE: You know, you can never do away with regional politics. I mean, this is the tragedy of the international system. I think that you would find every one of the powers in the Middle East -- Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian government, Turkey -- everyone saying, we are doing what we are doing for defensive reasons because we are threatened. And they would have a case for that. That's the tragedy of international relations.

But I don't think -- and here I think Bassel is absolutely right -- that it's not inevitable that the intensity of the conflict that we're seeing now has to continue forever. It might get worse, but we know in the recent past, after periods during which regional powers have spent blood and treasure in wars and conflicts, there have been periods when they have

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been more willing to not form alliances, but have understandings that would stabilize regional politics.

I think if we go back to the period in the 1990s after the Gulf War, relations between Iran and the GCC states were much better than they are today. They weren't problem-free. I wouldn't say that these states were allied with each other, but it was a heck of a lot better than the situation is now.

And so, I do think that politics can change. Regimes can redefine their interests, can look at the resources that they're spending and decide to have more modest goals and to try to come to understandings.

So, I wouldn't rule that out. I wouldn't rule that out.

The other point I would like to make is about sectarianism, which was -- underlined quite a few of these questions. I think that regimes want to stay in power and that's their first and primary goal. If using sectarianism strengthens their position and divides their opposition, they will do that. The

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Syrian regime did that, the Bahraini regime did that, both which faced national protests calling for greater democracy and representation, both regimes used sectarian language to try to divide the opposition and garner support from their co-religionists.

That is just the way regimes act. And so, I think that there's nothing particularly Shia, there's nothing particularly Sunni, there's nothing particularly Christian, there's nothing particularly Maronite or Greek Orthodox about that, right, that's what regimes do.

And so, I think that the issue isn't so much the persistence of sectarianism, the issue is coming to some, as many of us -- I think all of us on the panel have said in different ways -- coming to some understanding among the elites within these states as to what their politics should look like, because if they can come to that kind of agreement, if Lebanese can come to that agreement, if Syrians can come to that agreement, if Bahrainis can come to that agreement, it's much, much harder for outsiders to

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interfere in their politics.

So, I understand why people in the region say, the great powers have to move first, the regional powers have to move first, because of the imbalances of power between regional states and powers like the United States. But I also think that it's really important for us not to forget that it's divisions and weaknesses at the local level that invite these outside powers, whether regional or international, into the politics of the region.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me add -- before you switch off, let me add another wrinkle, though, and it's tied to the question that the lady asked, the second one, in terms of the context of the cold war, ties between even states that are perceived to be on the same side with GCC states, and here it's no secret that people are taking a different view when it comes to the rise of political Islam, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular.

How has this affected the broader context?

MR. GAUSE: I think it's really interesting

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when we look at the states in the GCC that at times of crisis they come together. The differences, say, between Qatar and Saudi Arabia on approaches to the region were minimized in the immediate aftermath of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt and Bahrain and Yemen.

To the extent that the states in the GCC feel that their own security, domestically and regionally, is in a better position, they're more willing to pursue different policies, and so, to some extent, I think that when you see differences among the GCC states, it's an indication that they actually feel relatively secure.

I'd also say that I think that when I talk about strong states and weak states, the GCC states, with the exception of Bahrain right now, are strong states, even though they're not strong at the international level, they don't have large armies, they don't have the kind of influence that states with large military forces and large demographic bases have.

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These are domestically strong states. They have states that provide services, states that provide stability, law and order, and I would say in -- to a great extent, they have understandings of citizenship, maybe not democracy, but understandings of citizenship that need improvement, but that haven't led to the kinds of divisions that have invited in foreign powers.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Come to Dr. Salloukh on the question -- you can answer any of the questions you want, but in particular the one that was directed to you, I think, linked to Greg's answer about it's really an issue of people and yet it's in the best interest of certain powers, actually, to maintain instability.

MR. SHAIKH: Right. Yeah, well, I agree with Greg. I mean, regimes sectarianize domestic relations for their own purposes, and I think, you know, historians will look back at the period we're passing by today and I think they will look at what happened in Bahrain as the beginning of the end of

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what we all thought was going to be a prosperous Arab Spring, and when the Arab uprisings were used for geopolitical purposes, that meant the end of the movement by the people, the peaceful movement to change the regimes from within.

People forget that when the uprising in Syria started, at the outset, nobody even said we want to change the regime. The first demonstrations were calling upon Bashir al-Assad for himself to undertake the reforms, and then things were derailed and the uprising was derailed and the regime sectarianized the uprising, the uprising was militarized, and now Syria, as I have mentioned, has become a site.

And, you know, if you look at the experience of Lebanon, these things can take a long time, up until all actors are exhausted, and only then -- all domestic, regional actors are exhausted, and only then can external, global actors step in and say, okay, now is the time for you to agree. And that's, I think, the greatest tragedy of the Arab Spring, that when the Arab people stood up to claim what is rightfully

theirs, because of the nature of the geopolitical contest in the region, because of the importance of the region to the global capitalist economy, and so on, they were robbed that moment, and it's a moment in history that is lost and it will not come back anytime soon.

MR. SHAIKH: Can you just speak for one second about the role of the United States? Is the United States colluding for this to continue?

MR. SALLOUKH: Well, again, you know, Arabs have to recognize, people in the region have to recognize that America is not Santa Claus and it's not a charity. It has interests, it has administrations that may have different tactical approaches but they pursue what is in the best interest of America, and if, for America today, the best scenario is to have a protracted conflict in Syria that will bleed America's enemies and Israel's enemies, that's fine.

You know, I am reminded of when Henry Kissinger was asked during the Iran-Iraq war, he was asked one time, what should America do? He said,

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"Nothing. Let them bleed each other and then that will be in our best interests."

We have to recognize that America has interests and it will pursue its interests, and America was slow to react to the Arab uprisings, we should remember, but I agree with Greg. We shouldn't blame America for all our problems. Our states have interests. The decision takers in this part of the world have interest. And sometimes even America's allies will not look eye-to-eye with America on some issues and I think this is clear in some cases.

MR. SHAIKH: But let me say, if the American interest is still to maintain relevance and even some popularity in this part of the world, one of the great charges leveled against the United States is one of double standards in terms of sticking up for certain values but in the case, let's say, the Syrian people would say, you have helped to construct a post-Second World War value system with its institutions, and we talk about human rights and the responsibility to protect and all of that, and yet, it doesn't seem to

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be mattering right now.

I mean, interests can be determined in different ways here, especially if they're not being served, no?

MR. SALLOUKH: Well, this is politics and, you know, we have to be realists and we have to be as realist as successive American administrations have been. And I also think Arabs should -- and people of the region -- Arabs, Iranians, and so on -- have to realize that we were -- this part of the world will not remain on the radar of the United States forever. The tilt to Asia is something serious, and I think it will have consequences in the future.

But today, now, because we have something that the global capitalist economy requires, great powers still pay attention to us. But, you know, we have to realize that America's interest in the region is not infinite.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Just sort of linked to this I come to Dr. Eshki. The question was asked with regards to the role of scholars. We've heard

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some pretty, some would say, inflammatory statements, whether it's Sheikh Qaradawi asking Sunnis -- all able Sunnis to go and do jihad, or even backed up by the Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdul-Aziz, or on the other side, what role can scholars play here other than the one that they are playing?

MR. ESHKI: (Speaking Arabic.)

(Through translator.)

This is an important question and in fact we -- before the Arab Spring, we attended a conference in Syria for jihad and we had Sheikh Qaradawi with us and there were many other scholars (inaudible), and in that conference I said that any scholar should benefit from his knowledge and science.

Unfortunately, our scholars are not capable of having political knowledge, that's why they don't know well their politics and Sheikh Qaradawi, in fact, is poor in politics, but he's very strong in religion, that's why sometimes we don't take things except from the specialized people.

Nevertheless, every man should be respected

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for his idea, but we must discuss with him, argue with him.

As for this sectarian conflict, the sectarian conflict is accused of many things by us, but so far we have not witnessed a sectarian war, but we are afraid of that. Hezbollah has many supporters from the Sunnis and Iraq, there are Sunnis who are with the government -- the Shiite government in Iraq. In Saudi Arabia, in the past five years, we give nationality 4,500 Shiites, while this will not give only 50 nationality to Sunnis.

We must know that there must be diversity. If there is no Shiites in Saudi Arabia we must create them. So, if we are all of the same sect, the same religion, this will push into extremism, so we must accept all because intellectual discussions creates progress and differences create progress.

What happens now is difference in opinion, we must not make that a conflict, we must not turn this difference into conflict. We must build ourselves. I have so many friends who are Shiites and

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in fact I see nothing but good in them.

So, there should not be a conflict with the Shiites and Sunnis, there should not be a conflict between the Muslims and Christians. There shouldn't - - these religious conflicts are sort of backwardness, underdevelopment. I had a friend from Georgetown University and he has said to me that I ask George W. Bush, I asked him, I told him, why do you hate me, I mean me, as an Arab. He said, you hate all Arabs. Bush answered him, said, look, Dr. Hindi, if America had no Muslims in it, it would not be U.S.A., because U.S.A. is built on minorities. So, we must accept the others whether he is Shiites or Sunnis or elsewhere.

We are against any sort of extremism, whether from Shiites or from Sunnis. We are against any kind of violence, that's why we think that the Middle East cannot be built by (inaudible) accepting the others to create our own nation. Thank you very much.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. With regards to the role of religious scholars, and again, we've heard

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some pretty inflammatory statements from scholars on the Shia side too and part of the narrative of prevention and protection of the community, and yet let me also point out, we heard a very notable statement from Ayatollah Sistani a few days ago, I believe, where he actually called for Hezbollah to leave Syria.

But what here is the role that can be played, and also, please feel free to answer any of the other questions you were asked?

MR. MALEKI: I was surprised about the statement of Mr. (inaudible). I think it does not help developing the climate of peace and preaching of civilization some Arab countries in general and Gulf countries, in particular, say they are calling for. Really the case is very clear and as you know, the Hamas also condemned the case of Mr. Karzavi, one wing of Hamas they did.

In Shiite sect, also, there are many, many efforts to prevent any sectarian or something like that, and many leaders, they did, especially recent

months, they did. Second, on case of Saudi Arabia, really, I think in 2011 and after that, the Arab Spring uprising in Mediterranean Arab countries and North Africa overshadowed political developments in Saudi Arabia in the eyes of the media and many scholars, also protests took place in eastern province, the kingdom politics received little reporting compared with Egypt, Syria, Libya, and other countries. And I think it is very important to look at the democratization, polarization, and values in other countries also.

The third issue, which I want to say that really I assure Mr. Eshki that nobody in Iran wants to capture Saudi Arabia or holy shrines, but I assure him that all of Iranians, they are eager to go to (inaudible) each year, and really, the case of the pilgrimage in Iran, and pilgrim is very, very -- a long queue. Some of them they are waiting for 20 years to go to Saudi Arabia.

And the last point is that rationally, what is the benefit of Iran if Iran wants to do these

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issues which he claimed, in other countries, especially Arab countries? Iran is a country which is under sanctions, United States sanctions, European sanctions, therefore the best, rational choice for Iran is to have the best relations with neighbor -- its neighbors, especially in Persian Gulf, which is the vital Strait of Hormuz there and Iran receives all of the needs from Persian Gulf unless few commodities from Caspian Sea in the north.

Therefore, I want to say, if a country with leaders which they have deserved this country for 35 years, it means that it is not accidental, it means that this country has think tanks, decision making process and something like that. Therefore, if it is true, Iran is eager to have good relations with neighbors and Arab countries.

Iranian Islamic Republic constitution says that the foreign policy of Iran must prefer four types of countries, first, neighboring countries, second, Muslim countries, third, third-world countries, or non-Alawite, and fourth, those countries which they

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can remove some needs of Iran. And Persian Gulf countries, they are in all of four categories, therefore on Iranian side, really, Iran is eager to have that.

And if Iran wants to reiterate the leaving of foreign troops from Persian Gulf, again, Iran must have good relations with other countries which justifies this case. Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. Unless there is one more question, I'm going to bring this to an end? Yes. Let me say, before I say thank you, just by way of summary from what we've heard in this extremely rich discussion, is that, yes, there probably is a balance of power struggle that is going on, and at the same time, as has been pointed out, and perhaps more distinct from other such episodes since the balance of our struggle is not unique to this era, is that people in the region are asserting themselves, for their rights, for their freedoms, for their dignities, and their opportunities.

And the challenge for them is to build

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institutions and to build states that can somehow build, as Greg would say, stronger states to manage this competition and perhaps even to build cooperation in the future.

In the meantime, it seems also as if that Arab states and regional powers are in this together and they may be more alone than they think, notwithstanding the impact of countries like Russia and the United States in the Syrian conflict.

We call this "A New Middle East Cold War", of course in the last Cold War, there was a winner, especially with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It will be interesting to see whether we have a situation where we have winners or losers or we will have, in fact, the kind of strengthening of states eventually that can take us out of perpetual conflict.

For now, at least, I think, I'm sorry to say, the future looks still quite uncertain.

Let me thank, on that note, our esteemed panelists. Again, thank you very much, all of you, for making the trip here, Dr. Maleki from Tehran,

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thank you very much, Greg Gause from a plane
somewhere, I guess the United States, Dr. Eshki from
Saudi Arabia, thank you very much, and Dr. Salloukh
from, I believe, Lebanon.

Again, let us please give them a round of
applause and make sure the other people hear it too.

(Applause.)

Now, as is the Brookings Doha Center's
tradition, we have refreshments for you outside.
Please feel free to enjoy those and of course to
continue the conversation. Thank you.

* * * * *

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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