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**PLENARY V: RIPPLE EFFECTS: THE SYRIA CRISIS AND ITS REGIONAL IMPACT**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SHAIKH: Good morning. Good afternoon everyone. We're still in morning but we will be hitting afternoon so I'm hitting both. My name is Salman Shaikh. I'm the Director of the Brookings Doha Center. It's a pleasure for me to be introducing this final plenary panel. I know I've been told it's been eagerly awaited and it should be because of course we're going to be discussing the situation in Syria and its regional ripple effects.

Let me go straight into our esteemed panel. It's my great pleasure to welcome Mr. Hossam Hafez. He is a former Syrian Diplomat. Dr. Hafez served as the diplomat in the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from '98-2012 during which he held posts in Tehran, London and Yerevan. You defected from your post in Yerevan of course in protest of the regime's reaction to the uprising. You're most welcome.

DR. HAFEZ: Thank you very much.

MR. SHAIKH: Then Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Of course many of you know him as the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, former until 2006. He's had an illustrious US diplomatic career as Ambassador to Russia, India, United Nations and New York, Israel, El Salvador, Nigeria and Jordan. Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Sa'eb Erekat doesn't need much of an introduction.

DR. EREKAT: Why?

MR. SHAIKH: He's of course -- he's the Chief Negotiator of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He's previously the head of the Palestinian Delegation to the Madrid Conference and of course has been involved in every major diplomatic effort the Palestinians have engaged in ever since. He's also a dear friend. It's great to have you on the panel.

DR. EREKAT: My pleasure.

MR. SHAIKH: And Ambassador Jon Wilks, who I've gotten to know particularly well over the last two years or so. He is the UK representative, special representative to the Syrian opposition. He joined the diplomatic service in 1989. He is one of the best Arabic speakers you'll come across which is no coincidence as he served as the UK's first regional Arabic spokesman and has also been in Iraq, an ambassador to Yemen. I think he's also got enough material for a PhD on the Syrian opposition by now.

And certainly not least at the end is Vitaly Naumkin who's the Director of the Center for Arab Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies in the Russian Academy of Sciences. He's also editor-in-chief of Vostok Oriens and chair of the Faculty of World Politics at Moscow State University. He has a long and distinguished career as a commentator and as an academic expert on the Middle East and your Arabic is not bad either.

Again, gentlemen, it's a pleasure to have you here. I'm going to start with you, Dr. Hossam. Everyone now is looking at the urgency of the situation inside Syria. There is much talk about a looming battle for Aleppo after what seemingly looks like the battle for Košare being lost by the opposition fighters.

Tell us, what do you think is the -- how do you see the dynamics on the ground and in particular what you know about the Assad regime, do you think it really can -- it thinks it can really win?

DR. HAFEZ: Okay. The battle of Aleppo, Aleppo now in terms of things on the ground, around 60 percent or 70 percent of the city is by the Free Syrian Army, 30-40 percent by the regime. Most of the (inaudible) of Aleppo now and the council of the revolutionists, I guess, I believe that there's no way that the regime can take any land back because of the insistence of the revolutionary forces to defend the land, especially when we have elements came from the regime invited from Hezbollah and from many other sectarian groups.

Now the situation in Aleppo and in some other places in Syria, we are facing forces of incubation. Sectarian groups from Iraq, from Lebanon, from other the wall came under the sectarian banners in Syria is making the resistance against incubation. And also that would bring about the real danger of spilling over the crisis in Syria to the surrounding and neighboring countries because of most of the neighboring countries have the same strata, same social fabric, same social weaknesses.

So if the international community allows Assad to continue with his battle, we are going to end up with total chaos in the region. And I urge the international community, United States and other five permanent members to do something urgently to stop the regime killing his own people. It's not just a moral duty; it's now a legal duty to do something including invoking all the international public law, international (inaudible) instruments and mechanisms including imposing no-fly zones in the northern part and southern part of Syria.

It's now a moral and legal duty to protect the civilians and the Syrian people against the forces of incubation of Hezbollah, the regime and other sectarian groups.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me just ask you; let's take a very hypothetical scenario but maybe one that is possible. By August/September, the rebels have to flee Aleppo. Can the regime continue the momentum and "win?" Can it push over the opposition?

DR. HAFEZ: The regime definitely can't win especially in Aleppo because, as I said before, most of the countryside of Aleppo is in the hands of the revolutionary forces, not rebels, the revolutionary forces. And they are defending their own land, their own homes, their own families. So no matter how little arms they have now in their hands but for them there's no alternative but to fight to the last one, to the last civilian, to the last soldier.

At the same time, even if the regime brought in Hezbollah and other fighters, the supply lines are really long. They can't survive that long. And also fighting under this sectarian banners will turn against them because the regime apparently is pushing towards having more sectarian conflict in Syria, more equalization between Shiites and so on. But the national feeling between Syria is very strong and they are seeing the battle now as a battle against incubation.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Ambassador Wilks, let me turn to you for a second. What is the responsibility of the international community to Syria? And linked to that, where are the real red lines that will obligate the international community to really intervene and if necessary, to remove Bashar al-Assad?

AMBASSADOR WILKS: I think there are two main responsibilities of the international community as a whole. One is to address the humanitarian crisis. I think we all know the figures which the UN have recently put forward that we have one-third of the population in need of humanitarian assistance. We are looking at half the population displaced or refugees by the end of the year. We know the official figures for the death toll are 80,000 but that's probably on the conservative side as an estimate.

So the first responsibility is for the whole of the international community to respond to the calls for as we know billions of dollars' worth of assistance that the UN has asked for in its latest statement to keep humanitarian assistance programs going at the level required for the next six months.

That's the first responsibility.

Britain has already put in about a quarter of a million dollars' worth and we will continue to respond to UN and other appeals for help.

The second responsibility of the international community as a whole and we need to respond in a unified way is to do everything we can for a political solution. Now we all know that there's discussion over a possible meeting in Geneva but what's clear is that there are many challenges right now to getting both sides ready to do a deal to bring this conflict to an end. And I think we need to be really honest about what are the options here.

It seems clear to me that this conflict without serious efforts to get a political solution could go on for a long, long time. It could increase in severity. It could destroy much more in Syria and kill many more. The overspill in the region, it's already clear it's starting to destabilize neighboring countries. It is a horrific scenario to watch this happen. But when I look at the psychology and this is the key to the debate here. How do we judge the psychology of Assad and the regime and the opposition in all its aspects? I deal with an opposition that is committed to a pluralist democratic future for Syria. But there is a much wider opposition including a lot of the armed groups on the ground who have a very different vision.

What is the psychology that is leading them to continue to fight? And I think we need to be very serious in our analysis of how we're going to change that psychology to get them to a negotiating table. And I'll put my cards on the table right now because it's extremely urgent. This escalation of the conflict is taken to a new and more dangerous phase, more dangerous than it's ever been.

Either everybody stops supplying arms to all sides and we put a lot of diplomatic pressure on but if any one country or set of countries refuses to do that then I think we have to have a balance on the ground. A balance of supply to make clear that there is no military solution, that no side can achieve what, for them, would be a satisfactory result through the pursuit of military force. And what I fear right now is that Assad with countries that support Assad are going for a military victory.

I don't believe it'll work even if they make progress. I don't believe Assad can reestablish legitimacy and I don't believe he can reestablish control over the rest of the country. So what is happening now is taking us to a more dangerous phase of this crisis not towards a solution but the

response I think from the whole international community has to be to unify and increase our efforts to get this crisis onto a new trajectory.

MR. SHAIKH: I've noticed just to follow up for a second, I've noticed that there is a growing orthodoxy which is developing in Washington, at least in wider circles, in London, in Paris that you need to change the military balance in this current situation in order to arrive at a political solution. So does that mean, and given what you've just said, does that mean we're closer now to providing arms from western capitals?

AMBASSADOR WILKS: Under the circumstances of today I think that is seen as more likely to open up an opportunity for a political solution. But we have to respond to circumstances as they change. And clearly there are major downside risks in trying to achieve a military balance. Is it achievable and if you do achieve it, you know, what are the downside risks involved. So there are no simple solutions under current circumstances.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Dr. Sa'eb. Of course, you've got broader experience in terms of what the United States should be doing and I want to focus here also on the Palestinian issue as well. If you could give a sense, first of all, of how the current effort by Secretary Kerry is going but also your advice in terms of how Palestinians and perhaps even Arabs are seeing the US efforts more broadly in the region.

DR. EREKAT: Thank you, Salman. First of all, our official position as Palestinians as far as Syria is concerned and as far all the developments in the Arab countries we have tried and continue to try to keep ourselves in the neutral zone. We have 600,000 Palestinians in Syria. They cannot be fleeing to other countries. They're not accepted. The number of Palestinians killed in Syria is 1400 till today.

I'm not saying they're better than Syrians. We ache and mourn the Syrian death and we hope that the impact on us will be employed in every element of damage control as possible. Now I am afraid to say this is my personal opinion that it's too late for a military solution in Syria as we know it now. It's too late for a political solution in Syria. Geneva too is an American agenda. That's totally opposite to the Russian agenda. And the question to all those involved is they're after, they're after what?

They're after us. You have the United States of America, the country that's (inaudible), domestic oriented. They're asking themselves do we save Libyans lives and the Libyans kill us and then

why should we solve the problems. And as far as we're concerned, all the US has to do today is to move from the squares of what's possible to the square of what's needed.

What do I mean by this? American diplomats, officials, leaders, Presidents, envoys, came to the region, came to Israel. Focused on what the Prime Minister of Israel can do and what he cannot do and then they tailor their solution to fit that size. Repeating the same things over and over again as Einstein once said, it's madness. It's madness because if you boil water, Salman and add coffee to it, you're going to have coffee. Don't think you're going to have orange juice, one time or one million times.

So what the US needs to do is to move to the squares of what's needed. What's needed is two states and 1967. Americans will not impose solution. Americans will not make concessions and decisions for Palestinians and Israelis. It's going to be us but the ability of Israeli decision makers to hide beyond being part of America's political life, makes some of them believe that they can derail and delay the solution of them.

Today, the US identification of interests, if we take for instance I can identify seven elements of American foreign policy in Obama's second term 2013, 2017. Number one, security of Israel, number two helping, assisting, aiding America's allies in the region and that's a broad definition in terms of military help, military cooperation, military presence, aerial, ground, missiles, naval. And then thirdly fighting terror and extremism. Fourthly, helping or supporting democracy and reform. And fifthly preventing Iran and containing Iran spread of nuclear weapons and now Iran is the bulldog that will scare the region. And protecting the oil and then seventh, the agenda is follow up to the peace process.

So now if we take Syria, for instance, and we see what the Americans are thinking and this is what I'm thinking that they're thinking, they want to contain the Syrian affairs without spreading it to Lebanon, Jordan and so on. Secondly, they are monitoring very much the Nusra and all these Qaeda because they buried Bin Laden in an ocean but the possibility of his resurrection is possible too, to the policies that we do afterwards, thereafter. They are making sure that no chemical weapons are spread here and there.

And now when Assad depended on Iran and Hezbollah, even if he switched militarily do you think the region will allow him to stay as a tool in the hands of the Iranians and Hezbollah? And then

democracy after Assad and also the Golan Heights, not a single shot was fired for Israel since 1974. This is a real item on the agenda.

Look, the first attempt to democratizing this region was in Tunisia 2010. It was Iran 1951 when a gentleman of the name Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh won free and fair elections, formed a government, began the process of reforming, developing, fighting corruption and certain intelligence agencies in the West brought him down in three years. Not knowing that in 1953 when Vibracha and General Zahedi, that they planted the seeds of harmony.

The one question we all, Russians, American, Palestinians, Arabs, should ask ourself, what do we do to make the right people win? What do we do to make the forces democracy, human rights, accountability the governments win? Did we ask ourselves this question? Did anyone ask themselves these questions? Are the Russians really concerned about what goes on in Syria or they don't want the Americans to spread their missiles in Czechia, Poland, Aprezia, Georgia, Dagestan and Shishan and the 25 million Muslims and so on.

Is our questions legitimate question of national interest to nations? And we don't want to be the battleground for just because people should have the eye to see that, you know, when we say 100,000 Syrians killed it's not just a mere number. It's not a mere number. A whole nation is being destroyed. A whole nation is being destroyed.

Now as far as the point of being a Palestinian here, no one benefits more from Secretary Kerry's success than Palestinians. And no one loses more of Kerry's failure than Palestinians. This is the truth, Thomas. This is the truth. And in our kitchen, Kerry's failure is not an option for us. So President Mahmoud Abbas had met him what seven times? I met him four times in the last two months and we have provided everything he asked for.

We have our map is with him and our positions in terms of two states, 67, swaps, security, Jerusalem, (inaudible) for two states, just (inaudible) solution to refugees all stand and we say it openly. Now when we want to resume negotiations 20 years later, we will not begin yesterday. We're trying to have a clarity of what's our agenda in the negotiation.

I mean you want me to go and see Mr. (inaudible)? Fine. I'm not against negotiations. We're not against negotiations. All I want to know that the agenda of my negotiations with the Israeli side

is clear. I know it isn't. And today we have a Prime Minister of Israel who cannot utter the sentence I accept two states on 1-9-6-7. Anyone who says two states without defining the 1-9-6-7 borders, that's meaningless.

So I know that the whole world has asked Mr. Kerry that since you have a map, Palestinian map, Palestinian position, Europeans, Russians, Chinese, Indians, South Africans, Arabs, Latins, they have all asked Mr. Kerry, please let us see Netanyahu's map. Let us see Netanyahu's map. I don't want to go the negotiations and find myself in a lecturing room about what will happen if the Indian Ocean began disappearing or linking or all this crazy scenarios about threats coming from the East or Palestinians taking over Jordan or whatever scenario.

I really hope that this time Secretary Kerry succeeds in putting on the table what's needed. What's needed is that there is two states on 19-6-7. If a Prime Minister of Israel cannot say this sentence, cannot say 1-9-6-7, do you expect that I will talk and implement with him 1-9-6-7?

And then when we say, Salman, that he stop settlements or release prisoners or accept two states 6-7, these are not Palestinian conditions. These are Israeli obligations, signed agreements. So what's good for me in terms of interests, commitments, alternatives, options all these elements that we have agreements and then you have a government in Israel that says no sacred debts. And if you say (inaudible) condition --

MR. SHAIKH: Dr. Sa'eb, just very briefly how do you rate the chances of Secretary Kerry? You talked about success being in your interest of course.

DR. EREKAT: Well, I think no one knows Palestinians and Israelis inside out as much as Mr. Kerry. I've known this man for 26 years. His mind is there. His heart is there. He knows it's two state 6-7. No one has his knowledge so it's up to him. How do you find American interest in this subject? Can it wait? Do we need another headache in this foreign policy?

Well, you know, if you look at this region the changes in (inaudible) mark my words; it's going to be a painful road, long road, bloody road. The dust will not settle down for years if not decades. But make no mistakes Arabs are democratizing.

I bring your attention to Europe 1848, March 15th when after three weeks of having peaceful demonstrations in Vienna Chancellor Metternich had to flee his palace and five kingdoms fell

down after him in Europe. And it took them almost 90 years for the dust to settle down. I hope that Arabs will not have their dust settle down in 90 years. I hope it will be nine years. I'm so optimistic. It could take longer.

But no one, Arabs, want to see with their eyes, want to hear with their ears, want to speak with their tongues, they are democratizing and those who think they can maintain the old system in this region should reconsider their position. And those who think that the system is changing and they want to keep the same way of thinking in Washington, in particular, they should understand that new systems require new thinking. And the thinking here it's what's possible. And you know, America's borders are no longer with Canada and Mexico and the two oceans.

We are a nation that has more than 100,000 kids spread through this region, their borders are with Turkey, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, the Gulf, Saudi, Syria and Jordan and when the nation superpowers role changes the regional nations changes, all I want to advise Arabs, proceed to those democracy, human rights, accountability not because Americans are asking you, because you want to do it. We want to do it.

Two things are required for this region to send it in the path of change, democracy, human rights, women's rights and so on. One democracy in the Arab world and anyone who says Arabs are not ready for democracy is a racist. And no system will survive. No system will survive in the current order. I hope that people would be visionary to accommodate themselves with the coming changes.

And secondly what's required is peace between Palestinians and Israelis. And here, Salman, we don't need to reinvent the wheel or eat the apple from the start. It's two states on 1967.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much. Ambassador Pickering, I want to come to you. Of course there is much talk about another conference in Geneva almost a year since the first one. And yet neither the opposition or oppositions or the regime look as if they are ready or in the mood to make the kind of concessions. And in fact, some would observe that whilst all this talk of peace or not peace processing just yet but peace is going on. People are actually preparing for more conflict and more war on the ground.

What do you think can be gained out of this Geneva conference if it happens? And what is the US really expecting in this? I know you're not speaking as an American official but I think it would

be good to hear from you in terms of what is the thinking from the US side in pushing forward this idea still.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Thank you so much. First let me reiterate I don't speak for the US. Secondly, let me just briefly say to my friend Sa'eb that John Kerry undertook this initiative of his own free will, fully supported by the President.

MR. SHAIKH: Your mic is --

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Well, I don't control technology but I'm sitting on the piece of machinery here.

MR. SHAIKH: Where is your mic? There we are.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Take me a minute. How's that?

MR. SHAIKH: Perfect.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: All right. I don't speak for the US. Let me have a word with my friend Sa'eb. John Kerry took this initiative on his own free will. It was high on his agenda. The President is supporting him. We certainly all wish him the best of success. And you know and I know this is the best thing that's come along for the last four years.

DR. EREKAT: That's what I said.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: Or maybe the last 12 years. In any event it's important. Salman, to your question, I won't in answering it ask for equal time with Sa'eb.

MR. SHAIKH: No. You won't get it.

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: But I sure want to say just a few things. I listened with interest to Dr. Hafez. I listened with interest to Ambassador Wilks. It seems to me that there are four home truths about Syria we have to face up to.

One is there is no military victory on either side in sight. I'm sorry to say it cause I have my own favorites. I don't want to see the Assad regime continue but I don't see that.

Secondly, I see an enormous amount of radicalization going on both sides. Jibhat Alnusra is obviously continuing to make ground among the opposition and there is no question that Iran revolutionary guard training of the Alawite (inaudible) has its own obvious influence and is going to make, I think, a significant difference in the future of the Alawite people in Syria and it is making it more difficult.

I think that the third thing is, but it should be first on the list, 100,000, 80,000, it's an absolute horror. 6,000-10,000 a month are dying. And with all respect to Jon, whatever humanitarian program we have in mind is got to be of necessity focused on the living and saving the wounded. And that's an important factor we have to keep in mind.

Finally, the region is in turmoil. You've asked for the ripple effect. We can see Jordan in very bad shape. Lebanon in bad shape, Iraq mixed up in this in a messy and unhappy way and Turkey with a very, very discombobulated southern border is not happy about either the result or the future.

It seems to me that the diplomatic process has been totally undersold by everybody. People will stand up and say it's impossible. It won't work. It cannot succeed. The only heart that I can take from this is that first and foremost a Russian-US cooperation is absolutely necessary even if it is not yet sufficient. And Vitaly can talk about it. I was in Moscow eight weeks ago. I had the beginning of a sense that Russia too is examining this problem on the basis of the four hard facts that I laid out. And it is not in their interest as well as not in my interest, not in the US interest, not in the Syrian opposition's interest to have these four hard facts continue whether they take Aleppo back or not.

My sense is that Geneva has to face up to the hard realities. First and foremost the two sides have to come together in Geneva. Secondly it seems to me as someone who is very much alarmed by the current situation, that like it or not a humanitarian ceasefire ought to be the first objectives of negotiations. To get to negotiations, preconditions from either side have to fall away. To get to negotiations the linkage that is there that nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed has to go away. It cannot be the prevailing idea if you need in fact to stop the fighting.

I agree with Jon entirely that the military situation when you stop fighting has to be in balance. And indeed, I would favor reinforcement of the opposition. Not because I think there's a military victory in sight but because it sends a clear message that there is no military victory in sight. And it makes the negotiating table, the next stage, so much more important.

I don't know whether you can get there but you don't know until you make a major effort. And the major players in the international community, I think, have to be brought together to bring this particular process to a close.

One final point, Salman, and an important point. The result of a conference not only has

to be a humanitarian ceasefire, it must address in the Annan plan of what is the future arrangement for transitional governance in Syria? That particular question, in my view, has two alternative routes. One, a negotiated arrangement between the parties. If you think a humanitarian ceasefire is tough, you've got to believe that is 20 times tougher.

The other is an alternative suggested to me interestingly enough, I'll be indiscreet and say a senior Chinese diplomat who in fact suggested that the people of Syria need to make this choice. The only way that could possibly happen is an UN conducted election in Syria. As hard as that may seem that at least gives the people of Syria the option of signaling where they want to go.

My sense is it ought to be for a constituent assembly or an interim Parliament. If it's for that then the body elected by the Syrian people will have the option of choosing the government and maybe even focusing in the future on the constitution. It all seems millennial but my own view is the circumstances are so horrible, the opportunities are so sparse, the outcome so uncertain that we need something. And whether this set of ideas or a better set of ideas can inform the future, we need to look at the Geneva process as a way forward.

Too often in this part of the world my country and others have felt military force is the sovereign answer to all problems. Once again we face that set of alternatives. Syria is, in my view, a special case which makes it highly unlikely that military force will solve it.

One final point. I think we ought to give a solid look at the question of whether a no-fly zone shouldn't also be imposed as a way of pushing in the direction of a diplomatic solution. Thanks.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Well there's a lot there and thank you for those ideas. But what you are advocating is more support for the fighting rebels on the ground and maybe even a no-fly zone but at the same time the fruits of a Russian-American dialogue. Now many would say we haven't even got to first base with the Russian-American efforts.

It's been more than a year now since and in fact Kofi Anan has been, if you include his efforts, it's been a year and a half and yet all we've had is, you referred to the numbers killed. You had maybe a tripling of those killed in that period. You can't even get the Russians and the Americans to agree on a Security Council mission to the refugee camps in the region in Jordan or anywhere else.

You can't get them to agree on humanitarian delivery across border as well as cross line,

the kind of things which should be of mutual benefit. Is it really possible?

AMBASSADOR PICKERING: I think that of course as I said the US-Russian arrangement is very important. The common denominator of agreement is at least a diplomatic conference. The negotiators now have to work to see if they can expand that. I don't know whether that can be done or not. But that is an obvious necessary precondition to moving the situation ahead.

We shouldn't be blind to the difficulties and I certainly am not. But I see the ultimate necessities of a path through this not coming on the battlefield. I can see using the battlefield to strengthen the pressures toward the kind of an arrangement that you would like to see and I would like to see. But I cannot see, in fact, a pure military victory.

I think that Secretary Kerry's initiative in going to Moscow and getting whatever low common denominator of agreement is there is only the beginning. And I can't tell you where it will go but I didn't find these ideas necessarily totally apparent in Moscow when I talked about it.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. That brings us very nicely to Dr. Vitaly and let me apologize. I got your title a bit wrong. Of course you're the Director for the Institute of Oriental Studies. Again it's a pleasure to have you here.

I want to sort of pick up a little bit more on the direction we're going in this discussion. First of all, with Geneva, Iran is a sticking point and its inclusion. How can that be squared with the US objection to having Iran at the conference? And secondly, let's assume there is an American-Russian effort that starts to gel. What leverage really does Russia have on the Assad regime?

DR. NAUMKIN: I believe that this leverage cannot be exaggerated. Assad is fighting and the whole regime is fighting for its survival. And I totally agree with my colleagues that there can be no military solution for this conflict. But the tragedy of the Syrian society is that it is deeply fragmented and there is a significant -- what Russia understands that there is a very significant fragment of this society that is supporting Assad. So it's a lot of people

If we take even Syrian army and security and the army is about 320,000 people with families and all supporters and it's still cohesive. It's still fighting. So that's why we're in favor of a political solution. There is no military solution and I think it brings us together.

Coming to this humanitarian --

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MR. SHAIKH: Just to interrupt you for a second, I'm sorry. So you don't believe that the Assad regime can win?

DR. NAUMKIN: I don't believe that any one of the conflicting sides can win. So they can win temporarily for some period of time but then it can come the opposite side and it happened already. So all sides have delusions about the possibility of military victory but I believe that that -- I think it's normal. That's why we're in favor, in my understanding, I'm not representing the government. That's why we're in favor of this political solution.

We are against violence. We sign the Geneva statement, agreement, Geneva I, so we're speaking to the provisions of Geneva. So the main difference between us and some of our Western partners is that we would like to have this international conference without any preconditions, no preconditions because a very significant number of Syrians are still supporting us.

Coming back to this humanitarian catastrophe, so it's true. But let's not forget as Fareed Zakaria mentioned in his recent article in *Time* that in Iraq, for instance, during the last 10 years about 200,000 people have been killed. And much more refugees fled the country than now from Syria. And the Western Coalition forces couldn't protect security for these people.

Syria gave refuge to about one million people, refugees, from Iraq. Let's be fair. I'm not defending Assad's regime. Nobody is defending Assad's regime in Russia. But let's be fair. And it's very difficult to do it and Russia is already sending humanitarian aid to the refugees.

So I think the present agreement between our -- I think arrangement between Russia and the United States about this international conference is extremely important. The conference is a process. In my view it cannot be done in two or three days. Let's remember Dayton. In Dayton the people were sitting for three weeks behind the closed doors until they reached the agreement.

So I think something but this is the beginning of the process. And we have not -- don't exaggerate our leverage on Assad but we've been pressing Assad, Assad and his regime. But the fact of this cooperation which is ruling this country, in my view, it's not to be Alawite the cooperation. It's much broader. Sunni bureaucracy, Sunni entrepreneurial class and whatever so it should be cleared out who is going to stay there.

For instance, a good friend of mine Francois Heisbourg wrote in the International Herald

Tribune that there will be -- that it's important that what he said that this political is preferably without Assad but probably not without the ruling Baathist party and bureaucracy. And we have already small concession from the regime that it accepted the position or whoever is coming to this conference as a negotiating partner. I think it's very important.

MR. SHAIKH: Dr. Vitaly, just to follow up. One can understand the need for a process of dialogue that's fine. But there is a concern out there that this process can take quite a lot of time. And meanwhile on the ground, particularly the regime backed by its international supporters is trying to win. And through this process thousands, tens of thousands of people can still be killed. What leverage can Russia exert to get to a situation whereby which actually we are moving in a fashion which gives much more credibility to even what is a process?

DR. NAUMKIN: The only thing is to pull for is to come to the international conference. No other leverage. You know we are not arming the regime by anything used against the rebels. But the intervention started there by the jihadists who came to Syria. I'm not exaggerating over their role but I am afraid that Syria has already turned into the arena of confrontation between the Gulf and Iran. And it said that there are Hezbollah fighters on the one hand and jihadists from the other hand.

It's very bad. It's against the future of the Syrian people. We have to stop it and it can be done only by some agreement among so all significant players. We have this agreement with the Americans about the participation of Iran in the forthcoming conference. We believe that without Iran it can done. It can easily play a role of spoiler. I understand the feelings against Iran that are shared by many people in the Gulf.

But still Iran, in my view, should be invited there as well as many regional players who have influence on Syria like Egypt, Jordan. Not directly involved in this conflict but still who are important for -- Saudi Arabia of course, who are important from the point of view of having its influence on the conflicting parties.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. I'll come back to you Mr. Hossam, Dr. Hossam. There is, of course, now a lot of concern that the effects of this Syrian conflict is acting as a catalyst for a full-blown religious conflict a Sunni Shiite conflict across the region. And we've had, of course, Hezbollah's intervention. Hassan Nasrallah talking about a final victory and then on the Sunni side we've had Saudi

Arabia's top cleric Abdulaziz al-Shaikh urging the government to punish Hezbollah and of course Sheikh Qaradawi here in Qatar calling for Sunnis to wage jihad.

Do we have now a situation which is beyond the ability of the Syrian parties to control? Are we now in a much broader based religious conflict or is it still possible with regards to the sectarian dimensions of this, still for the Syrian situation to have a positive effect on this?

DR. HAFEZ: What's going on the ground now it's quite obvious that the regime is pushing towards having sectarian conflict in Syria and to involve the whole region in that sectarian conflict.

As far as the Syrian people are concerned, we are in no mood to go into sectarian conflict. We are still fighting under the national interest and national banner in Syria, Syrian national interest. However, if this conflict, if the revolution are not supported enough to topple a regime down there will be great danger or spilling over the conflict from Syria to the surrounding states, surrounding countries, neighboring countries.

I would like also to highlight some and comment on some of the points that my colleagues raised. Dr. Vitaly spoke about the percentage of the population that are supporting Assad. Let's be quite clear here. There is more percentage of the Syrian population are in interest of keeping Assad in the office.

Assad regime is exploiting people, is blackmailing many stratas of the Syrian society by wiping out entire villages and neighborhoods by using excessive force to keep them under his controlled areas which is now in Syria like it's less than 40 percent of the country is only still under Assad control. And at the same time Dr. Vitaly spoke about that the Russians don't really have the leverage over the Assad regime.

In the same time, they continue arming the regime on almost daily shipments, arms shipments. It's unfair really to support the regime to kill his own people and at the same time tell the international community here that we don't have enough leverage over Assad to tell him to step down. This is really unfair reality of the Russians and I will say that Russian interest and American interest to remove this regime through political instruments and Geneva too might be a good step, a step in the right direction if as Ambassador Wilks said, if we keep somehow a balance around the table of negotiation.

You can't send the Syrian opposition delegation to the negotiation table without backing them enough. You can't send them with their back against the wall. If you want really that Geneva to succeed you have to support them politically and in terms of military also and arms. If you want really to succeed you have to keep that balance.

Also I would like to about Dr. Sa'eb Erekat spoke about how to identify the American interests in the region. For sure the American interest should be revolving around key being the national states in the region as they are now. Of course, most of them are artificial and outcomes of Sykes-Picot agreement. But after 100 years of Sykes-Picot they are the only components that we have and we have to continue supporting their existence as they are. And some theorists spoke about dividing the area into much smaller states, much smaller components based on sectarian affiliation and so on.

This is entirely against the interest of the United States and even Russia. If you want that scenario to be out of the scene you have to help the Syrians take the Assad out of the picture. And Geneva might be one step in that direction. Geneva II might open up a new track, political track, for changing the chapter and Geneva II is very slim chance that is succeeded in ending of the whole Syrian crisis. But if you support the right people and you keep the balance around the table and the Russians, Iranians and the other players use their leverage over the Syrian regime and tell him to the eye that you can't kill your people and continue being in the office, this is the only solution that is fair for the Syrian and fair for the entire region for the future.

We can't let those people who kill the Syrians, hundreds of thousands of Syrians, torture them, killing them in very savage and brutal ways to continue being in the office, being on the political track or military track or so on or whatever. We have to tell them directly that Geneva is not a road for them to use their delaying tactics to prolong the conflict forever.

Geneva II should have a limited schedule, limited time table, very clear time table from the first session there should be sort of principles, sort of declaration of principles, declaration of will that the outcome of Geneva should include that Assad regime should not be allowed to continue, to have a governing body which is a government, government that control the military and security apparatus and to have a full support of the international community.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Ambassador Wilks, Sykes-Picot was mentioned and it's only

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by half coincidence I come to you.

AMBASSADOR WILKS: I should say, Salman, that this was recently raised with my French colleague present who helpfully said, well it was more Sykes than Picot.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. What is undeniable now is that the area from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Gulf Waters is now increasingly becoming a zone of conflict. You've got in fact, conflict resurging in Iraq. You've got it in patches in Lebanon and of course Syria as well. It may well spread much further.

In fact what you're looking at is a patchwork of not just conflicts, of perhaps even different entities or groups that start to resemble very much a much more broken environment. What prospect is there for real wholesale change here and the unraveling of those post-Ottoman arrangements?

AMBASSADOR WILKS: Well, if we talk about Sykes-Picot and we look at history, we've also got to talk about, you know, the 400 years before the Ottoman years as well. But I think also we must put it in balance with the history of the last hundred years because there's one really important element that I think will help us here.

In the first round of this discussion there is so much reason for despair. But we must hold on to those elements of hope, the constructive elements of this situation that we can all build on and I'm sure everybody in the room agrees. And I think what we've seen in the last hundred years is that actually there has been the growth of new identities in the region whether it's a Syrian identity or Iraqi identity or a Palestinian identity or a Jordanian identity which actually help bridge the differences between various groups in those societies.

These identities I think can help us to produce the sort of peaceful resolutions of conflicts that we're seeing today and in particular in Syria. This identity is under threat because there are politicians who are attempting to create sectarian tensions. They're using the idea that they are at war with us and so we must attack them first. And of course that's a self-fulfilling prophecy. It sets you off on a vicious cycle of sectarian warfare.

But if I could bring out two positive points from the discussion so far that I think it really important that will help us all give a chance to a political solution. Firstly, Dr. Sa'eb mentioned something. You know, we have to think about who we want to win in this situation. I think it is absolutely clear that

the majority of Syrians who are not involved in this conflict are who we want to win and they want a political solution. And they want to see the regional powers and the international community come together to make that happen as soon as possible.

So I think we need to be absolutely clear in our thinking on that. I don't think is a full-blown sectarian conflict in Syria despite the attempts of certain forces and certain politicians to turn it into one. I think the majority of Syrians still want to hold onto something. They can still remember from their lives in Syria in the last decades that there is a window here because sectarianism is increasing. People are feeling these threats and it's very, very difficult to stand up for a more tolerant, open, moderate approach when your family and your belongings are being destroyed or threatened. So there is a window here which gives added urgency to the work we all have to do to achieve a political solution.

I just want to bring out one other positive point because I don't want everybody to leave this room in despair. I think when you've heard both Ambassador Pickering and Dr. Vitaly, me, in fact everybody on the panel; there is a lot of common ground in the international community. Many of you will be reading in the newspapers and seeing on television the differences and there are differences and they are well known. But actually there is a lot of common ground. And we must intensify our efforts to build on --

(Interruption)

QUESTIONER: Okay.

MR. SHAIKH: And yet -- and here, I'll get Dr. Sa'eb and Ambassador Pickering in -- and yet, the Syrian conflict is driving us to the extremes. Let's take Al Qaeda, for example. The Syrian situation has now created a vacuum of sorts for those elements to certainly gain some strength. And you even have those -- I guess it's been retracted, to a certain degree by Al Qaeda Center, al-Zawahiri, sort of the announcement of the Islamist State of Iraq and the Levant (inaudible).

Is it possible that these extreme elements are actually going to set the agenda, rather than what you are talking about, Ambassador Wilks?

And I'd welcome, Dr. Sa'eb, your response, as well as (inaudible).

MR. EREKAT: Well, first of all, I think, I look at this region's history, you know, I think we tend to use religion, and we tend to employ the fact that we are Sunni,

Shiite, Alawites, for achieving our radical aims. You know, as Muslims, let's face it, let's speak very frankly: Shiites, and Sunnis, Alawites, they pray for the same God, fast Ramadan, pray five times a day, face Mecca. And then today, in 2013, we have people exploding mosques, burning them (inaudible), and they're telling me it's because some people are Shiites and some people are Sunni? Come on. It's about the inability of this system, this status quo in this region to survive.

When I said that maybe it's too late for a military solution, and it's too late for a political solution, and it's too late to maintain the status quo -- and hear Dr. Osama's appeal for the U.S. to maintain the current borders, maybe Osama -- the current borders are no longer sustainable. The current system is no longer sustainable. Things evolve. It's a hundred years later. It didn't work.

Our focus as Arabs should be on what is our level of education, health, universities, hospitals, well-being, way of life. Is it 2013, and we have 57 percent illiteracy rate in the Islamic world, with the people that began their Koran with the word "iqra" -- "read."

It's to face, we as Arabs and Muslims, we should, before asking the Americans to do, and the Europeans to do, and so on -- I'll be very frank with you guys, the year 1683, 1-6-8-3, a group of Muslim soldiers seized a small city in Europe called Vienna (inaudible). Do you know what? I believe we have never been forgiving since that time. And anyone who will raise their heads in this region will be banged down, in any way.

It's time to define Western-Arab relations. As I said -- and Martin keeps looking at me when I hear "democracy," and (inaudible 00:03:35) those who don't believe in democracy. It's true. It's true, Arabs want to democratize. We're not different than anybody else. We cannot continue seeing with the eyes of our rulers, and hearing it

through their ears. We cannot practice the gathering, or the right to gather, only in mosques on Friday, we cannot do that, and then ask why these people won the elections, it's a mandatory (inaudible).

It's time for us to address ourselves, because if we want to redefine the relations with the West, based on interest-oriented calculations, we need to define what we want.

What do we want? What do we want? That's the question today our people are asking themselves -- "What do we want?" "Why can't we have freedom, why can't we express ourselves?" Why is it that I have to continue, you know, seeing, not to see, and not to hear, not to say anything? Why should I, since Muawiya ibn Abu Sufyan, decided to install his son in this systematic way -- we have to understand that we should understand that dictatorship is not a system of government. We should understand that democracy is not tailored to suit only the poor people. You're rich in the West, and you do not come rich without your democracy.

It's time to stop saying the division is Alawi, and Sunni, and to employ this against this. I know that there are Alawis who are heading the opposition in Syria. There are. There are Kurds fighting with the opposition in Syria. And I'm sure there are Sunnis fighting with Assad in Syria. It's interest. It's how people define their interests.

What I want to say is that I couldn't agree more with Thomas. I said no one suffers more of (inaudible) than us, and I don't think we could have a better chance, as Palestinians. But it's not us, it's not the Arabs, it's not the Europeans, it's not the Chinese, it's not the Indians, it's not the Africans -- it's the government of Israel that continues to say no to the two-state solution -- on '67. They say two states, but they want to define -- that's a major problem.

And, look, you can -- I as a Palestinian always worry, it's too difficult to be a Palestinian, to be honest with you. Very difficult to be a Palestinian -- right? Why? Because, you know, Al Qaeda, whoever bin Laden has fight for 15 years in Afghanistan, they never mention us Palestinians. The war is over, and what's their ammunition? Palestine.

No evil should be committed in the name of Palestine. Killing women and children, attacking New York, Casablanca, are criminal acts. It has nothing to do with Islam, or with our religion, or with Palestinianism. This is other employment of (inaudible).

MR. SHAIKH: Dr. Sa'eb, let me just ask you, just briefly on that. Of course, the Assad regime, Hezbollah, and Iran, and others are still invoking the axis of resistance, in terms of --

MR. EREKAT: Who was their ally, Salman, five years ago?

MR. SHAIKH: Yes.

MR. EREKAT: Three years ago? Who were the allies of Assad, and his resistance (inaudible)? Who were with him? Where was Halad Masah? Was he sitting in my lap, or was he sitting in Damascus? Who rebuilt south Lebanon? Come on -- I mean, ignoring facts doesn't mean they don't exist. We can sit and use these forums to really advance our thinking -- okay? I know Jon wants to enhance the position. Thomas said that he wants to. And do you think I don't want Arabs to be -- you know, as a Palestinian, the most expeditious way to return Palestine back to the map is Arab empathizing. We know it.

This is the most important thing in the advancement of Palestine -- Arab democratization. We want it. And I think it's the full right of Syrians, whoever, who wants to determine their future.

And that's the point. The point is, can we sit down, instead of saying, "Oh, we lost Busayra. It means that Britain and France and America will start sending some arms to upset the balance." You know what? Without defining, in the opposition of Syria, what the day after Assad would look like, we're going to be there for a long, long, long time. Don't think that anyone would like to have Nussra, or Musra, or Zarkawi, Markawi in Damascus. And people's conscience is not opening for the suffering of Syria.

Get your act together. Define what you want. Act with cohesion. Learn from us and our mistakes, and maybe by doing this, you will save the lives of your people, and save Syria.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you --

MR. EREKAT: The Americans will not save Syria for you, or the British, or anybody else. It's you. And that's the truth.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. And, actually, I will ask you to respond to that -- but, quickly, Ambassador Pickering, on the Al Qaeda threat, and the rise of extremism in the region, is this something that can be reversed at this stage?

MR. PICKERING: I don't know the real answer to that. I do know a couple of things.

It seems to be growing in a kind of medium of controversy and contention. It seems to be gaining ground through its ability to portray itself, and act as if they're the premier fighters in this particular contest. And we see that attraction. We can only see that, obviously, through the eyes and ears of people observing from the inside, so it's very difficult.

Is there a way to stop it? I certain hope so. The gentleman sitting to my right should probably be the one to answer that questions, because he knows better the Syrian opposition than I ever will.

My hope is, yes. My hope is the Syrian opposition will contest for the things that Sa'eb talks so brilliantly about, and that we will have an opposition which is democratic, looks for a free Syria, a Syria that stays together -- all of those things.

And it's important to hold that, because that is the contending alternative position in a diplomatic conference.

And in a diplomatic conference, you will find, in my (inaudible), that the bulk of the people of the outside will support those inside who are looking for future values and relationships with which they can live, which will help stability the area, which will not fraction Syria into 10 small satrapies, and have the same focus and effect on Iraq, and on Jordan, and on Lebanon.

And I think those are things we need to avoid. So I think that's where the future rests.

But we can't wait for days, months, and years of fighting to see that happen. I really believe that you know -- you get diplomatic conferences when both sides exhaust themselves. And both sides are not near exhausting themselves.

So, the outside players here have to provide what initiative and pressure and possibilities there are to short-circuit the notion that 200,000, 300,000 Syrians must die before you can get the kind of reasonable relationship which I think you can reach now.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Before I come to you, Dr. Hossam, I just want a quick word from you, Vitaly, in particular: How can we stop Lebanon from getting itself into another nasty, long civil war and collapsing?

You know Lebanon extremely well, and you know that if a civil war in Lebanon reignites itself, as a result, maybe, of the Syrian catalyst, it will be very difficult to put to an end.

So, how is it that we can insulate at least Lebanon from this?

MR. NAUMKIN: Yes, I think that -- I agree with Ambassador Pickering that, you know, the spillover of the continuation of fighting in Syria will have its impact on all neighboring states, including Iraq, which is already there, and Lebanon, of course, it's also already there. And we, as Russians -- because we are a Christian-Muslim nation -- we're very much afraid and scared by this growing influence of these radicals. We have, by the way, fighters, already fighters, jihadists from Russia fighting in Syria, about 200 people. And we have our own jihadists fighting in Waziristan against American and Karzai forces, you know, along with the -- so, I'm afraid it will happen.

So, Lebanon will, of course, be the first victim of it.

MR. SHAIKH: Let me ask you, here, more bluntly: Is it a mistake for Hezbollah to be so openly fighting in Syria?

MR. NAUMKIN: Hezbollah believes that it should confront the jihadist front. So I am afraid that Mr. Brzezinski is right, saying that it's already a sectarian war happening in Syria. I have some doubts about that, but we are lessons from what happened in Libya, from what happened in Iraq. We care about our, you know, Christian community all over the Arab world. About 1 million Christians fled Iraq after the invasion. The same is happening in Syria. We have certain responsibilities.

We don't -- Syria is not the main partner of Russia in the Middle East. Turkey is number one. We have 4 million, you know, tourists coming tot Turkey, spending more than \$6 billion every year. And we have differences on the Syrian issue.

So the issue is not our own interest. We care about Lebanon -- and one of the points, why we care, it's about Christian community and the minorities. It's very important for Russia.

MR. SHAIKH: Okay. I want to -- we've got about 25 minutes or so, so I'm keen to open this up. In the midst of our responses, we'll get you, Dr. Hossam, to explain to us, perhaps, what is more of an intra-Syrian solution that can help Syrians, themselves, come to a resolution of their conflict -- maybe with the support of the international community. But we'll come back to that. I know we're going to get a lot of questions.

I'll start with Martin.

MR. INDYK: Thank you to all the panel for a fascinating discussion. My question is a short one, and it's to Dr. Hossam and Jon Wilks.

Why is it so difficult for the Syrian opposition to form a united front? And what will it take for them to form that united front?

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

The lady just in the corner there, just behind you.

QUESTIONER: I'm Halli Espandia. A question for Dr. Hafez, and one for Dr. Vitaly.

Dr. Hafez, can you talk a little bit about, really, the Iranian involvement in Syria? Because we hear that Ambassador Pickering said they are training the Alawites. We also hear that they are very much involved with the armed forces. They have a lot of leverage on Bashar. They spend a lot of money. You have certain Iranian (inaudible) mentality. You were part of the government, so you can elaborate on that.

To Dr. Vitaly, I mean, Iran has good relations with Russia. Has Russia ever tried to dissuade Iran with its continued involvement in Syria? This is one way of maybe stopping the bloodshed.

Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

I'll take Josh -- okay, let's start with Bruce, just in the front here, so you don't have to go very far.

MR. RIEDEL: Just a very simple question to you, Vitaly.

Tom raised the prospect of an American no-fly zone within the context of Geneva negotiations. How do you think a no-fly zone will impact Russia's view on negotiations?

MR. SHAIKH: Come to Josh, just in the second row, there.

MR. ROGIN: Thank you. Josh Rogin, *Newsweek*.

Over the last three days I've heard many people, from many different countries, governments, say that they're waiting for the Obama administration to make a decision before stepping up actual, concrete assistance to the opposition. Lots of people in this room, lots of governments represented here are ready to do that, and they are simply awaiting the White House's process to complete before moving forward. They say without U.S. cover and U.S. support and U.S. leadership, steps like a no-fly zone, and arming the opposition are simply not going to happen.

Ambassador Pickering, I'm speculating that perhaps maybe you still have contacts in the Obama administration. Could you tell us what is your best take on where they are in that process? We're led to believe by news reports that there are very important meetings happening, there are very serious discussions happening. Is that real? Are they close? Is a decision imminent? And do you think President Obama will

actually make the decision to arm vetted, secular, moderate elements of the opposition any time soon?

Thank you.

Mouaz, did you want to ask?

MR. MOUSTAFA: Yes, so -- Mouaz Moustafa. I work with the Syrian emergency desk for a Syrian-American organization working with the opposition.

And my question is, I think everybody wants a political solution. There's nobody in Syria that doesn't want a political solution to end this conflict without the social fabric of this country being ripped up.

My question is to Ambassador Wilks: Wouldn't it be wise that before we go into negotiations that there is an enforcement mechanism that is set by the international community, with a limited frame, to where it could force Assad to actually seriously negotiate. Because so far, if we go to Geneva today, for example, the balance on the ground is completely in his favor. He has no reason to sit down and think seriously about a solution to the conflict.

So enforcement mechanism is that an option to put on the table?

MR. SHAIKH: That's actually a good question. It should also apply to Vitaly, in many ways, in terms of what the Russians would think about something like that.

Hisham.

MR. HELLYER: Hi. Hisham Hellyer, from Brookings.

One -- well, two questions, one to Vitaly as a clarification. I was hoping you could enlighten us, because you said that nobody's defending the Assad regime. And I'm not sure how you square that with Russia's physical support for the Assad

regime, militarily, strategically, and on all sorts of levels. So, maybe I've misunderstood something that you could clarify for the audience.

Ambassador Wilks, I want to ask you a very serious question, and I hope that you'll be frank with us. It's been almost three years -- I mean, we're getting very close to a huge death toll, over 100,000 people. Would you have done anything different over the last two years? Would you have done anything different in terms of dealing with this crisis? Because one day we will all ask ourselves that question.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

The gentleman just --

MR. FADEL: Mohammad Fadel, University of Toronto Faculty of Law.

There's been a lot of talk about sectarianism in this conflict as a result of Hezbollah intervention, but no mention -- or, at least, it hasn't come -- a great deal of attention's been brought up to the fact that you have certain countries in the region, for the last 30 years, spouting vicious anti-Shia propaganda that's sort of made the Shia community throughout the Middle East feel fairly vulnerable, and thus amenable to this kind of rhetoric.

And so I'd just like to hear people say about what governments can do to pressure certain governments to stop this kind of anti-Shia propaganda as a first step toward working toward a solution to the day after.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

And then just the lady in the front here.

MS. GIZKAR: Thank you. My name is Mihran Gizkar. I am an Iranian lawyer.

And my question is very simple, and it's about fighting between Shia, Sunni, Alawi, that somebody says that is coming from outside, and from West countries.

But I was witnessing that a Shia Muslim people, they are not allowed have a mosque in Cairo, and the Sunni Muslim people they are not allowed have a mosque in Tehran, Iran.

So, would you please make that clear that this kind of conflict is coming from which side? Inside our region, or outside the region?

Thank you.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

And I'll just take -- I'm sorry, I'll just have to take one last question -- the gentleman in the front.

QUESTIONER: I would like just to bring the issue of the Shia and Sunni. I'm very much worried about the rhetoric you see on the internet. If you go to YouTube, and you see the rhetoric now between the Shia and Sunni, we're worried about in the United States -- we just had a meeting with the Shia community, and Muslim Public Affairs, and it's now, we're talking to the Shia community in the United States. Because we're even worried this can even come to the United States.

But I do believe that maybe in this context of the Syrian conflict now, should have the international dialogue of interfaith, between the Shia and the Sunni across the region, because I do believe this could be not only in Syria, but can spill over all over the place.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Thank you very much.

I'm sorry, I know there's a lot more hands, but I do want our -- (inaudible), and Dr. Sa'eb has to leave.

So, I'll give you the first word.

MR. EREKAT: I'm really sorry I have to be leaving to another commitment.

But all I want to say about explaining the conflicts and the fight in the region by Shia, Sunni, Alawi, the Shah of Iran was there for 1953 till 1979, and I believe Iran was Shia. There were common grounds, common interests in this region. And I don't know what General Aoun, Michel Aoun, is he Shia, Sunni, Alawi?

MR. HAFEZ: Christian.

MR. EREKAT: Or is he a Maronitic Christian?

These are alliances about survival, about interests, about defining who's who. It's not about that Hezbollah went to Syria because they're Shia. It went to Syria because --

MR. HAFEZ: But they are fighting under that banner. They are fighting under that banner.

MR. EREKAT: No. The fall of Assad would mean drying the sources of their supplies, of their survival -- right?

You have -- at the end of the day, we can employ elements of what we are, what we are being, and so on. In Palestine, we don't have Shia and Sunnis. We're Sunnis, and Hamas made a coup d'etat in Gaza, and split the country -- which we are not a country under occupation.

What do we explain, what do you explain? And if you don't have Sunni and Shia, don't you have division by villages, belongings, families? We employ all these elements. We employ all these elements.

All I'm saying is that, for Iraqis, and for Syrians, for Palestinians, the definition is: What are we? Are we Sunnis, Kurds, Shiites? Or are we Iraqis? Are we Maronites, Christians, or are we Lebanese?

When we adopted the nation-states of Sykes-Picot, what we did, we took in our bag our tribalism and our defense mechanisms belonging to certain families and

tribes, and belonging, and so on. We cannot accommodate our acceptance of the concept of nation-states and safeguard it with the instruments of how we define ourselves.

It's time for us, as Arabs, to redefine. It's time for us, as Arabs, to start rebuilding our nations through what we want to be.

And I don't think the elements what being Shia or Sunni or Alawi, it will be employed. If you don't have this, you will have Gaza and Nablus. If you don't have Nablus-Gaza, you have Hebron-Jericho. You will have less on that.

And nations, at the end of the day -- nobody wakes up one morning and feels their conscience aching for Palestinian suffering, or for Syrian suffering, or so on. It's about nations defining their interests.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Hossam, you just wanted to say something in the presence of Dr. Sa'eb.

MR. HAFEZ: Because I don't really understand--

MR. EREKAT: Yes, please -- I have to really have another lecture somewhere else. Sorry, Martin.

MR. HAFEZ: I don't really understand the logic --

MR. EREKAT: But I want to listen if you have something to say.

MR. HAFEZ: Exactly -- just one minute, please.

I don't really understand the logic behind alleviating the current borders and the national states as they are now, in the Middle East, while we have all these free-state elements that you described -- tribalism, sectarianism -- which is built inside.

MR. EREKAT: (off mic).

MR. HAFEZ: I know that. I know that. I know that.

For the time being, the only solution we have as Arabs in this area now is to continue living in these borders, and to twine our national interest together with international human rights and modernization, and all these standards.

So we can't now, we don't have the means now, to alleviate these borders and the national states as they are now, to go for post modernism. It's really -- not in our generation, at least.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

MR. HAFEZ: Can I continue?

MR. SHAIKH: I'm going to start with Vitaly, and we'll come back and let you have the last word.

Vitaly, a number of questions that were addressed to you -- the one Bruce asked about a no-fly zone in the context of Geneva. And is it really that Russia's not defending the Assad regime?

MR. NAUMKIN: Thank you.

First of all, how can you imagine that someone is supporting this regime and voting at Geneva I for transition. The main idea of Geneva I is transition. So how can we support this regime and vote for this transition. It's not very practical. So we are in favor of transition. We're in favor of negotiation and peaceful settlement of this conflict.

But we are against regime change everywhere -- regime change from abroad, as enforced from abroad. Let the Syrians themselves decide who is going to rule them, whom they elect, fair elections, fair constitution, democracy.

We don't have disagreements with our, you know, Western colleagues here, and with a lot of reasonable people from the Syrian opposition. But we are not making any new, not signing any new agreements about arms supplies with Syria. We

have old obligations. This regime is still legitimate in our eyes, and in the eyes of the international community -- or a significant part of it, at least.

So, we have to, we are simply fulfilling our obligations. And there are certain sort of weapons that are defensive, and supporting certain sort of balance which exists there. And these weapons cannot be used against the opposition.

So, another thing about --

MR. SHAIKH: And when you say "defensive," it includes Russian trainers' going to Syria now to train the Syrian army on the anti-aircraft systems it's --

MR. NAUMKIN: Also it's part of our old, you know, obligations. But there are also trainers training fighters from the Free Syrian Army, on the Turkish territory. You know this better than me.

And, about the no-fly zone. I don't know, but I am afraid that Russia will be strongly opposed, under any circumstances, to any sort of no-fly zone. That's a lesson from Libya -- no-fly zone turned into direct military intervention, and the Russian leadership felt cheated by its partners. And this military intervention turned into chaos, the spread of weapons across Africa.

So we all know what happened in Libya. So it's the lessons of Libya -- no-fly zone is not accepted.

What we are afraid of in this regard, that there might be a provocation to ignite Syrian-Israeli confrontation on the Golan, that's why Russia proposed sending its peacekeepers to the Golan Heights. We believe that the old provisions, 40-year-old provisions not allowing the permanent members of the Security Council to send their forces is not valid anymore. And if Israel and Syria agree, it should be done. The Israelis, they promised us to consider this seriously. And, anyhow, it's not rejected by the Israelis. I think it's very important.

MR. SHAIKH: But what about, what about an internationally-backed enforcement mechanism -- something that we'll come to Ambassador Wilks on, as well -- to back up whatever is achieved --

MR. NAUMKIN: Sure. Of course.

MR. SHAIKH: -- in this negotiation?

MR. NAUMKIN: By Security Council. It's clear. It's clear. It needs backing.

MR. SHAIKH: This could be done before, even.

MR. NAUMKIN: Yes.

MR. SHAIKH: You would be for that?

MR. NAUMKIN: I think it will play some very important role.

And the last thing I would like to say about the Shia, Sunni, and Alawi, and whatever, you know -- the Shia project, to be very frank, it started from 2003 by the Shia projects played by the United States. And it's paradoxical -- and Maliki is generously supported by both Washington, D.C., and Tehran. And then it was replaced by another project it might be -- I don't know whether it's Sunni project or something like that, but the Iranians turned into one of the most influential forces in the Middle East after toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Jon, you had a number of questions, including the enforcement mechanism -- but also Martin's, in terms of why has it been so difficult for the Syrian opposition to form a united front?

And, also maybe, if you want to get a little bit philosophical -- but for only half a minute -- would you have done anything different?

MR. WILKS: Yes. Well, I've got to give very frank answers, and very brief answers to all three.

Why has it been so difficult for the Syrian opposition to form a united front? I think if I had to say one word, what's missing, and what we've got to still encourage, is leadership. And in the sense of probably the most renowned British military leader in the Second World War was Field Marshall Slim, who said leadership is a mix of character and vision.

And what we have had in the Syrian opposition, both on the ground in Syria, and among the externals, are various people who've had character, various people who've had vision, but nobody who's got anywhere near its doing even what Dr. Sa'eb Erekat just did, and give a very passionate and rousing speech about the need to look at the whole question of development, the whole question of education, the whole development -- taking the highest values of the traditions of Arab and Islamic civilization -- to inspire people to change their conditions for themselves.

There are people in the Syrian opposition who believe that. But I think none of them have been able to stand up and actually give a convincing vision like that.

So what we're left with are some individuals who, in certain areas of the opposition, have been able to exert leadership on the humanitarian side -- to a certain extent, General Idriss on the military side. But we haven't seen that politically. There's no Ataturk or de Gaulle, who is able to really influence the majority of Syrians on the ground. And the honest truth is, a majority of Syrians, at the moment, I don't think support the regime or the armed opposition. And there's a need to address that group.

And we need to encourage it, because it could be the single most important thing to turn this revolution around. And I always quote to the Syrian opposition Mao Tse Tung's theory of insurgency, that it's 80 percent political. It's only 20 percent military. It's about winning the people to your side, and then whatever military force you've got is used, then, to keep the pressure on the regime, and then you bring it down.

Many of them accept this, but it's just not happened. And as Sa'eb Erekat said, it won't come from outside. We can advise, and we can point these things out, and we can give them all sorts of training and coaching and mentoring, but it's got to come from them.

I don't say this just as a criticism, because the character point is also related to the fact that after 40 years of this dictatorship -- you know, there was no politics, there was no civil society to speak of. People are really starting from a very, very low level, and progress has been made in two years. But it's too urgent to wait for this to develop in the fullness of time.

So that would be my answer there.

ISLAMIC-2013/06/11

I would say, just in parentheses, you know, we look at the future of Syria and, at best, we're going to have a fragile peace at some stage. I think the big difference -- and, again, it's what we're focusing on with our British programs of support. And I know many other donors are, as well -- the big difference will be developing institutions. That's the absolute key area of activity, beginning now with the coalition and its institutions, and, ultimately, if they set up some form of administration in the northern Syria liberated areas, as they're called. I'm quite happy to develop that afterwards with anybody who wants to understand of our thinking on that.

On the enforcement mechanism, a very simple answer: Yes, I think what is so important about Russia and America -- and, indeed, it's wider than that, because Britain and France and China, the P-5, are involved at moment, I think, in a much more constructive discussion about Geneva and about transition -- is there must be enforcement mechanisms. That is our role, the most important role, in terms of making a success of a peace process and a stable transition.

And we need to build trust between these countries for the reasons Dr. Vitaly said, that trust is at a low level following Libya and Iraq and Afghanistan. But because of the specific circumstances of Syria, because of the common ground that I think has been reflected in so many of the comments today, we can rebuild that trust. And it must ultimately deliver enforcement mechanisms.

And then, on the question of self-criticism, sometimes this would be difficult for me to answer -- frankly, because I might have personal views that would be inappropriate for me, in a public forum, if they were different from Prime Minister David Cameron, or Foreign Minister William Hague.

But on this question I'm quite happy to practice self-criticism, because it's something my prime minister has said that I personally agree with in my day-to-day contacts with this.

We did not, I think, factor into the intensity of diplomacy, particularly at the P-5 level, but also in the region, the fact we could predict that six months down the line we would be where we are. And if we don't up this diplomatic effort, we can all predict, in six months time, we're going to be at an even more disastrous place.

I think there has been a tendency to sit and wait, and see how things develop. That's not neglect, necessarily. I think of, in the business schools they very often talk about "wicked problems."

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These are problems that are so complex, in which there are no simple answers, and maybe no good answers, that all you can do is take advantage of developments to start to make this problem slightly easier to solve.

And I think people have been living in that sort of mentality. And I don't think it was good enough. And as my prime minister said, "How will history judge us for what we have done, and particularly not done, in the last 12 months?" The one sign of hope is that now, with Russia and America sitting together, the P-5, and, indeed, the regional, whole group of the friends of Syria, all working now very intensely on Geneva, on getting a transition under way, I think we're in the right place. But did it really take a year to get there?

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

I'm not going to look to my right, because I can see Durriya creeping up on me, and we're about to run out of time.

But I do want to just give you both a minute each --

MR. PICKERING: Sure.

MR. SHAIKH: -- just to respond.

MR. PICKERING: Very quickly, on what's the Obama administration going to do next, I really don't know. Wanna mabaraff.

I think you'll have to wait and see. There are signs that it may be approaching a decision, but there are signs, because we've had them before, that it may be only considering a decision and holding off.

On the Sunni-Shia problem, I wish I could agree with Sa'eb, that the nation-state is now invincible, all-controlling and all-consuming. What we are seeing is the destruction of nation-states, and we're seeing forces at work -- some of them religious, some of them ethnic, some of them social, some of them historical allegiances -- that are all playing a role

Finally, I'm delighted to hear what Jon had to say. I think the lesson for the next six months is not to follow the progression of the last six months.

Thank you.

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MR. SHAIKH: Thank you.

Hossam.

MR. HAFEZ: Very briefly, I would like to go back to the beginning, when the revolution started -- I am talking to Vitaly -- that it's not regime change from outside. It started as a peaceful revolution for political change, which is a basic right for any nation.

Responding to Mr. Indyk, why it's so hard for the Syrian opposition to come together -- as analysis, you can't always speak about 40 years of no public forum for the people to participate, and this is from an analytical point of view. But, still, it's not an excuse. We have to come together to go out with one voice. But, also, this is not an excuse for the international community not to act together, and to protect the people of Syria as a legal and moral duty.

And we've been witnessing some indecisiveness on the part of the American administration, sometimes to the extent of conflicting messages. But we welcome the latest development on the part of the American administration.

Also, it's producing a leadership for the opposition, it's a process that started. It might take some time, but this is the very nature in this hectic time, and the time of crisis for the Syrian nation.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you very much.

We've heard a lot of talk here about diplomacy, and a move towards peace in Geneva. Let's hope that that does come through in the next few weeks, and that we don't get more war over the next few months and, possible, even longer.

Let me thank our esteemed guests and panelists -- Vitaly, Jon Wilks, Ambassador Pickering, and, of course, Dr. Hossam, and, of course, Sa'eb, in absentia.

Thank you very much. And thank you for taking part and listening in.

Please give them a round of applause. (Applause)

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