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WILL IT WORK?
EXAMINING THE COALITION'S IRAQ AND SYRIA STRATEGY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, for joining us here at the University of California. I'm Michael O'Hanlon from Brookings. We have a Brookings Panel today to discuss the issue of the ISIL, or as you prefer, you say tomato, I say tomato, ISIS, IS.

Ken prefers the Arabic name as we'll hear in a moment. In any event we are going to talk about this very acute threat to certain regional security in the Middle East, and then the question of just how much is it a threat to the United States as well. And that will be our topic of today.

We are thrilled just to -- I think we have the perfect team here to kick things off, and we have succinctness and cogency, one of our top experts. Each one of whom can talk about Iraq and Syria, and the broader region, but each one will kick off the conversation with one country or the other. And we'll talk amidst ourselves for a little bit upfront, even though I recognize that the viewing may be a little difficult. And then we'll have a discussion, and maybe during the discussion we'll come up individually to the podium if we have longer comments to make so that we can engage better with you all.

So, again, thank you for being here. I'm Michael O'Hanlon, and I direct the Center on 21st Century Security Intelligence at Brookings. Actually, I Co-Direct it, but my Co-Director took a little leave of absence. He's now directing the coalition against ISIL, retired General John Allen. So we thought it was a reasonable basis for a little paid -- or unpaid vacation in his case.

And then we have panelists, Ken Pollack and Salman Shaikh. Salman, is in our Doha Center. Both of them work for the Center on Middle East Policy at Brookings, also part of the Foreign Policy Program. Salman runs our Doha Center, which we are very proud of, and it's been under some scrutiny in recent, well, weeks, in the

newspaper and elsewhere. I just want to say, I think you'll see for yourselves today, if you aren't already familiar with what he's doing, that it is remarkable work.

And allow me to state clearly for the record, it is unconstrained in any way by any outside influence in the Government of Qatar, allegations to the contrary notwithstanding. But in any event we are not here today to talk about Brookings versus the *New York Times*; we are here to talk about the world against ISIS and ISIL.

And what I would like to do therefore is to ask Salman to talk a bit about Syria, and he does so as a scholar, but also as a participant in a peace process, or a political negotiation, that he has been trying to catalyze; and trying to help spark in his job at Doha, and his broader interest. He has a background with the United Nations working on various peace efforts in the broader Middle East, and I think you'll see the sophistication and the familiarity he has with a lot of the groups, a lot of their points of view, and he'll go second.

Kicking things off will be my good friend, and longstanding colleague at Brookings, Ken Pollack, who, as many of you know, has served in the government at the Intelligence Community and the NSC in previous parts of his career in previous parts of his career. He is very well known for his writings on the broader Middle East. He is particularly well known for writings on Iraq, on Iran and Syria, although certainly, he has written about broader Arab political reform, broader Arab military performance and history as well.

And so what we are going to do is begin with Ken. Will each talk now for five to seven minutes. Ken will start primarily with Iraq, Salman primarily with Syria and then we'll combine the conversation. Obviously, we are all aware these problems are intermixed, and non-separable. So the fact that we are asking each one to begin with a piece, is designed to set the foundations to build towards a coherent strategy and a

coherent integrated discussion, but I think we'll start in that fashion; so, without further ado; Ken, over to you.

MR. POLLACK: Thank you, Mike. It is great to be sharing a podium once again with Michael O'Hanlon and Salman Shaikh. It's great to be appearing for all of you, although in a new venue. So I can't say, you've heard me say from this podium. I'll say, as you've heard me say from other podiums.

What's nice for me is, I actually get to be the good-news guy, right. This is a rarity for me, it has been years since I've been able to stand up and say, I'm going to talk to you about Iraq, and Iraq is the good news part of the story. Obviously, I'm being somewhat facetious. Iraq is the good news part of the story, only in so far as we compare it to Syria, where there are even greater problems, where there's even more work to be done.

But on the Iraq side of things, I think it is worth taking note of the fact that we've had some very important developments, and they have been by and large positive development. The Obama Administration, after steadfastly doing the wrong thing for six years, suddenly came around and realized, okay, that isn't working, we are going to have to do the right thing, and I think that they deserve credit for recognizing that.

They fundamentally changed their approach to Iraq, and that has borne real fruit. Right? We do have a new Prime Minister in Iraq, and we do have a new political process, and it is far from completion, and it is far from achieving what we hope it will and what it needs to if Iraq is going to continue to make progress, but there has been progress so far.

There is a new Government, there is a new Cabinet, mostly, there is movement on a whole variety of different issues, and we are hearing different Iraqis talking about the political process in ways that we've not heard them talk about the

political process since 2010. That's all important, that's all positive.

That, unfortunately, though is kind of where the good news ends, because we are now at a point where we have made some important progress. Oh, and I should point out, the Daesh offensives have been stopped around Bagdad, they've been stopped toward Erbil. They've been stopped at Mosul Dam, to some extent they've stopped in Diyala, and even Anbar where they've made some progress. No longer are they pushing southeastward, they are still taking villages in other parts, but the major thrust has also been largely stalemated. That's also important progress.

But now comes the hard part, and there's still a lot of other important elements that need to be taken care of; things that we need to be watching as we move forward. And here, you know, I was trying to decide whether problems are political, whether they are military, and then I find it impossible to disentangle, because the military is political, and the political is military in this part of the world; and in particular in this conflict.

But just a few things that I think we all need to be watching very carefully, as we move forward, and it's where these intermingling of the military and the political really become very acute, because what needs to happen now, in Iraq, is a military campaign to evict Daesh from Western and Northern Iraq. But that can't be a purely military campaign; it has to be a political military one. And every aspect, every step of that military campaign is going to have critical political overtones.

Overtones that the parties themselves in Bagdad are acutely aware of, and it has the potential to complicate if not potentially derail this military campaign. So the administration recognize reality, recognize that the Sunnis wanted their own military forces and were deeply skeptical of the idea of allowing the Iraqi Army, where Ghetsis now is effectively another Shia Militia, as coming back into their areas and liberating their

areas. And the administration recognized that reality, it's even come up with a nice term, Iraqi National Guard Units, those are going to be the Sunni formations, which will be married up to Iraqi Army formations which may very well heavily dominated by Shia.

And for the moment, that's a workable way of moving forward, but of course the rubber is going hit the road when the boots hit the sand, and when the tank tracks hit the sand, all right. How are these units going to operate? Will Iraqi Army units be allowed to push on and liberate Sunni cities? Whether it be Tikrit or, you know, as we get farther north, even up into Mosul, into Felucia, you know, places that are acutely sensitive for the Sunni community. And so far have very consistently said, they don't want to see the Iraqi army in those places. They want only their own formations with American backing.

And that's of course not something that the United States necessarily wants to see, but we are going to have to figure out a way to make all of this work. Either to have combined formations of some kind, or to somehow broker who goes where, and when and how, and that's going to be very, very difficult in the days to come.

Beyond that, there's a very big question lying at the end of the road, of what the future Government of Iraq looks like, and it's not a question that can simply be put off until the rest of Iraq has been re-conquered, because the fact of the matter is, that Sunni, Shia, Kurd, all of them are thinking about that right now. And their responses, their reactions, their cooperation in the fight to evict Daesh from Western Iraq; is going to be predicated on their thinking and their goals for that future state, right.

The Shia would very much like to see Iraq go back to the period, as one Shia put it to me, basically the Maliki era without Maliki, right. Could we recreate the moments when Iraq was no longer occupied by the United States, was dominated by a coalition led by the Shia, but remove Maliki's autocratic tendencies from that mix, and

replay it in a way that as we may seem -- should have been done but wasn't, because of Maliki's paranoia, and his own personality problems that he brought to the job.

That is not what most Sunni political leaders are interested in, not what they are willing to accept. They want a very decentralized Iraq, as several put it to me, at various points in time, they want what the Kurds had. And that may even be hard, because who knows what the Kurds will have at the end of the road. And we are hoping to have all of these different groups cooperating, and of course, for all of them, any military decision they make can become a precedent for that ultimate political decision -- that ultimate political solution.

So if the Sunnis allow Shia formations, Iraq Army formations into the west -- into the north, does that mean that in that future state there will be an Iraqi Army that will control all of the territory of Iraq? Or, will it be that the Iraqi Army is only Shia Force left in the South of Iraq, and the Sunni Governance have their own militias, their own National Guard formations, which are the primary security providers in their areas, effectively what the Kurds with the Peshmerga, and what many Sunnis have wanted.

There are other problems as well. I think on the Shia side, we more or less have situation where most Shia political leaders are fairly confident in this government. On the Sunni side, much less so, and we see a greater fragmentation among the Sunni community in terms of tribal leadership, in terms of political leadership, it's much harder these days to say, who leads the Sunnis, and who speaks for them?

My friend, John Allen really has his work cut out figuring out, who it is who is going to speak for the Sunnis. And a last point that we ought to think about, and there are many others, I mean, to finish off on this one, because we want to keep our opening remarks brief, is this question of, at what point can we start to count on the Sunni tribes and other Sunni groups to turn on Daesh?

From almost the minute after Mosul fell, I and a number of others, Mark Kimmitt here, or Mark probably got these phone calls too. But a number of us started getting phone calls from Sunni Sheikhs, from Sunni political leaders, from other intermediaries, all saying to us, please understand, we hate Daesh, we have no interest in allowing them to rule our lands, but we hate Maliki more.

Once you get rid of Maliki, we'll all turn on Daesh, and I think that the -- when they said it they meant it, that represented their heart-felt aspirations. But of course, Maliki is gone and some tribes have turned on Maliki, but not a whole lot, and there are still many others who have not done so, and some who are continuing to fight alongside of Daesh and the other Sunni militants. And the truth of the matter is, it would be very difficult for them to move.

There is a piece I think in *The Times* today, or yesterday, that I thought illustrate it very nicely. How do you equip, train, enable these forces to move against Daesh, at a moment when Daesh is largely in control of their tribal lands? How do we make contact with them? How do we bring their fighters out to where we can train them, arm them, equip them and send them back in?

These are enormously complicated problems, made even more so by the prior point that I made, when it's not clear who actually is running the Sunni world, the Sunni part of Iraq, where there is no unified leadership, that can make these kinds of contacts and broker different arrangements. And it's not clear which tribe will actually report to which other tribe, and which other tribal leader.

All of these things still need to be sorted out. So at one level, I think we've made real progress, taking some very important steps forward, but there's still a very long way to go.

MR. O'HANLON: And while you are up there, if you don't mind, if we've -

- we've been asked to do most of our speaking here. So I'll pose two quick clarifying questions, while you are still there. One is, all of your excellent comments make it clear why the following question is unanswerable, but I'm going to ask it anyway, which is about how long would this take, if it worked the way you hope?

And then secondly, you are mentioning the calls from the tribal Sheikhs makes me -- a question occurred to me, when we -- both you and I, especially you and other Iraq experts, know a lot of people who got killed by al Qaeda in Iraq, back in the '06, '07 period especially, and before. And there were a tribal leaders being taken out.

To what extent is that happening? Or, in other words, are we losing that kind of tribal structure even as we speak with each passing day and week and month, is the basis for Sunni resistance within Iraq being decimated because ISIL has anticipated where we all want to go? Or, is much of this leadership surviving for the moment, which I don't mean to suggest, would be a case for complacency, but it would still be interesting to know.

MR. POLLACK: Let me answer your second question first, because in some ways it gets back to your first question. My sense is, and again, I want to be very careful about this, because I don't think that we have great information on this, the U.S. Government, hopefully, has better information, but I don't think that they have terrific information either. And you know, there may be others with better, but again, I don't think it's complete because that's the problem, it is very fragmented, it's hard to know what's actually going on in those areas controlled by Daesh and other the Sunni militant groups.

But at best I can tell, it seems to be the case that Daesh certainly does go after the tribal leaders who resist them, but that it hasn't embarked on kind of a widespread campaign to try to decapitate the Sunni tribal leadership. Perhaps because they don't ever intend to, at another level, it may just be because they be because they

don't yet feel strong enough to do so.

And I certainly think that that's the case, that we certainly have gotten very frightened by these guys, but the truth is they aren't terribly many in number; they are a lot more Sunni tribesmen out there, than there are Daesh fighters. Again, they are only part of a larger coalition, and I don't think they are in any position to start decapitating the Sunni tribal leadership which would immediately turn that very big swath of a population against them, in a way that, frankly, they don't need right now. They've got enough enemies.

Which kind of brings me to the second question of how long? And you're right, that's an almost impossible question to answer, but I'm going to answer it in this way, but I actually suspect that the United States, and I'm going to say this, I hope that this is the case, because it would be the smart thing to do, but I'm going to give them credit, and say that this is what they are doing, I don't think they want to move too fast, because I think that they recognize that they need to sort out these political questions first.

I mean, I think the truth is, that if President Obama really want to, if his goals simply were to smash Daesh -- smash Daesh -- if that were really his goal, right, destroy the great ISIL, that's what he said. If that's all he wanted to do, we could start backing the Shia Militias right this minute, and they have a fair amount of capability with U.S. air power to do a great deal of damage.

The Shia Militias are big, they are extensive, they are vicious, they are very committed, they've got experience, they can and brawl with these guys. And with the addition of U.S. air power, I think that they could do a lot of damage right now. But I think that it's very clear the U.S. doesn't want to do that, and I think that what you are going to see is the U.S. -- certainly the U.S. Military, that's going to say, give us six to 12

months, to retrain the Iraqi security forces, and now to train these national guard formations so that when we start to roll back Daesh, we are doing it the right way politically.

We are doing it with -- my guess is what the administration wants, the military wants to do, and it's composite units. So we have a National Guard Battalion and an Iraqi Army Battalion, and if there's a Shia Militia Battalion trailing behind we'll just kind of pretend they are not there, but we'll know that they are there. And that's the right way to do it. And I think the real trick in whether there are, you know, key issues for John Allen, for General Austin, ultimately for the President, is there's undoubtedly going to be a military political tension here, and it's something that you see in almost all these kinds of wars and. You know, heck see saw it World War II, right, with the political leaders saying, you've got to do something, you've got to do something, you've got to do something. We have to show the people of Europe that we are not just standing still. Right?

And Eisenhower and Marshall and the other generals saying, no, no, no, we are not doing D-Day until we are absolutely ready to go. I think we have the same situation in Iraq, where political are going to be saying, you can't just leave Western Iraq under Daesh control, you've got to do something, you've got to do something. And the military leaders saying, we are not ready, we are not ready, we are not ready.

And we don't know how that's going to work out, right, and it may be that they try to do both at the same time, certainly they are going to do this air campaign, they might try to do some special forces operations, as a way of showing people, hey, Daesh is not going to be in control of Western or Northern Iraq forever, but we are going to make sure that we are going to do it right way.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. Thank you. So, Salman, over to you my

friend.

MR. SHAIKH: Thank you. Good afternoon. It's lovely to be in Washington, a city I love, and I particularly love this tow path, that you've got, where I can go running every morning. Very different to Doha, and I'll tell you that.

Well, I've been asked to speak about Syria in about six, seven minutes, so here goes. I'll try and divide it up into set of three set of sections. The first section to continue, slightly the good news thing, the coalition, the miracle coalition that was formed with Arab States, which I think many of us were surprised to the extent to which they wouldn't come forward.

Secondly, I want to talk about actually the view of that coalition, what's going on from the ground. Last week I was in Istanbul with about 15 military groups, who came to see us from inside Syria. We are constantly doing this, we are constantly in touch with the folks on the ground, not just the military side but those in Damascus, and those that I would say have more pro-government and independently-minded views as well.

And thirdly, linked to that, is what prospect is there of some sort of a political process in Syria, because at the end of the day, as Ken said, you can, you know, switch around the military side and the political side, but both of them matter, and certainly in the case with Syria, as we are learning in the case of Iraq that's what we need.

So, first in terms of the coalition, I think great credit to Secretary of State, Kerry, as well as Secretary Hagel, as well as Susan Rice, and of course the President himself, in getting these five key Arab States to take serious military activity on this. And, you know, it wasn't just political expediency, it wasn't just because there were certain amount of pressure, because they themselves feel and existential threat.

The Saudi border is not the most -- in my view -- the most defensible. The Jordanians are facing infiltration, we look at what's going on in Lebanon, and then of course there's Turkey, as an example. And Iraq of course, but Turkey, you know, Turkey does face some very difficult choices which we can talk about in the Q&A, not least to facing its own terrorist threats, maybe in the medium to longer term, if this thing goes on.

So that was an achievement, and this whole strategy of trying to bring in Sunni communities on the ground. In the case of Iraq as well as a political effort with the Sunnis is an important playbook to follow. Certainly in Iraq, but also in Syria, itself, because at the end of the day it's really going to be those communities inside, and those communities in Al Jazeera, in Raqqah, Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor, and elsewhere in Syria, which are going to be the ones that can marginalize and effectively make a redundant Daesh, but also the ideology which is much more difficult to wipe out.

I should also point out, by the way, that probably something like 6,000, 7,000 Syrian fighters have been killed in fighting against Daesh even before this coalition was reached. And in fact, early this year, there is, many of them, these fighting groups had actually succeeded in expelling Daesh, whether it's from the suburbs of Damascus or whether it was up in Idlib.

So this is a -- there's a clear desire for them to fight against Daesh and see them as the -- as a threat that they ought to their own society. That's the better news. Now, in terms of the not-so-good news, and here what we heard from these fighting groups, pretty much across the board, they are very secular minded, those that are being supported by the United States and the West, as some have been vetting, and all the rest of it.

All the way to the spectrum of the more Islamist groups, like Ahrar al-Sham or Jadassohn, and Jashi Islam, and groups like that; across the board they say

two, three things. One, there is no cooperation with us, no coordination with us, as these airstrikes started, so how are supposed to take advantage of these things, in fact, later (Inaudible), said to us, I read it in the newspaper.

Secondly -- and this is one of the groups that the U.S. is supporting -- secondly, it won't wash with them that this is very much a strategy which is just focused on Daesh. They see that there should be a parallel effort at least to put pressure, and if necessary take the fight to Bashar al-Assad, himself. And they particularly point to the aircraft that the Assad regime is flying every single day and using its power bombs, and using all the other armory, and armor that it's got, and they point out, and conservatively, if you look at the Syrian National Human Rights body, they, in terms of their data, and I know those are conservative figures, in the month of September 2,500 Syrians were killed.

Now, most of those were killed by the regime, not by the Daesh, and that's the reality that most Syrians are facing day in, day out. And what we were told, if this strategy continues and only focusing narrowly on the regime, effectively the Syrian, what they perceive as a narrow counterterrorism effort, which is very much what they say in Western or U.S. interests, we are going to start losing our communities. And these people, whatever you may say about them, are very much part of their communities.

I know they are being branded a farmers and dentists and lawyers, and all the rest of it, but they took up arms, and maybe some of them a year and a-year-and-a-half ago, and they have been training themselves. Some of them have had training, and they see themselves very much first and foremost as protecting their communities, and building the kind of civil infrastructure in a vacuum which is (inaudible), all the time, while the rest of the world has pretty much looked away.

There's also the moral argument that we use when it comes to Daesh.

We say Daesh rightfully so, are these murderous barbarians doing horrible things, and of course we've seen that, unfortunately, in terms of the videos that they've produced, mass killings and all the rest of it. But they say, you can't take the moral argument by just focusing on one group, what about the moral ideological argument in terms of what the Assad regime is doing.

And again, it undermines the effort to win hearts and minds, not just in those communities, but I would say more -- wider in the region and in -- I dare say in the Islamic world, when there is, this is seen very much more as a narrow focus rather than, in the words of one commander, is the battle between decency, values that we all hold and barbarism. And the barbarism doesn't stop just with Daesh. So again, in practical terms, I think this is going to continue to have a wearing effect in terms of the coalition's effort.

And remember if you go into social media, if you go and look at the Facebook entries of Saudis, of Qataris, of Emirates, of Jordanians and others, that are pointing all of this out, because at the end of the day, even these leaderships will be affected by what they are hearing from within their own populations, and yet we need them very much to be an active part of this coalition.

So, my second point is, it's that an open-ended, which is what it is right now, military strategy, without a real political strategy, is not going to work. This is where we need to have a parallel effort on the political side, which is focused on looking to see how you can change the dynamics within Syria. If Nouri al-Maliki or -- and his ways were a problem in Iraq, well certainly after maybe 200- 250,000 people killed in a civil conflict in Iraq, Bashar al-Assad and his regime certainly are as well.

And this is, again, what we don't hear just from -- what you people, you would brand as opposition people, we also hear this from certain tiers, from even within

the Alawi community. We hear this from within the Druze or Kurdish community, we hear this even from within the Christian communities, as well as business leaders, as well as tribal heads. The point I'm trying to make is that there is a broad, wide spectrum of opinion which understands that the cause of this is the fact that initially you had an uprising which was increasing -- which increasingly grew bloody against Bashar al-Assad and his rule.

And until you are not able to address that, you are going to find it hard work, in order to be able to fill the vacuums which are now being filled by the extremists themselves. And here, let me say, in terms of the groups that we've spoken to, including the military groups, they very much point out that they want peace, they want a ceasefire, they are tired, they don't want this to continue.

And we also hear something similar from even, let's say, third, fourth rank Dalawi security officers, and another such elements that we've been able to speak to. The question though, is how? And of course, that's not an easy question to answer. How do you get a political process going in Syria, which has the chance of turning the situation?

I'll offer to you two things, which have come from our own sort of workshops, and study groups that we've been facilitating, as Mike, kindly pointed out, over the last nine months or so. First and foremost they talk about, still, a political agreement, but a political agreement that would put Assad to one side, but which crucially needs, still, the Iranians and Russians to seek a separate path.

Now, most of you would think, well that's pretty fantastic, didn't we try that with Geneva in January-February? And by the way, it's made even more difficult because the Assad regime doesn't want anybody to talk. We've tried to bring people out from Damascus, we are speaking to other people, and they are extremely scared of

talking because of the fact that the Assad regime really doesn't want anyone to talk right now. Don't take my word for it, look at Walid al-Moualem, the Syrian Foreign Minister's speech with her U.N., where he said, there's no political process that is possible right now.

Yet, the Russians and the Iranians have been behind the scenes, I would say, in the last couple of months been testing some ideas. I know that the Iranians have discussed ideas again about a national unity government of some sort. Now many of you will be skeptical and you should be. I'm skeptical. But nevertheless, there has been some, quite serious conversations in that regard.

The Russians, too, have been discussing about ideas of -- or dialogue, a national dialogue, and how do you get a national dialogue process going in Syria? I think what we have to do, even if it's difficult, is try and prepare for that moment of what I would call and in U.N. statement, we would talk about as -- of diplomatic rightness. A way by which certain interests can converge, and certainly, since June, since Mosul, things have started to change on the ground, which is also having an impact in terms of the Iranian and Russian War effort in supporting Bashar al-Assad, that's just a reality that they are also living with.

So we need initial political agreement, that would bring in some sort of a new unity government of some sort that tries to implement some of the Annan, original Annan six points, or some sort of ceasefire and release of detainees, but also, and this is the point I wanted to make, so it's not from just immediate, but to the longer term in terms of a political process; which inevitably is going to take some time.

And that is a national dialogue process. It closed, rather like we saw in the Yemen case, where there was built into an agreement the idea of a national dialogue, and here, we've been talking and working on the design for something like that, making, I

think, it was probably hundreds of Syrians from all different backgrounds, discuss what should be the mandate, what should be the agenda, who should be invited, all the rest of it.

And these are the kinds of important things, I think, that need to be worked on that will actually empower Syrians in a moment of change to work on a political process which can bring, security, stability, which can set an agenda on the civil justice side, as well as on the economic reconstruction side, as well as charting a new pathway -- a new political pathway to their new state, and new vision, or they -- especially through a constitution in here, is where the international community does have a particularly role to play when that starts to get going.

First and foremost, in making sure that it happens, if we were to put as much as emphasis as we are on Daesh, on the security side, as we should be, on starting a political process, I think we may start to see, some of those ideas, not only being tested but perhaps coming to fruition over a relatively short period of time, and that is the hope I would have.

The final thing I would say to you, I notice -- I think there was quite a lot of talk, I think in this town as well as in other places, that I go to, about what is -- of Assad's state, it's not going anywhere, and that's -- this is just a reality that we have to live with, and we have to put it to one side, that's actually not true. There's turmoil within the Arabic community, we know that, and we can talk about that more.

Secondly, on the battlefield, without their aircraft, they actually lose a lot of their battles, and thirdly, in terms of the ability of people wanting to talk, there are all sorts of contacts going on now, between regime elements and local and national elements on the opposition side, and those who consider themselves independents.

Finally, those who say, well, what if Assad goes, what are the

alternatives? Well, what I would say to you, I'll tell you what the alternative is, and if Assad stays, and that is we are going to end up in a fairly short amount of time with a more intensified conflict, even more fragmented, on the ground, which essentially becomes, in my view, a fight between Daesh and the regime, and that's not a very good choice that we should face.

MR. O'HANLON: Let me ask one clarifying question as well of you that's very, very good and very rich, and there's a lot more to talk about, we will. But whatever model for a new political governance of Syria might emerge from the process that you are describing, whether it's, you know, confederation, whether it's a strong state, but some kind of a reconciliation process that allows people to get beyond their hatreds and paranoia and mistrust.

Whatever it might be, do you think that it is likely to require the deployment of a substantial international peacekeeping or peace implementation for sometime recognizing it's way too soon to know. But just in terms of shaping our expectations, could you speak to that?

MR. SHAIKH: Sure. The short answer is, possibly, but it has to be done through some sort of a dialogue and discussion with Syrians themselves, and particularly those elements on the ground. Now that's difficult, which is why, again, we need to create the vehicles to engage, because unfortunately, and I'm sorry to say this, the official Opposition (Inaudible), just hasn't cut it, as being their representatives.

We need to be able to find those elements on the ground and encourage them to produce the kinds of structures, as part of a broader political process, which then allows us to ask these questions. The role of the international community, if you ask Syrians from (inaudible), is extremely complicated for people to answer, they want the international community to come in and protect their rights and to give them support, but

at the same time, they are sick and tired of the interference of the international -- of the regional states in particular, as well as the -- and they are very much more suspicious of it, as the conflict is now into its fourth year.

And so, I think that -- I think that's what I really want to -- I will say one more thing which I forgot. The military groups on the ground right now, are in their own process now, having given up, to a certain degree, in terms of externally-led efforts to form their own coalition or revolution command which they called Watesimo, which includes military groups right across the spectrum, those are getting the support of the U.S. and the West, and those in the Islamic front.

They are -- which is modeled on a (inaudible) which was signed in June, July, where the groups like Ahrar al-Sham, and some of the more secular-leaning groups. And if this effort works, they will be forming a council which is part political, part civil, part military. I'll tell you what, the things that they most worry about is outside interference, because some of those groups are starting to get that, including from some of their Gulf patrons, which I think would be a very bad thing, because we should see the results of this.

We should see the platform on which they base themselves. If they are able to succeed that then gives a basis, in my view, to work with folks on the ground in those areas, knowing that we have to bring in people under more pro government, or independent side, as well as the (inaudible) which in my view, puts service in foreign ministries, or something like that.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. Thank you very much. And now what I'd like to do, as we move towards conversation with you, is really just pose one more question, and it's to Ken, and it says, take on Syria. So with just a couple of minutes before I can invite your comments and questions, what I'd like to do is ask Ken to speak

about Syria. He's got a very helpful and in many ways provocative paper that you might have seen on the table out front building and expanding on a foreign affairs article he recently wrote. It's a country he's thought a lot about as well. I just wanted to ask you to offer your thoughts on appropriate next steps in Syria, and then we can go to a broader discussion.

MR. POLLACK: Nice, Mike. And so I'll be quick, because most of what I want to say is kind of echoing and picking up on themes that Salman has already laid out. But I just want to make a few points, about Syria.

First, Salman is absolutely right, that, this has got to be about more than just a fight against Daesh, and that means a lot more in Syria than it does in Iraq. In Iraq we are actually doing some of the stuff that is necessary to deal with the underlying problems that enabled the Daesh offensive, that gave rise, to the new civil war in Iraq. In Syria I think that we are going to do that. I hope that we are, at least what, say, Chairman Dempsey has talked about suggest that we will, and the paper that Mike talked about that's out front, outlines exactly what would be necessary.

But I don't yet see the U.S. Government signed up for that yet, okay. And that comes up in a few different ways, and I think that they are important. The first is how the President is describing this, and we are going to degrade and destroy ISIL, that's fine. That's like talking to a person with Ebola and saying we are going to get your fever down. That's important, right, we all want to do that. It does not deal with the underlying problem, and we need to recognize that.

Daesh is not the problem; Daesh is the symptom of the problem. The problem is the civil war in Syria and Iraq, and for that matter would be Yemen and potentially Lebanon as well. Those are the underlying problems. Again, in Iraq the administration with a little bit of slight-of-hand is actually doing just that. And that's

represent those important political steps I talked before.

I do not yet see them ready to even acknowledge that they are going to need to do that in Syria, and that includes Salman's very important point about this has to be about the regime as well, right. It can't just be about trying to crush Daesh in Syria, it won't work.

Even if we somehow did that, if we did not deal with the underlying civil war there, a year from there would be another group. May be calling itself Daesh, maybe calling itself something completely different, it would be same problem, because these civil wars generate exactly this problem. We've been seeing that now in the region at least since 9/11, but arguably even before that, and it's a constant out there -- excuse me.

The second piece to that, also something that someone was willing to -- we need to recognize that we are not building a Syrian Opposition Army. Again, that's what General Dempsey's, his test rivalry. He's going to train 5,000 guys, that will be the start of only 10- or 15,000 in couple of years' time. Those guys intend to fight Assad, and good luck to us, if we think that we are going to stop them, once they are trained and armed, right?

So we are in this. And now I understand why the administration may not want to declare the fight the fight on Assad just yet, for a whole variety of political reasons, they are going to need to do so. And by the way, all of those allies you signed up as Salman pointed out, they are signed up for the fight against Assad; even more than they are signed up for the fight against Daesh.

Last point, the last piece that's missing, the biggest piece that's missing, and to me, you know, the great -- the thing that I'm most concerned about right now, is the lack of any conversation about the political and economic and social reconstruction of

Syria that is going to need to take place as part of this process. Not after, as part of it.

This was the lesson that the Bush Administration, screwed up so horrendously in both Iraq and Afghanistan, right. This is the mistake that President Obama himself recognized he made with Libya. When he told Tom Friedman of *The New York Times*, that he recognized that just trying to do the military take down in Libya was a mistake, there had to have been -- there's political economic social follow through; which I will, for lack of a better term, call nation building.

Syria is going to need it too. We can't just walk in there crush Daesh and walk away. We are going to have to help the Syrians and others build a stable Syrian society. And if we it right, it means starting right now, and it means enlisting all kinds of other groups, so that we don't have to try to do it the way that we did in Iraq and Afghanistan, which not only didn't work, but also was ruinously expensive.

If we do it right in Syria, there is every reason to believe the U.N. can provide the leadership, the NGOs can provide most of the muscle work, and we'll probably provide, at least, a big chunk of the security, and the Gulf States will provide most of the money. But we can't get away from that. The President was right when he said to Tom Friedman, that you can't simply do the military piece, and walk away. You've got to do the nation building piece of it.

And again, the worst mistake we could make, would be to try not to do it, because if that's the case, we will solve nothing, or else we'll then try to make things up, as we go along, after the fact, the way the Bush Administration did, and it will be ruinously expensive. If we do it now, there is no reason it needs to be like Iraq or Afghanistan, there's every reason to believe that it can be an international effort, led mostly by Syrians with a long-term bottom-up process that produces a stable outcome which we don't have to pay for.

The worst mistake that we can make is to keep trying to duck this problem. And I recognize this is not a very popular thing to say, but if there's anything that the history of the last 13 years should have told us, it is the necessity of that.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. So now I'm going to take three questions at a time, and if you like you direct them to one person, that then what we'll do is we'll try to cycle through and each use the podium in reply. So, we'll start over here with Dan, and then we'll go back to the middle, and then to the side for the first round. Yes, here you go.

MR. SERWER: Daniel Sewer from John Hopkins SAIS. Can you provoke me to say first of all that I --

MR. O'HANLON: You've always done.

MR. SERWER: -- I agree with you 100 percent on the state building aspect. I call it state building rather than nation building for good reasons. The question is what kind of strategy we are going to pursue? And I think right now, there are two choices, one is to consider state building as something that we can only do once Bashar al-Assad is gone. And all we can do right now is playing for it.

The other is to consider what in fact we did in Bosnia and other places, which is to start building -- rebuilding the Syrian state from local situations. And I wonder if you could comment on the choice between those approaches, or others, that you might have.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Here in the center?

QUESTIONER: Pierre (Inaudible), from (Inaudible). The President is meeting this after at the Pentagon with the Leaders of the EOD and the Military. If you were to tell him what is the next decision, what kind of a decision you would like him to take today?

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. And then the third question will be over here, and then we'll answer, and then we'll do a second round.

MR BURROUGHS: Hi. My name is Nick Burroughs with TD International. Kind of an open-ended question, how would you describe Iran's involvement in both countries, from both panelists? And what role could Iran play in the state building, or nation building process?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, for three excellent questions. I'm going to start but I'm going to be fairly brief, and it's going to be mostly on the second question and then we'll just invite, we've worked on the row here and everybody can comment, and whichever they questions they wish, there's really only one set of thoughts, I would make, but your questions sets me up to make a point that I was hoping to make today.

Which is, basically, how we can be effective inside, of Iraq in the short to medium term, and I think the Syria problem is harder. I agree with Ken, the Iraq part is the relatively more manageable and better news in a sense. But I do think that even in Iraq, we don't quite have it right yet, and the reason is, because we are still maintaining these artificial firewalls, no boots on the ground, and no American combat. Even though we've obviously violated both of those stipulations already, that's supposed to be constraining our effort.

We have 1,700 people on the ground in uniform in Iraq, and we are dropping bombs all the time from the sky. So we have boots on the ground, and we are in combat. I understand the main point here, is to say we don't want to do any large scale invasion again, but there still is an intermediate zone of two types of operations that I believe we need to seriously consider.

And one would be advisory teams, for the Iraqi Army Units and National Guard Units that are now being either reconstituted, or built from scratch in the coming

weeks and months. The Iraqis will do the building, the Iraqis will do the fighting, but I think they are going to need some help in making this all stitch together. And the other is, I will be willing and see a case for American Special Forces being involved in collaboration with Iraqi Special Forces, in the early weeks of any major counter offensive against ISIL, to actually join in some of the raids.

And not to do it permanently, not to take the main role, but to help, because that early period can be a period we go on the offensive very effectively with the Iraqis and build the momentum in the way that Stanley McChrystal, and Bill McRaven showed us we could do by an intensity and a pace of Special Forces raise, that can really create a synergistic effect.

Just one last point of explanation before I pass off to Ken; when you asked, you know, why this would be needed, especially the military advisory teams in the field, part of it is, helping the Iraqis themselves regain their own confidence with each other, working together in some mechanisms and some modes that haven't yet even been decided upon, as Ken pointed out. But even once they decide what the role is of a national guard versus the army and so forth, and you are going to have to get people working together, who, right now, often don't talk to each other, fundamentally distrust each other.

Americans actually have some of the personal relationships that can stitch some of these individuals, and pieces of the whole problem together, because of the human dimension, of our relationships, built up over the last decade. But on top of that, let me also just remind you all, and many people in this room, and certainly Mark Kimmitt, a few others, know extremely well, better than I, what I'm going to say.

But when you actually do these sorts of operations, it is difficult. People have an image of counterinsurgency or of the surge in the Iraq as just being pumping

more troops into more neighborhoods and then the problem sort of gets taken care of by brute force. But in fact, if you know the military history, read the military history of what we did in these places, there's a complex sequencing that involves, with first developing an intelligence picture of the battlefield, by talking to your human intelligence sources.

Listening through signals intelligence, but that's not going to be good enough. So then you've got to use that as your first draft, and you go in raids of various types, and you try to arrest, not kill people, and interrogate them, and find out more about where the leadership nodes are, where the weapons caches are, where the rat lines, for supply, for movement of people are. And that helps you then build up a better picture, and then after you do all that, you have to figure out what kind of a clearing operation are you going to conduct in a given neighborhood or sector of a city.

You've got to have enough troops to do that. You've got to initially bring in some people who clear roadside bombs, so you figure as few casualties as possible doing that. You've got to cordon off the area that you are trying to clear so that the enemy can't easily escape. You've got to have, then, some rapid response teams in case the enemy is stronger than you expected, and also you've got to be able to have a holding force come in afterwards, be it this National Guard or some other unit.

I'm not claiming to do this all with precision and sophistication at how I've laid out the 101 of how you do counterinsurgency and clearing, but it's something like what I just said. It may vary from case to case, but it's something like that. It's hard. It's not necessarily brain surgery, but it's complicated, especially in the logistics, and the pacing, and the coordination.

And I question whether Iraqi Units that are going to be fashioned out of a few tribal fighters here, and a few formerly disgruntled soldiers there, will quickly have the capacity. We can't do it for them, but I think we can help them as coaches, as advisors.

So that's why I think we need these advisory teams in the field and will make the whole job a lot easier, if we are willing to contemplate that. And I'm talking about at most, a few thousand people.

So certainly more than the 1,700 we've got now, but certainly well less than even a single division, and certainly nothing close to the forces we had during the 2003 and 2011 period. I'll pass things off now to my colleagues.

MR. SHAIKH: Do you want me to do it here?

MR. O'HANLON: As you wish.

MR. SHAIKH: It's okay to do it here? Can you hear me? First of all, I know it's directed to Ken in terms of state building or nation building, but let suggest this sort of a practical way forward in this regard. In our discussions and national dialogue efforts, folks have identified three areas that they would like to focus on. How do you build long-term security, including the combat against extremism, but also the reform of institutions, border control, weapons proliferation; how do deal with that as well as reintegration of fighters and things like that?

Secondly, there's a sort of civil economic agenda, how do you achieve justice, how do you deal with the suffering and hurt and that is being caused, how do you deal with issues of even compensation, expropriation of property. How do you deal with the whole area of economic reconstruction and development? And thirdly there's, as I told you before us, what's a political pathway to a new Constitution?

Now, in all of these areas, and I can't -- I could go into much more detail, but I know we don't have time. There is a series of things here, that the international community if it was organized, and if it was so minded, could very much help on, as a Syrian-led national dialogue starts, to try and resolve these kinds of questions that they pose under these kinds of themes. And I think to make it even more structured I would

suggest that some sort of an international steering group, the U.N. has set up many international steering groups.

Some that have worked, some that haven't, that very much bring in, let's say, the coalition partners that we have right now, but also the possibility of the Russians with the Iranians and others are being parted, very much task-based, to support particular activities or a particular set of goals in that state building effort. And of course they are going to have to be committed for the long-term, because this is not something that's going to end even in the initial phases.

It's not going to end for another 10, 15 years, so you need that kind of commitment, as well as in multinational and multilateral organizations that need to be involved. That's what I would say, and that of course, does include the local elements organizing themselves. Whether it's the current interim government, or whether it's other formations, the civil administrations that are set up around the major towns and regions as being part of that.

And what's been a fascinating discussion is how do you select who is part of this political process? And again, this is part of the preparatory work that needs to be done if you are to raise this kind of process. And it's absolutely necessary. If you look at Yemen, Afghanistan, you look at the '90s in terms of the West Africa and national dialogue efforts, there are so many that have adopted different ways in which to bring the right people to the table. But you need the right people at the table.

In terms of the military, I would just say to President Obama, I would say, you need to be look at a (Inaudible), or at least threaten to impose one. If the Assad regime's aircraft continue 10 seconds away from an American F16, or another -- in another area, are still bombing. And they have commanders on the ground, have pointed out to us, specific instances where there are coalition aircraft in the north, and in the

south, the regime is doing a bombing, or flying a helicopter while bombing, and that kind of thing.

And then of course there's the whole issue of buffer zones. We all speculated on this pretty much when this crisis became militarized, about neighboring states establishing defector borders if they could. Well that's what's happening. I have a fair degree of confidence, I think the Turks will establish something themselves. You have a defector buffer zone along the Israeli border.

Incidentally I think manned by Jabat Al Nusra, and by Jordan, and a buffer zone on the border with Jordan as well. That's partly -- that's mainly for self-interest in terms of the control of refugees, what kind of bad elements are coming across. But these can also serve as the kind of safe havens, which are needed in order to be able to protect its own.

And let me just say finally, and I'll leave the Iran bit to Ken, since -- on what I've already said. It's that many people make this point to us, that fighting Daesh, and protecting civilians are two sides of the same coin. You can't say that you are fighting terrorism but have civilians being killed in this way, with the responsibility to protect them, completely forgotten.

First and foremost in terms of the regimes and the authorities themselves, but then also in terms of the international community's role, and therefore we now do have to look at practical ways where we can stop civilians being killed in this way.

MR. POLLACK: Then if you prefer state building and nation building, sign me up, I'm good with that; especially given how people feel about the term nation building, we probably do need to find a different one. You posed it as a question but I'm going to assume by implication, that you think that the smarter move is your second path, and I'm supposed to say, I think that is the right way to go.

You know, the lesson that I learn, firstly, before we ever went into Iraq, just talking to people, who worked on Bosnia, worked on Kosovo, Cambodia, Haiti, team in all these different places was that these processes work best when they work from the bottom-up, and I think that Iraq and Afghanistan, because we didn't bother to do that have proved that once again. That trying from the top down is much more problematic.

Now there obviously has to be a top-down component to it, right. You can't just walk in and do nothing, at that top level, and particularly you are going to need a constitutional process, and you are going to need, you know, folks advising you, you know, if the U.N. is in charge, as I think that they ought to be, you are going to need folks at that level as well.

But in an ideal world, you really want to allow the leadership to grow from the bottom-up. And I think that you are absolutely right, it needs to start right away from the moment that we cross the border. In fact, we need to be planning for it, preparing for it, even before these forces cross the border. Which is my response to Mr. Adam's question about what's my one thing I'd say to the President, it's that.

It's, you know, Mr. President, you are going to have to do state building in Syria, the problem is well beyond Daesh, and it has to start now. As any number of people reminded us very rightly before the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. started planning for the reconstruction of Germany in Japan in 1942, right, and it wasn't a day too soon. And there's a lot of work that needs to go into it, and it is a terrible mistake to try and make it up after we've already started to do that.

And then last, the question about Iran. As always because it's Iran, it's complicated, and let me try to be a little bit brief though, and it differs in both places. In Iraq the Iranians, obviously, have a very important role to play. Right now, like it or not, Mashia don't like it but they are the great power factor of the Shia, they've got advisors all

over the place, another -- there are a lot of different questions I could have raised in my prepared remarks, another one I was thinking but chose not to, but I'll raise it now.

It's, I want to know how the American advisors to the Iraqi Units are going to interact with the Iranian advisors, to those units. That's going to be a really interesting dynamic and, you know, we'll have to figure that out, but the Iranians are there, they have a very important role to play. But, you know, I think both there, and I'm transition a little bit over to Syria, you know, what we learnt from Iraq is that a strong Iraqi political process takes care of the Iranian political influence.

It marginalizes it, and it marginalizes it better than we ever could, and I think that it would be a mistake for us to worry obsessively about Iranian influence in Iraq. The smart move is to try to rebuild a strong, functional Iraqi State. That's what we need to deal with the problems of Iraq, to deal with problems of Daesh, and ultimately that is the right answer to whatever our concerns are about Iran. The Iraqis will keep the Iranians at bay much more effectively than we ever will.

Syria, I'd say it's a matter of sequencing. Right now, again, the Iranians along the Russians are the great power backers of the regime. And if we are going to have a negotiated settlement which, again, I think does start with a major shift on the battlefield. But you don't want to simply empower the Sunnis to slaughter all of the Alawis, that's not a good outcome to this either, and I think that that's why the point that Salman has been at pains to make both today and a whole variety of other instances, that there are Alawis who are looking to reconcile; who would be willing to get rid of Assad.

And I think that's what it's ultimately going to come down to. It's to convince the Iranians that Assad is finished. That militarily this is not going to result in his victory, and then it becomes a moment, when I think the Iranians have every incentive to

cooperate in forging a new power sharing arrangement, very much along the lines of what happened with the Russians in Bosnia.

If you remember, the Russians were dead set about the date in the (inaudible) or something like it, up until the moment that, you know, the bombing campaign, but really the Croats and the Bosniaks on the ground were beating the stuffing out of the Serbs, and it became clear, that the Serbs were going to lose. And then all of a sudden the Russians, not only were in favor of it, they wanted to be a part of the peacekeeping force.

To make sure that they had their say, and the Serbs got their say. And you can imagine the kind of analogous situation with Iran and Syria, whereby if the Iranians become convinced that Assad is not going to win this fight, he is going to lose, they then have every incentive to back the Alawis and cutting loose Assad, and cutting a deal soon, before they do get crushed. And that's how you get to a kind of date and like solution for Syria.

And again, once that happens, then I think that it becomes up to the Syrians, to decide what kind of relationship they want to have with Iran. Again, I think that if we build a strong stable, pluralist Syrian State, they are going to determine their own relationship with the Iranians, and my guess is that Iran will not be a dominant power in Syria. But I think that's, again, how we need to think about it, and again, the common thread that runs between in the end, we've got to build strong, stable states, in both places.

We need that for our own reasons, for their reasons, and one of the side benefits is that will help to diminish Iran's influence in both countries.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. So we are going to do another round, now, and glad to have a number of hands. I've seen these three for a couples of minutes, so I'll

take them and then we'll move in the following round out here, but --

QUESTIONER: Gary.

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, exactly. Gary, and then here in the center, and then over on the side, please?

MR. MITCHELL: I'm Garrick Mitchell, and I write the Mitchell Report, and I want to -- Mike, I want to sort of pose two questions that I want to -- I would appreciate the group addressing, that really haven't been talked about today, but which are out there in the land, and I'm talking about in the U.S. And probably not anybody in this room, but there are questions that come up all the time, and I would appreciate hearing the best answers to those.

One is, we are pretty sure this is a statement (inaudible) is intended to be the question. We are pretty sure that when we engage in kinetic actions these days, in that part of the world, we are creating more Jihadists than we are destroying militarily. And what's worse is the geography from which these people are coming, is broader and getting closer to home.

Second, Ken has said that -- he didn't say ISIL, but I'll say ISIL because (inaudible), isn't the problem, ISIL is the symptom. The problem is this proliferation of civil wars, I hope I have that right. If that's the case, why are we in this, and isn't it over the long haul about time for us with large, to understand that these are deep-seated problems that are centuries old, that had been complicated by recent history and that there may come a time at which we, collectively, the world we need to get out and let these people deal with it themselves?

MR. O'HANLON: There's only one thing I know that you don't know Gary, which is how many hands are up behind, you, and therefore I'm going to -- these were big questions, I'm going to ask for short answers, and I'm going to -- so with

apologies that they won't be complete answers to these grand sweeps of history, but they are very good questions. Here in the middle?

MR. ASWAD: Thank you. I'm Norris Aswad, with the German Embassy. So one of the things that we discussed a lot over the last few days, especially Turkey's involvement and potential role, and I know that General Allen, also, is expected, I think, tomorrow in Ankara, and I'd really like to hear your thoughts about what difference could Turkey make on the ground especially in the border region of course? What holds them back, and how can they be encouraged to get more involved? Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: And finally, over here, with this gentleman?

MR. SAJAT: I'm Cornel Sajat, from Bangladesh. I have been engaging and teaching with Madrasas and Islamic Schools, for the last seven years. What we are talking about, IS, is not such a big, experience or such a popular concept in those Madrasas -- in almost every Muslim country. What they are talking about is something bigger, it's called Khilafat. Now Khilafat is a much easier word, and a much more peaceful word, but if you remember when the IS started they made a Khilafah, and that's the Khilafat I'm talking about.

By the name of Khilafat, teams are going around to Madrasas, and to many Muslims all over the world, recruiting people, and telling them that they are a secret sentries, say, sentries, you'll be trained, you'll be getting a lot of money, and you will inshallah go to heaven if you become a martyr. And it is working.

Is the international community aware of it, and taking some steps about it, that's very important? Number two sir, Bangladesh has shed too much blood in peacekeeping force. We are the largest peacekeeping force for the world, and I work on that. If you have to have peacekeeping in Syria, you can't have the same forces, the same equipment that you're using in Ivory Coast, or in Sierra Leone, or in Bosnia. There

has to be Special Forces under U.N.

Preparation should go from now -- selection should go on from now, and it's -- it must be prepared from now. These are my two small suggestions. Thank you, sir.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I will pass myself, in responding to any of these, so Ken, or Salman, who would like to start?

MR. SHAIKH: Do you want to start?

MR. POLLACK: Sure. I'll start, since you start last time. All right, so I'm going to leave the hard questions, to Salman, and just take Gary's easy one, and try to be quick about it. Gary, as you know, as well as anybody in this audience, maybe better, you know, one of the things that we try to do at Brookings is we try to take the tools of scholarship, and the knowledge of the scholars and apply them to policy questions.

And civil wars, is one of these areas, where we actually have a phenomenal body of scholarship. I mean, it's a group of people working on civil wars for 30, 40 years, and it's just been a tremendous work on this subject. And what's really striking is that; what is the common impression that the civil wars are part of this century's old problems and, you know, they are ancient hatreds?

That's actually not the case at all, okay. They are borne of state failure, and when there is state failure groups reach for primordial identifies. And primordial identities don't matter. In every state they are different but in every state they exist. And people go reaching for them, and it's all a product of state failure and the creation of a security vacuum.

And so, ultimately dealing with problems of civil wars is ultimately about dealing with that. Again, it's this great body of literature out there. I think that it's still, nevertheless, a fair question to ask, well, why is it that we keep getting involved in all of

this stuff, right? And why is it happening again, and again in the Middle East?

And why it's happening again and again in the Middle East? My answer to that, and at some point I'm going write this, is that what we are seeing the Middle East and have seen over the last 20, 30 years, is the failure of the post-war Arab State system, the Muslim, Middle Eastern State system, that after World War II, after decolonization you had the appearance of a group of states, and a state system, a regional order overseen by the United States, that has increasingly been under pressure over the last 20 years. Okay.

And this is what gave rise to the Arab Spring, and much of what we are seeing in these civil wars, is a product of the Arab Spring, coupled with the United States going in and breaking a few regimes, and then not putting anything in its place. But it's this consistent pattern of state failure, that's why what's going on in Libya and Syria and Yemen looks so much like what's going on in Iraq, and what was going on in Lebanon, and what's going on in Afghanistan.

That's ultimately what this is all about. And, you know, my feeling is that many of these civil wars -- all of these civil wars are a tragedy. Many of these civil wars that were not necessarily a threat to American interest, but some of them are. And unfortunately the Iraqi Civil War is one of them. And as I think you know, of this point, and so my feeling about Syria was, I was very nervous Syria, right, from the get-go, because of my fear of spillover. Because of my fear and one of the problems that you see with these civil wars, is these civil wars spread.

The civil war in one country can cause civil war in another, and given that you had a bunch states around Syria, I was very fearful that it would cause civil wars in other countries. But my feeling was, look, until that happens, spillover is nothing but a possibility, a potential out there, it's reasonable for the United States to say, we are not

going to get involve, we will try containing it, which is a very difficult thing to do.

Well, my feeling is, June 10th that policy failed, and spillover from Syria reignited the civil war in Iraq, which unfortunately does affect U.S. interest because the oil, right. Let's put that on the table, let's not shy away from it, because of our independence, because of the global economy's dependence, on stable oil prices, right.

And so, you know, I come to the Syria problem somewhat reluctantly, but my feeling is, we are now in it. President Obama was even more reluctant than I was, and he is now in it. Being in it, we have no alternative but to handle it properly. And the right way to handle it is to address it as the problem of the civil war that needs to get handled as such. And again, the nice thing is, we do have a very nice body of work, from the scholars, from the policy community as well, which Dan can attest to, of how you go about doing these things. It's not impossible.

It is difficult, and it isn't necessarily cheap, which again is why I'd like to see other people paying for this one, and I would just agree that, yes, we've got to do this now, and having others participating, a wonderful thing, but it needs to start now.

MR. SHAIKH: The problem coming up here is that we want to keep talking, but I'll try and be brief, myself. First of all on the Khilafat thing; I mean it's clear to say first and foremost that 99 percent of -- I would say 98 percent of Muslims don't follow Mr. Bagdadi, or feel that there is this new state born.

Sure, I as a Muslim, very much, like so many other Muslims, who don't take his pronouncements and establishments of the state very seriously, and we have to say that very clearly. And also, the methods that they've employed are completely anathema to everything that -- to teachings of Islam, I believe and have been taught, have been said. So we have to say first and foremost.

Having said that, it is this issue of state failure, the lack of dignity, the

lack of prospects, the political breakdown in society's inability to share power, which is giving rise to this kind of ideology. And by the way -- and which is also being fermented by certain elements and Muslim elements that are certainly in the West, very small, but nevertheless; and that is why I'm worried about aspects of Pakistan.

That's why I'm worried about other aspects, whether it's in Bangladesh or whether it is elsewhere, in India, as well as Central Asia, et cetera. And I think it's this prospect of having leaderships that are focused on their own populations in building out their states, and getting beyond that, post independent failures that they've all been living through, which is so important.

And here let me turn it to the question, Syria. I actually -- maybe you think I'm crazy -- but I actually think Syria is potentially a very important catalyst to show what is possible in these societies. Syrians, first and foremost, by their nature, are not sectarian, they are Syrians first, and you hear that even today when -- and you listen and you hear them, they speak very much as Syrians first, despite the differences in geography that they may have, or in terms of sect and all the rest of it.

And that, in itself is a very sort of a heartening thing to hear, but then the question is, how can we empower these majority elements not those on the extremes, whether it's the Assad Regime, or whether it is Daesh, and those on the other side, who do want to see this as the sectarian fight, because in the middle, they are building schools for each other still.

In each (inaudible), there are armed groups that are working with Christian doctors who are building -- who built a hospital. There are many such incidences through this conflict when you have that kind of cross -- or where they are protecting each other. But it goes back to what kind of political process can harness the kind pluralism that of Syrian society and turn it into a workable power-sharing formula.

And that I actually think is why Syria does matter. It also matters because of course state failure in Syria acts as a catalyst for the kind of spillover that we've seen, which of course is something that we have to avoid at all cost.

On the Turkish question, very quickly; well, there are two problems of course that the Turks have raised. One is the question of Assad, they want to see a clear pathway, as does King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, when he sat down with Barak Obama and others. They want to see a pathway whereby which Assad leaves, and that's why they are suggesting these kinds of ideas on no-fly zones, and safe zones, and other such things. The other of course is the added complication of the Kurdish question, and particularly the role of the PKK, the PYG of which the Syrian arm which initially grew strong because the Assad Regime chose not to fight against them, but to let them grow.

And this, of course, poses a big problem. What the Turks are essentially doing now in my view, is negotiating the best deal with the U.S., and with the Western powers. And it's a game workmanship because there are real lives at stake here, as we are seeing in Kobani, one only hopes that we can come to a quick agreement and understanding on the way forward, because we do need Turkey as an active part of this coalition.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. We are going to do -- Well, the final round is going to be a lightning round. Lightning for you, lightning for us. We promise to try to keep our part, I'm sure you'll do a better job that we. But nonetheless, one question per person, please; I'm going to take four, and then we are going to wrap up within eight minutes from now. This gentleman here, in the fourth row, I think, and then -- and then I want to make sure I get off to the sides a little bit as well. So back over there, work our way up over here, and then finally, this gentleman here. So if I could do that. You're going to take notes. Okay. Right here, so it's going to be five, believe it or not. So the

onus is on us, to keep our questions straight. Please, ma'am?

QUESTIONER: Avi (Inaudible), Georgetown University. I'd appreciate in hearing about Syrian responses to the airstrikes, and regional responses to the airstrikes. Before the airstrikes, the U.S. had supported police, and local government's efforts, on the guidance area. I'm wondering why Syrians responses have been to these; if they've been effective, and if I could be the first step towards stake holding?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Back over here, please?

MS. MARRAZZA: Hi, Martha Marrazza, from Crisis Action. In your opinion, what are the main blockages preventing the U.S. from more seriously pursuing a political solution in Syria? And how can civil society groups both here and in the region support and unblock those blockages?

MR. O'HANLON: How about here?

QUESTIONER: I was glad to -- My name Winter Burgess -- I was glad to hear about the Kurds just now, because they weren't mentioned much before, but how can we ignore the secular, the only secular effective force on the ground? Obviously it's complicated by the PKK, and NATO, but how can the U.S. approach this?

MR. O'HANLON: Over here, please?

QUESTIONER: I'm with (inaudible) within Middle East, too, and this is a question for Ken. It's hard to believe that the Administration and President Obama does not have the Syrian political strategy, partly after the interview with Friedman, and which he said, I always ask now the day after. So, what is it? There must be one. And if not, why not, and what's the explanation?

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Finally, here, in the second row please?

MR. AL-KHATTEEB: Thanks. Luay al-Khatteeb from Brookings Doha Center, My question is to Ken, now, with all these strategies that we have are we just

ignoring the fact that Iraq is already divided into three. Are we just delaying just -- I mean, delaying that divorce moment between the three hearts? And I'm asking the question because many analysts talk about what's happening today from the 10th of June. From the 10th of June, that Sunni-dominated zone became a no-go zone to the army, but it was a deadly zone to the rest of Iraqis, specifically Shia and Kurds.

In 2003 a regime change was never being -- never acknowledged at a national level, and it was ignored at the regional level. Yes we have embassies, but the sentiment in these countries, did not comply with that regime change. Now, we really need to be candid about this. Are we just delaying that divorce moment? The Kurds -- the fact that the Kurds want to be part of Iraq is for one simple reason, they want 17 percent plus from oil that happen to be in the South of Iraq, in Basra. And the Sunni would only recognize the rest of Iraqis and Iraqis if they get their fair share from oil, in Basra.

There is no national identity, that was not from the 2003, not from the 10 June 2014, it was from 1920; we experienced 10 successful coup d'etats, half a century of dictatorship, and so on and so forth. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Okay. Two minutes each for my good friends, and then we'll be done?

MR. POLLACK: You can take three, I'll take one.

MR. SHAIKH: I'll pick up two different questions, Alan and Luay's, plus work in some others as well. Alan, I can only hear from other folks on the inside, that there is no plan in place and they are concerned about it as well; which is one of the reasons, why I am trying to use my voice to call attention to this.

Why is this case? You know, it strikes me that there may be and in some ways, it's also an answer to the young man's question before. This maybe a

bureaucratic or political issue, or -- right it might be a bureaucratic issue, might be a political issue. The bureaucratic issue may be that they just haven't gotten around to it, but the President has been busy. You know, they had to put in place a military strategy, they've been flying airstrikes, he's been giving speeches, he's had to deal with Ebola, and he has to deal with a whole bunch of other things as well.

The government may just be focused on this at the moment, and perhaps they just haven't quite gotten yet to, and by the way, they are also trying to build a big international coalition and it may just be that they haven't quite gotten to this. You've served in government for many years, you know the capacity of government is inherently limited, and it may be in the bowels of the Pentagon, there are a bunch of people who are starting to think about this, because that's what they but it hasn't gotten to the inter-agency level yet, and it may not have gotten to the President level yet, so that's one possibility.

But what I'm concerned about is the political answer to that question, which is, that the President hasn't yet crossed that Rubicon, and he is not yet ready to make that commitment. On this, you know, I think the key is -- I think he's probably following, that is, you know, he is behind American public opinion, which I think has been far more supportive of the strategy than I think he anticipated.

And I've been looking at the polls very, very carefully, in addition to all the anecdotal information that the polling sites produce, which suggests actually, fairly -- you know, quite strong support for everything that he's done so far. For the air campaign, for the training of the Syrian troops, for the training in Iraq, all the stuff, very, very strong support. The only issue where there still is a fair degree of negativity, is on the commitment of ground combat forces, although even that, you know, is changing over the course of time. So that's kind of an interesting thing.

But, you know, I worry that this is simply a matter of Barak Obama, the President who believes he was elected to get us out of wars in the Middle East, not wanting to recognize that, okay, he has done it. As I keep saying, we are committed to Syria, and we are either going to do it right, or we are going to do it half-assed. We are not going to not do it at this point in time. And so my hope is that he goes and does it.

And Luay, to your question about Iraq, you know, my feeling all along has been that since June 10th, the likelihood that we will go back to the old Iraq is gone, right. I don't know what the new Iraq looks like though. I suspect that the Kurds will at some point go their own separate way. When that will be? I can't tell you, but I still think there's a high risk of that happening within the next 10 or 12 months.

But you are absolutely right, that the money is a very strong incentive to remain, at least, nominally, a part of Iraq for some period of time. And we'll have to see how they work things out. In my mind though, the more complicated question is the Arab part of Iraq. The four-fifths of Iraq, because as you know well, most Iraqi Arabs consider themselves to the Iraqis, and all part of the same community, they are not looking, necessarily, to split, but the problem is that the problems of the last 10 years, have become so big, it's going to be very hard to get these pieces of the puzzle back together. And again, that's part of the challenge that I see moving forward in Iraq.

MR. POLLACK: Okay. I actually want to address the same question in terms of political situation, and then the Kurds as well. I actually think that -- I mean, of course they are thinking about it, and I guess I've been privy to some of the discussions. The simple fact is that there have not been any great easy answers, especially after the set of post Geneva period as being a great hangover.

What do we do? We can't bring the opposition groups with a regime that doesn't want to talk. We can't continue to go through that head-banging exercise. So

what do we do? And I know Secretary Kerry, has been very much focused on, and I think also, the relative malaise of the opposition itself, has not helped gel more ideas. And that of course, and I alluded to this right at the start, there is a dangerous notion that somehow Assad is here to stay, at least for now, so let's leave him to one side, let's not focus on that aspect, and therefore let's not really focus on the political aspects of what needs to be done, at least for now.

I think that it's all wrong, and what really needs to take place, and I think it is happening actually, is a sort of a reeducation exercise about, how do we approach this. And part of that re-education exercise, and now what's become much more acceptable is the thinking that we have to think much more -- broader, in the types of Syrians that we want to involve in any kind of political process.

You hear that over and over and now. I'd like to think it's partly to do with some of our work, but I think it's other's work too, in trying to bring to bear the various constituencies that out there, both inside Syria and outside, as well the regional players who would actually support a political process which involves a much more broader array of influential, important, nationalistic and other Syrians.

But that does require U.S. leadership as well as the United Nations we have, my friend Stefan in (inaudible) now, you know, who is a good man, he has got lots of experience, looking out for political entry points, to a new process, and he'll certainly be probing those, and he's now to be, as I said from the start, a renewed effort in that regard, and a renewed effort to eyeball the Russians and the Iranians as well, and continue to test what is their willingness to really explore very serious ideas. Where the reality still remain that the Assad regime doesn't want to talk politics, they still think, somehow, they can ride this out, and get the West on its side in the fight against Daesh.

And then, just on the Kurdish question. Yes, of course, and of course we

must recognize, especially with what's going on with Kobani again, the real stress and suffering that the Syrian Kurds are going through. Part of it is, I guess, resolving health by involving of curds from around the region, and the KRG in particular has a role to play in that regard.

It's more controversial, the PKK and the Syrian Kurds, but I would also stress something that I've stressed for a very long time, there's a vital need for a Syrian Arab dialogue, which can be in Syria, and which can act as a catalyst for a much broader dialogue, across the region, and which is absolutely needed. And in this case, again, we've got good material, because you've got Arab Tribes and Syrian Kurdish who have lived together as cousins for hundreds of years, in the same space.

And pretty much still want the same things, even if sometimes they have been in conflicts. I know this because, again, we've been running lots of workshops with them, where these -- where they probably understand each other better than anyone else. And that of course then has to translate into practical action. We've already taken some of that in terms of FSA groups teaming up with Kurdish fighting groups, on the ground to fight against Daesh. But we need to, again, find a way of encouraging that, rather than just thinking of them as a separate entity.

MR. O'HANLON: In closing, I don't know that your question got full attention, so I mean, without trying to do it justice, or keep folks longer, I would simply saying the following, not knowing what's happening in Syria and the specific places where we drop bombs, I would just draw analogies with my understanding of the Iraq and Afghanistan or other experiences, the bottom line is it all depends what comes next.

You know, you might, or might not make people angry, if you accidentally drop a bomb and not exactly where you were -- where you trying to. Or even if you took out 10 bad guys with 3 good guys, you can create some pretty mixed feelings. So the

whole question is what comes next. Is there a strategy that allows people who want to work with you to stay alive, and have some hope of opposing your common enemy while you are trying to do this off from such a distance that there's no prospect of really shaping.

And the reason I say this basically is if you look in places in Iraq and Afghanistan where we drop bombs for a long time, during unsuccessful phases of the war. The way in which the population behave was often very different from how it would then behave the minute we helped create forces on the ground. Either our own, or their own countries, that could then combine with the air power to create some kind of security or some kind of changed battlefield momentum.

So I think on the airstrike issue, it all depends, and it just calls off of the need for a fuller strategy than what we've got right now, would be how I would conclude. Which I hope is not a bad way to end the whole debate and the whole event.

So, thank you all for being here, very much.

(Applause)

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