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BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

WHAT THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
MEANS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING

706 Duke Street, Suite 100

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

PARTICIPANTS:

SULTAN BARAKAT, Moderator
Director of Research
Brookings Doha Center

ABDULLAH BAABOOD
Director
Gulf Studies Center

JOHN HUDAK
Senior Fellow, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BARAKAT: While we get ready on T.V., we will be conducting this session in English, so if you need simultaneous translation, please help yourself to the headsets that are on your chair. And if can please ask you to turn off your mobile and any other form that may make, any other instrument that may make noises during the session. This session will be broadcast on Al Jazeera Mubasher and therefore we usually have the usual caveats about language, and so on, which I'm sure will not be an issue here. But please keep that in mind as you, as you speak. And because of that translation, we will ask our speakers to speak a little bit slower than usual so that we can catch up with the translation.

Sorry, I'm just waiting for the signal to start. Good evening. I welcome you all to this discussion about the presidential U.S. elections. I'm Sultan Barakat and I'm the director of research at the Brookings Doha Center. And today I have the honor of moderating a very distinguished panel focused on the

issue of the American elections as part of our foreign policy debate series.

At the Brookings Doha Center, we feel a particular responsibility towards reaching out to the community in Doha and beyond. And to try and make available the best of our research to the maximum number of users in order to achieve positive impact as much as possible. Today, our discussion is going to be slightly different from what we usually do. We are usually focused on Middle Eastern efforts. We get colleagues from the United States to come and talk to us about their findings on our countries, their analysis and so on. Today, we are going to be reversing the role somehow and we've invited one of our most distinguished scholars from D.C. to come and share with us his insights, his analysis, his follow up on the unfolding American elections.

Whether we like it or not, the Gulf, like many regions in the world, is, and will be influenced with the results of the American elections. The size of the United States, its power internationally, its

physical power, military power, its appetite to intervene around the world, its feeling of responsibility to intervene around the world makes the next presidential election -- the next president, of concern, not just to the Americans, but to a much wider community outside the United States. And it is from that perspective that we thought we'll invite John Hudak to come all the way from D.C., spend a couple of days with us, share with us his insights on the process, and his initial findings and predictions as to what could happen in the weeks and months to come.

However, in order to make it really more relevant to our immediate apprehensions, and concerns in the region, we've asked John to focus specifically on issues related to the Middle East. In other words, what do the candidates think and feel about the Middle East and what are the policies they are advocating in relation to the Middle East specifically. To enrich the discussion further, we invited our host, Dr. Abdullah Baabood, who is a distinguished professor at

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the University of Qatar to come and act as a discussant, particularly from that perspective. Dr. Abdullah will be focusing his questions and raising issues in relation to how the Middle East perceives the American elections.

In the form of introduction, those of you who don't know John Hudak, who are from outside the Brooking community, John is a senior fellow, specializing in governor's studies. He also serves as the deputy director for the Center for Effective Public Management, and his research focuses on two broad areas. One of them looking into presidential powers and the way they get used and abused, if I may say, in some cases, and on election campaigns in general. His most recent book entitled Presidential Pork, very inappropriate for the Middle East, the title, but it does refer to the idea of understanding how presidents and using presidential power kind of buy influence or exert influence on various policies. So I highly recommend it for those of you who would like to learn more about how the U.S. democracy

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overall operates and how the office of the president in particular, runs its affairs and exerts influence on day-to-day basis within policy making in the U.S.

To moderate the day, I will ask John to start with a 30 minute presentation, giving us an initial idea, a broad idea as to how the elections work in the U.S., who are the top candidates to your mind, running today, and maybe conclude with ideas about their policies towards the Middle East. And then we will move to Dr. Baabood to ask some questions and I'll also be asking questions to try and elaborate on some of the issues raised before we open the floor to the audience and we have altogether about an hour and a half to do this. We are limited because of the recording with Al Jazeera Mubasher so I will have to be strict in terms of time. And I will, when we come to the questions, I would really appreciate again if you could make your questions precise and to the point as much as possible so, without further ado, John, if you would like to give us an overview of the American elections today.

MR. HUDAK: Sure. Well, thank you for the introduction. Thank you, Dr. Baabood, for hosting and thank you to Qatar University for welcoming me back to talk a little bit about the U.S. presidential election. As Sultan had suggested, I'll start my talk by giving an overview of how the presidential election system works in the United States. It's something that I assume is almost mysterious to people living abroad, and frankly, sometimes, it's just as mysterious to Americans who don't fully understand how their own election procedures work.

I will talk a little bit about what has gone on in the race so far. Candidates have been running for president now for over a year, and we just started voting in the presidential primaries this month. And so I'll talk a little bit about what has gone on and I'll transition into discussing some of the issues that are relevant to this region and briefly about what some of the candidates' views on those issues are, regardless of whether they are mainstream or at times offensive and worrisome. I will finish up by

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looking forward a little bit, and then I of course welcome your participation and your questions.

So the American presidential election system is quite long. It begins with candidates making announcements that they intend to run. Those announcements seem to be earlier and earlier every new presidential election cycle. And so for the most part, the presidential campaign in the U.S. is about two years long. It is also quite costly. To put it into perspective, in 2012, when President Obama was seeking reelection, both he and his opponent, Governor Mitt Romney, each raised and spent \$1 billion American dollars on their campaign. We are currently on track to far outpace that record, and some expectations are that in all of the American elections that will happen in November, that there will be \$6 to \$7 billion spent on the race.

Technically, from a procedural perspective, the race doesn't really begin until February 1st. This February 1st, the first votes were cast in the Iowa caucuses and that begins a series of dates,

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usually Saturdays or Tuesdays, where voters from each party in each American state separately tries to pick a nominee, the person who will ultimately run for president. In some years, there's not much of a race for a party. When a president runs for reelection, he rarely has any competition, as we saw in 2012 with President Obama and in 2004 with President Bush. But with President Obama being term limited, it sets up the unique scenario in which both parties are holding open contests. That is, there's no incumbent president running and so both contests are quite competitive.

For Democrats, the race may be a little less competitive, but it is certainly smaller, a smaller group of candidates. The term, the campaign effectively started with three candidates, Secretary Clinton, Senator Sanders and Governor O'Malley. It's now reduced down to a two person race between Clinton and Sanders.

Republicans, on the other hand, began with about 17 candidates running for president. Some, very

well accomplished with strong resumes, others with no resume whatsoever. And they, the field has now winnowed down to five. And really, of those five, only three are strong contenders, if you look at the results from the previous primaries that we've had and looking ahead at polling. So, those three are Donald Trump, Senator Cruz and Senator Rubio. Still remaining in the race are Dr. Carson and Governor Kasich.

So, as I mentioned, Iowa began voting on February 1st. That was followed by New Hampshire, and then last night, I guess two nights ago -- sorry, I'm still, I traveled yesterday, so my concept of what day it is is a little off. So on Saturday, Republicans in the state of South Carolina, and Democrats in the state of Nevada cast votes and Clinton winning the Democratic contest and Trump winning the Republican contest. And as I said, this will continue over the course of months. Oftentimes, there will be one primary on a given day, though some days there will be many. There will be about a dozen primaries held on

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March 1st. And what a primary does is that the candidates compete for votes, and then depending on what percentages they get, and based on the allocation rules within that state, they are given delegates going to the nominating convention, each of which takes place in mid to late July.

The person who wins the majority of delegates becomes the nominee. Usually, this plays out fairly quickly. You don't have to get all the way to convention to know who the nominee will be. That has been the case in almost every modern presidential election. This year looks a little different though. No one, at least on the Republican side, no one is earning a majority of the support of a state. Donald Trump has been polling the best of everyone. He has been -- he won two of the first three states. But even still, he has not reached even 40 percent support in each of those states, which means that there is a chance that Republicans will go to their party convention in July not certain of who the nominee is.

Now that sounds like a challenge. It sounds

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fairly worrisome. But if you're a Republican who doesn't like Donald Trump, that is the best situation that can happen. Because what it allows then is negotiation and brokering and probably back room deals to decide who will be the Republican nominee who will likely face off between Hillary Clinton, who is almost certain to be the Democratic nominee.

And once that begins, once that process is played out and both parties have selected their candidates, those two candidates run against each other in what is a fairly abbreviated campaign of just a few months. Of course they're effectively already running against each other, and this year we'll elect our president on November 8th. The person who wins takes the oath on January 20th. The election of course is not a national plebiscite. It is also a complicated process in itself where the presidential candidates compete in individual state contests, all held on the same day, all held on November 8th, what they are competing for in those states is a win because that win gives them, in most cases, all of the

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electoral votes that a state holds, which is generally based on population, though not perfectly so. And whoever wins 270 votes becomes president.

And in the past two elections, Democrats have done quite well, President Obama was elected by a large margin in 2008 and a still large, but slightly smaller reelection margin in 2012. And so what Republicans need to do is to start appealing to broader groups of the American electorate if they want to beat the numbers that President Obama had in 2012 and that Democrats are essentially predisposed to because of political issues, because of demographic changes in the United States, and for a variety of reasons, Democrats began this presidential campaign with an advantage.

The reality of the campaign for Republicans has not made that advantage go away. And in many ways, when you look at the candidates who are running and the serious candidates who are running, they have, in some cases, done a disservice to their party in making statements that they make, positions that they

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take, just the day-to-day politics, which lacks the decorum that is typical of a presidential race means that Republicans are putting themselves in a weaker position.

That said, American politics can change all the time, very quickly. In fact, the Brookings Doha Center will be putting out a report I authored later on today. I finished that report a week ago, and it's already slightly outdated. So my apologies on that, but some candidates have already dropped out of the race in just a week's time. And certainly more will. It will probably be also outdated a week from now. What it does, however, is provides the type of overview I just discussed, but it also has individual candidate profiles of the leading Democratic and Republican candidates. It talks a little bit about their background and then also talks about issues relevant to the Gulf region and their positions on those issues.

So the issues involve the Iran Nuclear Deal, strategy in the fight against ISIS, the Syrian refugee

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crisis, relations with the state of Israel and then I included a separate section that is sort of a catch-all, that looks at certain issues relevant to the Gulf region that candidates have happened to engage on their own. They're not as big picture as the ones I just listed, but the Gulf region comes up in debates. It comes up in campaign events, it comes up from questions from the media. And sometimes, if you're lucky, the presidential candidate will actually respond with an answer or a position or a view, though it's not always the case.

And so, what we have with relations, in terms of relations with the Gulf region, issues relevant to the Gulf region, one of two things happens. Either all of the presidential candidates seem to agree with each other. It doesn't happen on every issue, but there are a couple, or Republicans tend to agree with other Republicans and Democrats tend to agree with other Democrats. In general, those two views do not meet well, and there are several examples of that that I will discuss.

But what has happened in general on foreign policy, there is very little difference between what Secretary Clinton views on many of these issues and what Senator Sanders, her Democratic opponent views. On the Republican side, there is a little bit of difference, what we say is there's daylight between the candidates. Unfortunately, much of that daylight exists as candidates make efforts to -- Republican candidates make efforts to make more extreme, more outrageous, and more offensive statements with regard to Middle East policy. Now that's not characterizing all Republicans. There are certainly ones who have very serious, legitimate, thoughtful foreign policy. Some of them have dropped out of the race already. But what is happening is a campaign that have the opportunity to have one of ideas and one of policies.

And for a variety of reasons, including who is part of the campaign, and what I would consider a real dereliction of duty from the American media, issues aren't being discussed. Policy positions are not being engaged in the way that they should. This

is true on both sides, but it's particularly true on the Republican side, as statements are made, critiques, Republican critiques of other Republicans are not necessarily dealt with by media in a way that is fact finding or pushes the truth in favor of -- and pushes out false comments or information that's just wrong.

But all that aside, we do know a little bit about what how the candidates view relations with the Middle East. It's obviously a vitally important issue for whoever will become the next American president. On day one, they will be facing a situation in, with ISIS that has to have immediate attention. I think many in the world are waiting for more American leadership on this issue. And I think many across the world feel that President Obama has not done everything that he could to remedy the situation. Now, there are certainly plenty who think he's done too much. But that is something awaiting the next president.

In general terms, many of the candidates,
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Democrats and Republicans, want to see the Gulf region more engaged in the fight against ISIS. Almost every candidate has made this point, right or wrong, whether you agree with it or not, every candidate has made that point, that they want to see KSA and others commit more funding, more troops, and help contribute to a strategy to help deal with this threat, which is a threat not just to the people of Syria, and Iraq but a threat to the region in general. In terms of violence, in terms of stability and while the candidates agree that there should be a more outsized role for some of the regions powers in this fight, that is about where their agreement ends.

There are different strategies that have been talked about. Senator Cruz, for instance, supports a more robust American presence. He also supports carpet bombing of this region. Mr. Trump has a very odd perspective on how he would like to deal with the situation, which includes having the state of Iraq transfer \$1.5 trillion in oil revenue to the United States and then carpet bombing the oil fields.

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This is his approach, his stated approach. There are others who want to see -- other Republicans who want to see a less aggressive American role but play more of a supportive role in terms of the use of troops, in terms of training, in terms of coalition building.

And at the end of the day, there are some Republicans, I think Senator Rubio is certainly one, Governor Kasich is another, who see this not just as conflict, a war, but also a very serious humanitarian problem, not just that it's creating hundreds of thousands of refugees in Syria, but this is really a humanitarian crisis in terms of the way it is affecting the region, the periphery of the region itself and the ripple effects that it's having all over the world. And there is quite a bit of discussion about how we deal not just with the military side of this, but also the human side of this. The most central, obviously, as I said is the Syrian refugee crisis.

But once conflict is over, rebuilding what has been numerous decimated cities in Syria as well as

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Iraq beyond just this conflict itself, but the American invasion as well. That rebuilding is going to be a very important next consideration if the conflict can be suspended now or in the next administration. Some of the candidates have talked about how to do that. Many of them on the Republican side would rather the Gulf rebuild itself, I'm sorry, the Middle East rebuild itself or have GCC nations contribute in that rebuilding effort. Others have expressed a desire to use American funding to support refugee camps in Syria or in Jordan. Or to use that money as a vehicle of direct foreign aid to help not just in the resolution of the conflict, but then the post conflict challenges that come up.

But in general, the differences between the parties on this type of approach is that Democrats are willing to spend American money on this conflict and Republicans prefer not to. That's not a perfect line in the sand, but it generally is too. It also reflects expectations among American partisans.

Republicans want less government spending, they want

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effectively, in many cases, very little foreign aid and Democrats have more moderate or more liberal views on the role of American spending abroad.

With Syrian refugees, both Secretary Clinton and Senator Sanders have talked about welcoming certain numbers, the numbers seem to fluctuate depending on the speech, a certain number, tens of thousands of Syrian refugees to the United States and then as I said, also helping support other nations who are willing to take in refugees. They have also publicly stated that they expect the Gulf region and other parts of the Middle East and Northern Africa to take in many more refugees than they have. That's their stated position, but they differ from Republicans in the acceptance of refugees.

Among the Republicans running, Governor Kasich has had a more moderate view on the refugee issue, but for the most part, the Republican candidates for president have no interest in taking any, even a single Syrian refugee. And in the case of Mr. Trump, he has obviously spoken of wanting to ban

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the entrance of Muslims into the United States entirely. And my guess is his definition of what that would mean would probably also keep non-Muslims out as well. It's not clear exactly what that policy position means. What is clear is that it is, would likely be rule unconstitutional. But his interest in this also does not come out of nowhere necessarily. There is substantial support in the Republican party for that idea.

Last night, in South Carolina, after the, after voters went to the poles, a research group in the U.S. did exit polling. Exit polling is you randomly sample people as they exit their polling station and ask them a bunch of questions. You ask them how they voted, if they are willing to answer you. But you ask them about demographics, their views on different issues, and they asked about the Muslim ban specifically. And about 75 percent of Republicans in South Carolina support it. That's a pretty substantial number. And of course those voters disproportionately supported Donald Trump. But what

it shows is there is in the rhetoric of the Republican Party and the rhetoric of Republican candidates, these are not just individuals who have views that many find offensive. They are views that are ingrained into certain segments of the Republican Party and so in many ways, these are candidates responding to the views of their voters.

Now, the source of those views is certainly I think up for debate as to why they, why voters think this, what fuels it, what pushes it. But it is a reality that oftentimes when people abroad or people in the United States find rhetoric in the campaign to be offensive or misplaced or wrong, there has to be a recognition that the people saying these things are not losing support.

In fact, with Mr. Trump, the more extreme some of his language has been, not even views, but language, the better he does. And that, as someone who follows campaigns and elections, is very hard to understand. But it is a reality. And I would suggest that his support is nearing its peak right now, but

that he is certainly an important force in the Republican right now.

I would be happy to discuss some of the other issues that are relevant to the region in the Q&A session but I'm pushing time, and so what I will do is talk a little bit about looking forward. What the first few results in Iowa, South Carolina and Nevada tell us about the race. First, I'll start with Democrats. I think Hillary Clinton's win in Nevada last night positions her quite well to win the nomination, probably a little bit quicker than it looked like a few weeks back. She has stopped Sanders momentum he has built from a very close second place finish in Iowa and then a very significant win in New Hampshire and the next contest for Democrats is in South Carolina where Clinton holds about a 30 point lead in polling. It will be very difficult for Sanders to overcome that, and then they move into March 1st, which is called Super Tuesday, where as I said, there are about a dozen more contests. If she wins all or most of those contests, Clinton is the

presumptive nominee and barring some scandal really affecting her in a serious way, which would likely have to be an indictment, she will represent the Democrats in November.

On the Republican side, it's hard to argue Donald Trump's success. He's doing better than everyone else. I don't think, as I said at the outset, that it's quite clear that he'll be the nominee. I think if the Republicans go into their convention in July without anyone securing the majority of delegates, there are a lot of forces in the establishment of the Republican Party that will do everything they can to keep him out of, to keep the nomination away from him. They might succeed. If they do succeed, it will likely cause a pretty ferocious uproar among Republicans who supported him, especially ones who are very angry with politics as usual and see it as corrupt.

So in many ways, for Republicans, I would say Donald Trump is more likely than anyone else to become the Republican nominee, but if he, if he is, it

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will be something very difficult for Republicans moving forward. And if they strip the nomination from him, that will also be something very difficult for Republicans moving forward. It's a real challenge for the party right now that I think the best and brightest minds in the party don't really understand what their strategy needs to be or ultimately what the strategy will be. So I'll stop there.

MR. BARAKAT: Great. Thank you so much for this fantastic overview of the elections and what's going on. You left us feeling maybe slightly more concerned than when we started. When you say that little in-depth thinking is going around some of the issues related to foreign policy, which for us is very, very critical important issues and that people are being driven by rhetoric and some extreme remarks made casually here and there and so on. We'll come back to this in a minute. But I would like to move now to Dr. Abdullah Baabood as a discussant, please.

MR. BAABOOD: Thank you, Dr. Sultan and this gives me a great pleasure to welcome you all to Qatar

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University and we are very honored and pleased at the Gulf Studies Center to host Dr. John Hudak for the second time on the same topic, as Brookings and us have been working on the U.S. elections, you know, holding these events here at Qatar University. So we are very honored to be the host again, and we welcome you both here. And Dr. Sultan had said that we're starting this in a different way. It gives me pleasure to welcome you all here to Qatar University.

I'm not a specialist in American elections or in American politics, however I will take what John, who is a specialist in this, and as he said, he is publishing his paper soon, and I have been honored to be given the first copy before it was published. But I'm going to be talking about how the Middle East, how the region looks at the elections in the United States.

Well, what happens in the United States is obviously watched by everyone, not only in the Middle East but across the globe. The United States is a global power. It has been for a while. It is now and

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it will continue to be a global power, that will shape politics around the globe. So it is of course immensely important to follow what happens in the United States. And of course, the elections are one major issue.

If we go beyond the rhetoric that the candidates are saying now for winning votes and so on, I think finally the United States will have a certain policy that it will follow based on its strategic calculations. Currently, of course, there is a lot of rhetoric, it's a lot of talks to win votes and sympathy and support. But I think at the end of the day, the strategic calculations are going to make a difference. And this is not a country that is run just by a president, this is a country that has institutions, it has constitution, it has distribution of power that other, that will come to play when making the decision. Yet, it is very interesting to follow what is going on.

And talking and looking at the region and saying okay, what is, how does the region look at the

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elections in the United States and what is this going to do in terms of its impact on policies toward the region, I think we need to also understand what the region is, define the region. The region is of course, is very fragmented, very different. If you're talking about the Middle East, which Middle East are we talking about. Different Middle Eastern countries have different views. Some would like to see a Republican being in power, some for their own historical, if you like, relations. And some would like to see a Democrat. I'm sure Iran would love to see a Democrat rather than a Republican. But I think some of the Gulf states would rather see a Republican because of the fact that there is a conception that the Republicans are much more active in the region.

So there are different Middle Eastern countries with different perception towards the U.S. and towards the elections. And even if we move from the larger Middle East to the Arab countries, the question is again, what Arab countries. There is no one voice, and there is no one conception about how

the Arab countries view the United States and the elections there. We are seeing a very fragmented Arab world that are first doing different strategies, different policies competing with each other in one way or the other.

And even if you move further and still to the Gulf region, which is the, if we say even if you want to bring it down to the Gulf Corporation council states, I don't think we have one view towards what is going on in the United States. There may be similarities in one way or the other, but I think there are different sets of policies in the gulf that each country tends to follow there, so there is no consensus on how they see the elections are affecting them.

However, there are, despite all these, if you like, differences, there are similarities that the region can be said to experience. One of these similarities is that there are, there are both, all the countries in the region are subjected to the global changes that are taking place. As you know,

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the U.S. is a global power. It's been the guarantor for security in the Gulf for a very long time. But there are now signs that the United States is perhaps changing this policy, rightly or wrongly, it is read in the region that U.S. pivot towards Asia is an indication that perhaps the importance of the region has become less than what is now in Southeast Asia.

And there is a fear that the United States may have a reorientation of its policies towards other regions and the Middle East or the Gulf become less prominent. Having said that, you know, there are also rises of global powers. Now we see China is a power that is moving slowly but surely to the region, to the Middle East, building economic relations but maybe even, and political relations and maybe even in the future, even security relations with the Middle East. China is now a very active global power that even having cooperation in nuclear issues with some of the Gulf states and Middle East countries.

How much is China going to play in the future is of course not known. Will there be a space

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for it if it's not known, but I think sooner or later, as China grows to be a global power, a global economic power as well, it will certainly continue to build its political power as well as military and security power and it will have a role to play. And given that the United States policies in the region have been somehow confused, at least from the way that we look at them here, and there is no clarity on how the U.S. sort of views the region and how does it implement its policies, we have seen that there are other powers that are moving towards the region. Russia is now bombing, Syria as you know, and the one reason for that is of course there is a vacuum here, a vacuum in power, and that the United States is not playing what it was supposed to do, a global power that has strong Middle Eastern interests.

The position of the United States regarding regional conflict has also raised a lot of questions here. Is the U.S. really the strategic partner that we in the partner have been used to, or are we seeing a reorientation, a rethinking of U.S. policy. And the

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global, but also regional, issue is that you have the oil, the fall in the oil price, that are affecting the region. And of course, the U.S. shale is playing a very important part in that. But also there's, it implies that the United States is no longer going to be dependent on Gulf oil. And how much is this going to affect U.S. policy towards the region.

But also the region has witnessed its own dynamics and its own shifts. As you know, there was the invasion of Iraq, the collapse of Iraq as an independent Arab state that was the Eastern gate was Iran as it was viewed by the Arab side, and what is happening in Iraq, people blame it of course on the U.S. military intervention. But adding to that of course, the Arab spring and the consequences of the Arab spring where we now have some failed or even falling states.

And of course, all the disruption that are taking place and the fighting that are taking place, whether it is in Syria, in Iraq and Libya and in Yemen, and also the situation in Egypt. So we are

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seeing the region that is not stable. We are seeing a region that is in turmoil. We're seeing a region that is in war. And there is of course, human and economic and political costs to this. And this has unfortunately led to a rivalry between different countries in the region, invoking Syrian ethnic issues, and adding to this of course, the nuclear deal with Iran, and how the Gulf states and the Arab countries view this, that, that the nuclear negotiations that took place did not actually took care of some of the concerns of the Gulf States. And it was purely a nuclear deal that is viewed here that is going to give Iran more power because it will have more acceptability if you like in the international arena and it will have more economic power to interfere in the Arab countries, and they say that Iran is now interfering in many Arab countries and Iranian rhetoric rightly or wrongly, echoes this by saying that they control four capitals, which is Bagdad, Damascus, Lebanon and Sanaa.

And of course, the war in Syria is a very

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important issue for the Gulf region and you can see that the Gulf states have now started to act quite strongly in this, in this matter. And, and before that in Yemen as well, where the fear that Iran is instigating or supporting some of the regimes that are not acceptable to their own people, especially in Yemen and in Syria.

And what we are also seeing is the Gulf states are becoming less trustful of the United States, less dependent on the United States, and becoming their own -- taking the matter into their own hands and becoming actors for themselves without having to rely on the United States. And I think this is a very important point that we have to remember that the Gulf states were for a very long time were, and they were under of course the U.S. security umbrella, and they would not do anything, especially when it comes to war without having consulted with their security guarantor, we can see now that this is not the case. And I think this is also a telling point that the United States is no longer dependent

and trusts what the United States, the United States policies in the region or what the United States wants to do.

And in fact, there may be even areas of conflict between the two sides, that they try to (inaudible) it and of course and hide it in one way or the other, but I think there are growing conflicts. I don't think the Gulf states now and the United States see eye to eye on many issues including the burning issues in Syria and in Yemen. Of course, politically, the United States supports the GCC and the war in Yemen, but if you really dig deep inside that, they do not really see that as a useful tool to resolve the situation.

And I think there is also, there are a lot of messages that come from the United States that perhaps while the Gulf states want Assad to be removed because he is someone who has killed his thousands of his people and has no legitimacy any longer in his own country, you see that message is coming from the United States, including some of the candidates for

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the presidency are saying that we could work with Assad and there may be a way that we could have Assad brought into some kind of a negotiated settlement, which is not going to be acceptable here in the region.

So I think this is going to be a point of contentions between the United States and the Gulf. I think now what you are seeing here is the Gulf states are pushing back, pushing back what they see and perceive as Iranian intervention. And they are no longer dependent on their security partner and ally, the United States. And the question, of course, the United States commitment to the security of the region into its and also its commitment to resolving or helping resolving the regional conflicts that are here, they see that the United States does actually bifurcate from one time to time. At one point, it wants to push democracy and there was program for democracy promotion, on the other hand, it supports other governments in the (inaudible) calling for democracy or excising democracy.

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I think what the people want here is a clear message from their strategic ally and their partner to say what do they really want from the region, how can they work together, the region needs more capacity building, we have so many challenges going on that will require not only the U.S. but also other international partners to play a role. And of course, first and foremost what is the United States going to do about the Arab Israeli conflict? Gone are the days when Obama had declared in Cairo, that, you know, we were going to have a resolution to the Arab, the long, the long war and the long conflict between the Arabs and Israelis and give the Palestinians their homeland and two state solution. All those promises were never really delivered and all those talks that we get from the United States, people read it here that are totally not adhered to. And I think there is a big question mark from the region towards the United States policy, rightly or wrongly.

I believe that also from the United States perspective, there are lots of questions about the

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region. And the stability of the region and the fact is the region moving forwards towards more political participation and opening up the space and are they taking things into their own hand. And of course, those issues that John had alluded to, ISIS, we see eye to eye on these issues. But I think the United States is taking this and making this as a priority when in fact in the Gulf and the Arab countries, they see it as ISIS is a product of something else, a product of the lack that there were no opening for the people who did not allow the people to continue their revolution in Syria, they didn't support it because of the United States policies in Iraq et cetera. So do you actually treat the symptom or do you treat the cause. These are very important issues that are taking here.

My colleague John had already alluded to some of the other issues, like the Syrian refugees and other issues, so I will leave that maybe to the questions and answers stuff here, to the pleasure of my friend, Sultan Barakat.

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MR. BARAKAT: Thank you so much. I think you can somehow already feel the tension between a campaign that is run on sound bites in which we all are reduced to one Middle East, we're all reduced to one sentence, maybe to one fear of ISIS or whatever. And the region that wants to be understood in its details and its complexity, you know, with the description that Dr. Baabood gave, the fact that there is a fine grain and fine differences between us within the region and our expectations of the U.S. and so on, I mean that complexity does not make it to the debate in any way. And I think maybe it's also partly our responsibility in the region that we don't really invest in understanding how the American system works and how can we play our role in influencing the outcome, although obviously it's a national decision at the end of the day, but other actors try to influence the outcome and they exert certain -- play certain roles in doing so.

But given that, and I'm not sure if this is correct, but foreign policy is just a small element of

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what they campaign over. I mean their focus is mostly on domestic issues. With the space being very limited to foreign policy, how can we transmit some of that complexity to the candidates and through them to the American public to say look, we expect much more of you and we're looking forward to see what kind of leadership these elections will bring out and what will it mean to us.

MR. HUDAK: So, that's right. The foreign policy is only a small part of a given presidential campaign. Most Americans want to hear their candidates talk about issues that matter to them. Now, all of the issues matter to them, but for most Americans, foreign policy is something that's done far outside the public eye, and is something that you defer to your, typically defer to your president on, and it's not something that Americans necessarily appreciate as an important part of their day-to-day life, even though of course it is. They think much more about the economy, about the relationship between the federal government and the individual. They think

about things that they more easily come into contact with on a daily basis. Most Americans outside of the State department don't come into contact with the Iran nuclear deal too often.

But, they do think about what they're going to do if they lose their job or how they're going to put children through school or how they're going to put themselves through school. And so that becomes a much more dominant part of the conversation. And as was mentioned by both, there typically is this sound bite type of approach to foreign policy in the United States. We are hearing very short ideas or very short statements about what is an extraordinarily complex of what a president does, and about regions that are very diverse. And you paint, when you paint an entire region with a broadbrush stroke, there are certainly things you'll get right, as you had mentioned. There are some things that the Gulf region or the Middle East broadly thinks similarly on, but for the most part, that's not correct. And the one refreshing part I think of a presidential campaign, not so much this

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one, but when a president is elected, when he or she starts governing, they're going to have to face these issues in a serious way and the sounds bites that you're hearing on the campaign trail are not going to necessarily be a true reflection of foreign policy. Foreign policy in the U.S. can at times be quite stable even across presidencies, I think even though they were very different presidents, Bush and Obama, there are certain similarities and stability to the way that they have decided to play the role of commander in chief. There are certainly differences as well.

But the candidates, the next president will have to think about this region, regions throughout the world in much more dynamic ways than you're hearing them talk on the campaign trail. But that's also typically true of every presidential campaign. What you hear and what you get are very different things. It's often true on domestic policy as well. And what I think what the concern is, the biggest concern one should have about what the next president

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will do with regard to this region, other regions in the world, foreign policy more generally, is not that they will approach foreign policy in a sound bite manner, but that they won't approach it in a dynamic manner, understanding that what you do in Syria affects more than just Syria. What you do with KSA affects more than just that state.

And these are regional dynamics, they are multi-regional dynamics and when you begin thinking about how to implement foreign policy, it is essential for the next president to think of the world as an interconnected place and not just that America can do A in this place and B, C, and D won't happen. And typically, presidents do approach foreign policy that way. I think the worry is that some candidates, some candidates on both sides, Democrats and Republicans don't approach the way that they discuss foreign policy as that dynamic interconnected set of ideas and set of policies. And if they're elected, I think that's where the biggest worry is. We obviously have foreign policy pros running for president as well, and

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you, regardless of what your thoughts on their positions are, they at least understand how to approach foreign policy, they understand what a foreign policy should look like, even if you disagree with those ideas. I think it's the amateurs who are the most worrisome.

MR. BARAKAT: For the sake of the discussion just now, if we were to simplify it and say the top two runners are we stand today are Trump on one side and Hillary Clinton on the other. And from a foreign policy perspective, obviously look at the two and you think well, we'd be better off with Hillary Clinton, given that she served in that position, she has some experience and so on, and Trump is so unpredictable and he's constantly been changing his position. Say, for example, the issue of Palestine, yesterday or the day before he's come out saying his position is neutral on the Israeli Palestinian issue when Clinton came out very clearly and say not, the first thing I'll do is invite Netanyahu back and try and mend some of the relationship between the United

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States and Israel.

Now both, from our perspective in the Middle East are equally bad because we, what we'd like to hear is someone who comes with a policy vision and this is why Dr. Baabood referred to Obama at the beginning and the reception in which we all received him in this region, and finally someone is coming out here roll their sleeves up and is going to do something about this wound that's been there for 70 years now. What, how do you see that from an American perspective, looking out towards the Middle East? Which of these two candidates would serve the interests of the United States better in relation to this particular issue?

MR. HUDAK: What I will say is that when Americans are polled about who they recognize as a more capable candidate on the issue of foreign policy, Clinton wins hands down. Obviously, her resume reflects that. It would be odd if she were not perceived in that way. I do think that there are plenty of Americans who find the types of positions

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that Mr. Trump has taken to be perfectly in line with they want or what they think they want or what they think is good policy. And they think that Clinton's record as Secretary of State is a bad one. The reverse is true too. There are people who think she did a good job as secretary of state, and that as you said, Trump is more worrisome.

I think from a foreign policy perspective, there are a lot of things people want, there are a lot of things that other countries want. And one of, at times, one of the best things is certainty or stability in relations with other countries. And I think what Clinton will allow is first a fairly stable transition from the policies of Obama to hers. There will be differences for sure. But she's in a campaign where she is tying her record to the president, so she's not as vocal about areas where she disagrees with him, though by all accounts, the secretary of state, there were plenty of moments where they did disagree. But once she becomes President because she'll be away from that campaign, she will be freer

to distinguish herself from the president more.

But there's another benefit I would say from a foreign policy perspective of a Clinton presidency rather than a Trump presidency and that is the world leaders know her already and some might like her. I don't think Mr. Putin likes her, but it's very tough in foreign policy to get to know a new actor, particularly one as influential as the American president. And so, lowering the uncertainty with what you're getting I think helps other countries in the world map out their own strategies in dealing with the U.S.

Trump is an unknown quantity. We really don't know what he'll, he'll do from a foreign policy perspective. I think a lot of the things that he said have been bluster, and so what he would be like as president is not necessarily what he's talked about as a candidate, for better or worse. But it does create a type of uncertainty among world leaders that takes an acclimation period until you get to know what the next president was like. I think this was very much

true of Barack Obama. You mentioned this region looked at his new presidency back in 2008, 2009 as a real opportunity for the region. But also no one knew him. He had no foreign policy experience. And it took time to get used to what an Obama Administration would be like.

That's a challenge. It's not necessarily a reason why you should say one candidate and another candidate is not, but it has to be a factor in other nations' calculus that knowing who you're getting in an American president does have benefits in and of itself.

MR. BARAKAT: And for Clinton, being a woman, has this helped her in any way, or has it been kind of a burden for her to take forward as a candidate?

MR. HUDAK: I think in the United States the issue of gender and politics is one that remains unsettled. Women in the U.S. face very serious institutional challenges, particularly in politics. And those days of, I can't say the days of gender

discrimination are behind us, but certainly worse days are in our past. But there are holdover effects that create challenges. I think it is easier for a female Democrat to win, but for someone to campaign as a Democrat and a woman, there are likely not many Americans left who are not going to vote for a person because that person happens to be a woman. My guess is --

(Audio ends)

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