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# HOLY LANDS:
# REVIVING PLURALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. FRAIHAT: I would like to welcome everyone this evening for a very important discussion that we would like to have about this region and about an important issue that we have to deal with at some point, and that the region actually has been struggling with for some time. It's an important subject for this region and an important book with an important author as well coming to us from *The Economist* on the subject of pluralism in the Arab region. Is this possible, reviving pluralism? Do we have pluralism in the first place? Why do we have to go into the discussion of reviving pluralism at this time? And whether it's a solution, a challenge, a solution to some of the problems the region is having. There are so many questions about how pluralistic the societies that we have in the region are and how, if not, how possible is it for the transformation in these societies to become more pluralistic and to have more tolerance of pluralism in the region.

For this important subject we are pleased

this evening to have the author of this book, which is "Holy Lands: Reviving Pluralism in the Middle East", with Nicolas Pelham. He is well known, renowned journalist with *The Economist*. He spent many years in the Middle East writing and covering important issues and challenges and transformations that the region has had for the past decades. Nicolas Pelham has written about the Middle East since 1992. He began as the editor of the *Middle East Times* from Cairo before joining the BBC Arabic Service. He covered the Algerian civil war and the (inaudible 00:02:39) of Colonel Gaddafi as the BBC's correspondent in Rabat. In 2002 he joined the *Financial Times* reporting on the downfall of first Saddam Hussein and then the American protectorate in Baghdad. Since 2010 he has reported on the region's collapse for *The Economist* and the *New York Review of Books*. He's the author of two previous books, "A New Muslim Order", in 2008, on Arab-Shia rule, and "History of the Middle East" in 2010.

Allow me and please join me in welcoming Nicolas Pelham for this evening for his talk on the

book to share with us his views on pluralism and the Middle East. The floor is yours, Nicolas. (Applause)

MR. PELHAM: Thank you. Thank you, Ibrahim. I've sort of spoken previously about the book in New York and Washington; did a brief event in London. It was remarkably easy because the people I was talking to happen to know less than I did about the region. This event is very humbling because I'm with people who I wouldn't normally be coming to talk to and it's a chance for me to test my ideas. I think that it's also in some ways far more relevant to being do it here than anywhere else because these are issues which really are matters of life and death for millions across the region.

The book arose I suppose out of a time when we all knew a very different region, one in which in some ways the regions sects were still rubbing shoulders when it wasn't surprising in much of the region to see a mosque, a church, and even a synagogue side by side and public space was still shared between sects. And I think what we've seen particularly in

the last five years, but perhaps stretching back far longer than that is an ongoing erosion of that. And I supposed I wanted to ask the question how was it that a region which is over centuries if not millennia known for its inclusion of other religions and other sects and multiplicity of religious life and the diversity of religious life, how come that has so fundamentally broken down over the past 100 years. How come a region which was known for inclusion, for providing a refuge for those fleeing religious wars in Europe, that was known as sort of like (inaudible 00:05:52), the place of sanctuary, how come it's so betrayed many of the values which historically have underpinned this region? The reason why you have so many sects in the Middle East today is because unlike European Christendom Islam preserved them. It didn't -- instances of forced conversion or expulsion or the death by the sword for those who refused to convert are remarkably rare over the past 1400 years of Islam and they're very common in Europe. So how come -- you've almost had this role reversal over the past 100

years.

The answer that I explore in sort of the historical parts of the book based on -- I look at the millet system and then the transformation of that millet system after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. And I suppose that I perhaps rather crudely see western involvement in the region as being premised on three fundamentals about what the role of religion is in the region, which I think are fundamentally flawed. The first of those is that somehow religions of the region cannot live together and that, you know, this goes -- even recently you had President Obama saying that conflicts in the Middle East date back millennia. These religious conflicts are actually very recent in the making. The second is that somehow sectarianism is the root of all evil and that if only you could transform sectarian societies into secular ones the region would be much better off. And again I see sectarianism as actually being the building block that the framework on which much of the -- the framework which provided a basis for sects to

live together. The devolution of authority from the Sultan in the Ottoman Empire down to the various leaders of the millets, the application of religious law amongst the religious communities of the Ottoman Empire, the notion that somehow Istanbul wasn't just an Islamic capital, but it was also an orthodox capital, a Jewish capital, that the patriarch's authority would radiate out as far as those of the caliph (phonetic 00:08:55), that sectarian leaders would have rule over their communities, but their authority would overlap with those of other sects so that, you know, there was no real notion of separate quarters for separate relations. Public space was largely shared. And that was a -- sectarianism provided the basis on which religions could co-exist. And the third premise is that somehow the notion of the Caliph that we're seeing resurrect themselves today, somehow reflect the true nature of what a Caliph is, or this is somehow the true notion of -- whether it's Islam or the -- so the Jewish state is a true notion of what it means to be Jewish, Islamic as

well. This is an idea which is gaining increasing ground in Europe. And I think all three of the premises are somehow seeping into the religion's understanding of itself as well.

And so in the book I look at the breakdown of the millet system after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the transformation of the millet into the sectarian state. So the Jewish millet becoming the Jewish state, and then in Anatolia the Caliphate becoming the Turkish Republic, the -- and then I see that playing itself out in the modern era as well with a growing sense of a Shia space in Southern Iraq or a Sunni space in Northwestern Iraq. And somehow this notion of what was once a very heterogeneous region is becoming a homogenous one, and I think that there are certain characteristics that are borne out. The attempts to turn millets into states share -- they tend to involve an in gathering of one sect and the expulsion of other sects. They tend to involve a re-landscaping of territory to reflect the dominance of one sect and the exclusion of others. They tend to

involve a very focuses attempt to establish a state order. They turn universal religions into kind of lands cults of some form or another.

And then I try and look at who today is preserving some of those old notions of what it meant to have shared public space. And if I could just read for a few pages. I look at the those in -- I go to Najif and I meet the Ayatollahs who are hosting a book fair in an annex of the Imam Ali Shrine. There is an Egyptian book seller who's displaying his collection of works by Karl Marx, Kant, and Spinoza, a book seller from Baghdad keeps watch on a cleric who vetted displays. Whenever the censor approached, who was a seminarian, he turned over the covers of his collection of Sappho's Poetry which sported disrobed women and then turned them back again as soon as the seminarian had passed. He tells me that this best-selling book was a new Arabic translation of Richard Dawkins', "The Selfish Gene". It was he said particularly favored by students in the Hawza. Occupying a pride of place near the entrance was Luis

Seliba (phonetic 00:12:55), a Lebanese theology professor who sat by his door selling translations of the religious text he publishes. Within two days of the opening he'd sold all 50 copies of his new book, "Toward a Christian-Shia Dialogue", which had a picture of Jesus on its front cover. Arabic translations of the Bible, (inaudible 00:13:11), and the high text banned in neighboring Iran, were all selling fast. When a cleric politely requested he move such hierarchies, Seliba replied that if the books went he would go with them. The cleric idled away.

While we talked turbaned seminarians perused an Arabic text of Cannon Law first published in Cairo between the wars. They're not just book fairs, they're a remarkable testament not just to the openness that the Ayatollahs have instituted in Najaf, but the pliability of religious creeds. Shias like to claim that their faith has long been more broad minded than other streams of Islam, but the (inaudible 00:13:52) is in fact a fairly recent development.

Historically Shia Islam could tend to be more xenophobic and (inaudible 00:13:48) and defensive, more hostile and suspicious of non Muslims than Sunni Islam. Not Muslims were banned from Shia holy places and at the dinner table, only after the 1920 revolution against British rule of Iraq did Grand Ayatollah (inaudible 00:14:13) Hakim overturn the millennium old injunctions about banning contact with people of the book.

And then I meet some of those Ayatollahs, so I think sort of actively engaged in outreach. (Inaudible 00:14:32) representative in Beirut preaches in churches, another Najafi Ayatollah has opened a Hawza for women. The (inaudible 00:14: 39) shepherd non Muslims around the Imam Ali Shrine. Even bishops without outsized crucifixes swinging on their chests. Some clerics have begun partnering with the local university, Kufa, to promote interfaith studies. When I last visited its campus the university was a burned out shell used as an American base. By 2015 it had a new campus and 22 new faculties, including a medical

school and a science wing. Encouraged by Grand Ayatollah, the turbaned dean of the Islamic Law Faculty was teaching a course of comparative religion and he met me after his (inaudible 00:15:13) class. Man is made of two types, a Muslim like you or a man like you, so he be just with both, he said, quoting a saying of Imam Ali, "God not man decides who enters paradise". Other clerics are preparing to introduce interfaith studies into the Hawza itself, facing the threshold of Imam Ali's Shrine, Jawad al-Khoei, the son of a former Grand Ayatollah is building an 11 story interfaith academy. As he showed me around the building site he pointed out the location of seven auditoria where non Muslim academics will lecture about their respective faiths. Our problem in Iraq, he's told me is our ignorance and denial of the other. The Ayatollahs are resolute in their determination to see equal rights for all. As I entered his office a delegation of Yazidi, Christian, Mandian, and Sunni women from Baghdad were taking their leave to meet another Grand Ayatollah.

As if to compensate for Islamic states pillaging in the North curators across southern Iraq defiantly refurbishing and opening museums. The National Museum of Iraq, which Americans had failed to protect from looters in 2003 reopened in February 2015 after a $40 million renovation. Nassyria, a city famed as the birthplace of Abraham and the steps of (inaudible 16:34), reopened its antiquities museum a month later. Convention has it that Sunni-Shia relations are locked in an existential struggle dating back to the first generation of Islam. Fighters, politicians, and televangelists from both sects portray their conflict as an elemental schism coursing through Islam's 1400 years, from Imam Ali's assassination to the battles between the Ottoman and Persian Empires, so supremacy in Iraq. But for much of their history sectarian strife was an aberration. The Sunni Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad relied on Shia soldiers to keep order. For 350 years the Ottoman and Persian Empires upheld the Peace of Amasya which gave Shias free passage to visit their holy places and

practice their rights in Ottoman ruled Iraq.

Even after a decade of sectarian strife Iraqis never tire of emphasizing how Sunnis and Shias share the same dialects, tribes, prophet, and love of muskoof (phonetic 17:32), the fatty cow Piraquies (phonetic 17:34) barbeque on the banks of their two rivers. Statisticians say 26 percent still marry outside their sect. When I travel abroad I see Sunnis as fellow countrymen with the same language, a writer form Najaf tells me. We frequent the same cafes, we share the same taxis, why can't we do that at home? It is philosophy class in Najaf's Hindi Mosque, a senior cleric, Ezzedin al-Hakim, posits that sectarianism is a manmade corruption. The terms Sunni and Shia were not revealed by God. Religion is made by God, but division is made by man, he says. (Inaudible 18:09), Shia cleric leads prayers in Sunni mosques, and the country's leading cleric broadcasts appeals for unity. Do not say Sunnis are our brothers, cautions Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, say they are us.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much, Nicolas, for this discussion. That's very helpful, understanding the complexity of sectarianism and pluralism together in the region.

I would like now to go with Dr. Abdelwahab El-Affendi to comment and to respond to Nicolas on his argument in the book. Dr. Abdelwahab El-Affendi, a very well know, renowned professor in Europe and in the region. He is the head of Program, Politics, and International Relations Program at the Doha Institute. He was the founder of the Democracy and Islam Program at the Center for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster, and its coordinator since 1998. He has been a Visiting Fellow at Bergen, Oxford, Northwestern, Cambridge, and has lectured at most major American and British universities, plus many in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. He has authored many books, Dr. Abdelwahab. His most recent books including "Genocidal Nightmares: Narratives of Insecurity and the Logic of Mass Atrocities", then there is "Darfur: A Decade in

Crisis", in 2013, and also "About Muhammad: The Other Western Perspective on the Prophet of Islam". His current research interest include the crisis of Arab democracy, the role of Muslim intellectuals, terrorism, and the humanitarian intervention, and secularism and power. What interesting research subjects, Abdelwahab.

The floor is yours.

DR. EL-AFFENDI: Thank you, Ibrahim, and thanks to Brookings for this event. I must say I enjoyed reading the book. It is for you who haven't looked at it yet, quite well written and also very scary. I think that the effort which has gone into it is quite remarkable. I think Nicolas has been all over the place, from Gaza to Palestine to, as he describes, Shia (inaudible 00:21:01) of Iraq, and also many Gulf countries. So he has been around. I don't know how long that took (laughter), and I see in the acknowledgements he was thanking quite a few people for helping around.

Some of it is a real revelation. I think

especially the chapter where he meets Dahalan (phonetic 00:21:29) is quite a bombshell. (Laughter) And this chapter I'll come back to because I think it's where I also get to make my contrary points. But I think probably as he had outlined the argument is that the Middle East has for a long -- especially the Ottomans have been the mosaic of pluralism and then it splintered mainly he argues under European influence in colonialism and now is getting quite fragmented and he argues of course -- and I'll come back to that to the end -- that it's better to retain back to this kind of militism (phonetic 00:22:19) or the Ottoman way of people acting like a mosaic again.

I think a lot of what he says probably is correct. He's sort of (inaudible 00:22:32) in the sense that we had the region which has been very pluralistic and this has been mainly I think the character of Sunni Islam as it has morphed (inaudible 00:22:53), that it was part of multiethnic (inaudible 00:22:58). But the question which I think needs to be argued is why and how this fragmentation happened. I

think it's not only the Europeans who have done this. The modern nationalism has come to the region, come to the Ottoman Empire starting from -- it's European actually. And some people might argue, contrary to Nicolas, that probably the Ottomans have done wrong by not acting like the Spanish and ordering everybody to become Muslim, then we wouldn't have had the Balkans or all these things or all these sects, which have been tolerated and now are emerging. But, of course, this is not the way Muslims or Islam looked at things. But now it's not -- I mean we cannot say as the way he said it, that there had been a good old order which has fragmented and which now can be fixed by going back to the way it was. I think this is pure nostalgia and also won't happen because I think the identities which have emerged have become real identities. But I think where it is scary in this sense is where he reports what I called in the book, which Ibrahim has mentioned, "Genocidal Nightmares: Narratives of Insecurity", about how, for example, the people of Iraq, the various sectors of Iraq, each of

them sees the others as kind of danger and speaks about them in language which I -- just as I was driving here I was listening to some news and there was a report for example that people of the Hesht (phonetic 00:25:04) were saying that Fallujah was a kind of constants that has to removed. This we know, this is the language of genocide. Whenever you hear you know what's going to happen next.

But I think what has happened in this region is that probably this language has been spoken behind closed doors for a long time. Probably the various sects, Christians, Muslims, Jews, various Muslim sects have been talking about each other, living in isolation, seeing each other as danger. Now the colonialism, the way the colonialism has contributed is to change the balance of power. I mean we know colonialism started in this region precisely by claiming to champion the minorities, something which continues to this day. I had an interesting exchange the other day on Twitter by people who are saying that making the claim, which is in a sense correct, that

Christians in the Middle East are in danger. I think Muslims are more in danger nowadays than the Christians. I mean look at Syria, or if you look at Iraq, or any others, yes, of course Christians, Yazidis, and others are being, but the hundreds of thousands who are being displaced or being killed are Muslims and mainly Sunni Muslims I think, which is very interesting in this regard because this is where I come to the chapter where he has spoken about Sunni revival or Sunni resurgence, or whatever. And I think here is where we see the problem because the people or the groups or the states he mentioned as champions of the Sunnis, like Egypt or other countries I don't want to name at the moment, are actually not champions of Sunnis. And I think an important point many people make a lot about Saudi Arabia is also mistaken. Saudi Arabia they claim has been (inaudible 00:27:14) what happens. Saudi Arabia, since I think the time of King Fahd has not been championing or supporting it. It actually was working very hard to try to suppress it. There was -- I think (inaudible 00:27:32) has written

once an article where he said that in Saudi Arabia, for example, that on the face of it, for example, at that time satellite religions were banned but Saudi Arabia is the most avid consumer of satellite television and also the most provider of the secular music and all kinds of channels of -- and so I think there is a kind of a miss going on that Saudi Arabia has been actually a champion of radicalism. I think Saudi Arabia's problem is its failure to suppress radicalism, or is the way it's mishandled I think, the way it didn't go into dialogue, for example, the Sahawa (phonetic 00:28:29) and try to suppress them. And that led to very radical sects emerging in groups.

So I think if I want to summarize my viewpoint about this book, in addition to comment people to read it because I think, as I said, it's fascinating and also very scary, but I think it falls into many of the problematic stereotypes about the region. This is not actually all over and sometimes inadvertent because I think there's a lot of work which has been done on the ground, which even some of

us haven't done, going to listen to people to see what the people on the ground are saying in various areas, but also I think sometimes taking people saying at face value is problematic if you don't -- of the question behind. But I think that it's correct to say that the mosaic of the region, which I think is the other face of Sunni Islam, is fragmented after the Ottoman Empire collapsed, but I think Sunni Islam and most I think accurately Sunni Arabs, have been out of -- the people say the Shia have been out of control and they have now come to -- actually it's the Sunni Arabs who have always, since the time the (inaudible 00:30:14) took over, they have been guests in their country. Other rulers came and then colonialism came, and before they could get out of colonialism everything else went out of order. And I think the problem of Sunni Arabs, or the tradition which is associated with Sunni Arabs, is that they have always had confidence in a kind of dictator who would save them. Was Gamel Abdul Nasser, it could be Asullah Hadid (phonetic 00:30:43), it could be now King

Salman, it could be this, it could be hits. And that's why they didn't do anything themselves, for themselves, to try to bring the society into existence in a way which is conforming with what being Sunni Arab is.

So I will rest my point here and just finish by saying that we cannot -- it's Utopian to think that we can restore that past, but it's not Utopian to see possibilities. I mean, for example, in the early phases of Arab Spring we have seen the face of all pluralism coming in Syrian, in Egypt, in everywhere there was a revolution. In Tahrir Square people, Christians, Muslims, seculars, work together in the old (inaudible 00:31:39). But then the monsters he spoke about quickly came out of their holes.

Thank you.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much, Dr. Abdelwahab. This is very helpful. And you just reminded me actually with one of the articles that I wrote on the fair dictator, where people, especially in Libya, where I noticed that people are waiting, you

know, for someone who come as a dictator, but a fair dictator, like to save them and end the chaos and, you know, save them, which subscribes to what you just said about this tendency that I personally experienced during my research in Libya, like people want to see that as a solution in order not to deal with the complexity of a transformation and the changes happening.

Thank you very much again and I thank again Nicolas for this argument. And let me begin with Nicolas, with one of the questions. You invoke the Taif Agreement in your book, the Taif Agreement of 1989 in Lebanon as a solution, or that solved or helped in the solution of Lebanon. And I come from a conflict resolution background where we recognize that, yes, the Taif Agreement stopped the violence, but we have huge reservations of, you know, structurally setting the country for protracted instability. And this is what happened in Lebanon because with the Taif Agreement we basically eliminated the principle of accountability of the

civil war that we had in Lebanon for 15-16 years. And the war lords, they just changed their military uniforms, you know, with suits and they just sat in the parliament and they transferred themselves, you know, to the new phase or to the new era.

So I see again the point that, you know, talking about the Taif Agreement, but don't you think that this is like the model of poor sharing (phonetic 00:33:54) along sectarian lines, or the way the structure of poor sharing like in the Taif Agreement? Is this really the long-term solution you think or a good expression of pluralism in the region?

MR. PELHAM: Thank you, Ibrahim, thank you Abdelwahab. Let me try -- can I try and answer that by also trying to address --

MR. FRAIHAT: Yes, please.

MR. PELHAM: -- the question about whether this is Utopia? I don't think that I'm trying to resurrect the Ottoman Empire or the millet system per se. What I am trying to do is to look at what were the values that the Middle East represented in the

past and how can those be somehow resurrected in a way that can address the sectarian strife that is running rife across the region today. And in a sense the Taif Agreement was one way in which that was attempted. You turned back to -- the Taif is a way of trying to resurrect the millets and divvy up power according to the millets. And I suppose what it lacks that existed in the past was an overarching authority. Each of the sects essentially tried to manage their own populations but didn't really find a way of running the country together. And the Taif Agreement has in some ways been remarkably successful. It's kept peace in a very unstable country with 25 percent population increased due to refugees where kind of the rest of the region was collapsing, collapse across the (inaudible 00:35:56) crescent, much of North Africa, and somehow it's kept Lebanon in tact if not functional.

So I think that shows that there are benefits to sectarianism, it's just that in some way a sectarian order -- what I suppose was positive about

it was that each sect felt that its own survival depended on the survival of others. That if one of these pillars went they all risk going. So they all had a kind of stake in maintaining the sectarian system, what they didn't have was a stake in maintaining Lebanon as a functional country.

So what can be derived from the old practically as a way of addressing some of the problems of the new? Sorry, just for an answer, this is an incredible opportunity that the region has. There has been this sort of -- for 100 years outside powers have been trying to remake the region. You are seeing a degree of withdrawal from -- so the great powers of old, they don't see the region as necessary worth expending much political capital on, at least the way they did in the past. And this is a huge opportunity for the region to try and remake itself. The notion that the millet reconstructed as a kind of European Westphalian state I think has been seriously eroded. People are asking questions about how the region can reconstruct itself. And looking at what

worked in the past I think has immense utility. Looking at the values of inclusion, looking at the role that religious leaders played in maintaining that inclusion, and looking at having far more porous borders than exist today. I mean we live in an area which is kind of building more and more separation barriers, permanent regimes. I mean Israel typifies this, but it's not just happening in Israel. The permanent regime checkpoint regime has spread across the region, walls are spreading across the region, (inaudible 00:38:06) walls divide up Baghdad. I'm looking at how you can have much greater access and movement, trying to reestablish a common market, some form of much greater regional interaction. It's becoming ever more not just a kind of security issue I think, but it's also becoming an economic issue because oil alone, a single resource, is not enough to meet the needs of the population. There's got to be far greater trade, far greater interaction within the region if the region is not only going resolve its security problems but also its economic ones.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much, Nicolas. My question to Dr. Abdelwahab, you mentioned Saudi Arabia and I agree with you, I see the points that you mentioned. But let me ask you this, you know, just to challenge on the same point that you mentioned, do you think really with the influence of the clergy in Saudi Arabia that pluralism is possible? That there would be tolerance, you know, for different views with religious authority order clergy in Saudi Arabia? That this is something that would be possible?

DR. EL-AFFENDI: I mean Saudi Arabia is already a millet system. There are (inaudible 00:39:20), there are Sunnis, there are Shia, there are -- well, of course there is inequality, but that's also the millet system. Well, the system not of equality as he rightly mentioned, but of (inaudible 00:39:34) systems --

MR. PELHAM: Yes.

DR. EL-AFFENDI: -- of tolerating, of inclusiveness. And, as you rightly said, Saudi Arabia is the one which has (inaudible 00:39:43). And before

that (inaudible 00:49:46) also the Hamas Abbas Agreement. So they had a brief time during (inaudible 00:39:55) when they became Kemalists (phonetic 00:39:56) in the sense. But they are I think now back to where they were in a sense. So I'm not saying that Saudi Arabia is an ideal state, but I'm just trying to correct some facts. I mean, might be authoritarian, but not -- the elite in Saudi Arabia are not (inaudible 00:40:13), let's put it this way. They might be. I mean using what happens as a ready establishment, there is a state kind of addendum. It's not that they -- because the population have, but it is kind of that keeping the balance. I mean they are losing minimal violence and they are losing the (inaudible 00:40:35) kind of --

MR. PELHAM: (Inaudible 00:40:36).

DR. EL-AFFENDI: -- (inaudible 00:49:38). So I don't think -- but the Saudi -- I mean the Saudis I don't think -- I mean the Hallan (phonetic 00:40:45) doesn't represent the Sunnis (laughter) and the Saudis do not either I think.

MR. FRAIHAT: All right. Thank you very much. And I can't really resist one more question, Nicolas, if I may, which is on the millet system. So in what sense do you think that this is -- like can we use a newer version of the millet system or should replicate the millet system of the Ottoman Empire? How does that work today? I mean like in the revolutions that we're seeing across the region and the transformation that, you know, is going everywhere. So how does that fit into the new change and how is this related to pluralism and implement it?

MR. PELHAM: I suppose the primary difference between the millet system of the Ottoman Empire and the way that sects are ruling today is that sects are focused on territory, focused on particular parcels of land how they rule parcels of land. The millet system in the past was a much more universal system. There were holy communities, not holy lands. It was the population that mattered, not the territory that they controlled. And as soon as you adjust from a kind of a mentality of a holy to the mindset of a

holy community that allows for a much more inclusive region. I can expand, but.

MR. FRAIHAT: No, that's a good answer. I have many other questions, but I will not monopolize the time to engage our audience. If there will be time left I will be happy to ask other questions. But let me start with (inaudible 00:42:43) and then Jamal (phonetic 00:43:43). Okay.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much for your presentations. In such a system that is being proposed there is first the legal problem, which is are you going to allow multiple laws? You know, this is a fundamental problem an d many people in the past, rulers in the Muslim world, have faced this problem. And the way they solved it was quite the opposite of what's suggested. What they did was they enforced one madhab, one school of thought, because a lot of the laws were based on or related to some school of thought. So, for example, the sovovits (phonetic 00:43:46) imposed their school of thought, the Ottomans actually imposed one school of thought.

(Laughter) So in order to unify the law, although of course in certain categories, personal and so on, they allowed multiple -- so there's a legal issue.

The second issue is if you are actually going to do that then you're going to give -- put the power in the hands of traditional clergy. And of course Islam doesn't recognize clergy in the same way that Christianity, for example, does. And if you do that then you are actually freezing Islam into, for example, a specific set of school of thought, not allowing progress in the Muslim (inaudible 00:44:29) or Muslim community and so on and so forth. So this is actually a way to kill our societies rather than to help them move forward. And, you know, and I see, for example, you know, what the Ottomans did was at some point towards the end of the Ottoman Empire was they switched from allowing each local community to have its own like court system, which were totally regional and totally independent more or less, into the Majalla system, where they actually unified -- they got a team of experts to unify everything into the Majalla and it

was a single law. And then that law was actually being used even, not like you suggested that, for example, when they composed that each -- for example, the Jews and so on had to use their own system. Actually Israel was the last country to continue to use the Majalla, you know, until the '60s, you know. That this was being used as law which is actually an Islamic -- so all I'm trying to say is there are lots of intricacies and nuances that need to be looked at, you know, in detail because under the facade of a simple solution there is a bombshell.

Thank you.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you. Jamal, let's hear from you please.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. Excellent book. Nicolas, there are two things, allow me to say about (inaudible 00:45:57) reporter (laughter) who write about the Middle East. Number one, you influence people. This book might be a big time reading for the Prime Minister of England which could affect his decision. So you have to get it right. You have

nostalgia about the beauty of pluralism we had in the Middle East. I'm sure you walked in Damascus. People took you to the Jewish quarter and the Christian quarter and you see the diversity, the beautiful diversity that was there, and the same thing could happen in Jerusalem or in Baghdad. But the problem now, the people of -- the majority of Damascans are about to leave Damascus. It is becoming uninhabitable. So we have a serious problem with democracy and rule of law. We cannot bring back pluralism before we bring democracy and rule of law. Maybe at a later stage we can discuss pluralism.

The other important thing about Western journalist, they over simplify our (inaudible 00:47:13). For example, Robin Wrights made a famous map in the *Washington Post* which is still used by Arab writers and commentators as it is the original map that America is planning to do for us, to divide us into Whaabistan and Sunnistan and Shiitestan, which is not true. There is no way you can break up the Middle East, there is no way you can break up Syria. We saw

how difficult to break up Iraq, even though Iraq is so broken. There is no area in Saudi Arabia that can be exclusively Shia, no area in Saudi Arabia that can be exclusively Ismaili. Even (inaudible 00:47:57), which was one day maybe 90 percent Ismaili, it is not longer 90 percent Ismaili. So those maps worry us, the Whaabistan, Shiitestan, Sunnistan, Kurdistan. They are worrying us.

So if I was to suggest an idea to the leaders of the West, democracy, rule of law. That what -- any book about the Middle East should be about. After that we can introduce a beautiful nostalgic idea as pluralism. Let the majority enjoy life in the Middle East so the minority can come back.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you. Thank you, Jamal. Dr. Zekarayir (phonetic 00:48:44), let's hear from you.

QUESTIONER: Let me first appreciate your performance in the Doha Forum. It was fantastic.

MR. PELHAM: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: We are hearing about mainly

pluralism and political pluralism. Let us start or incorporate time starting from (inaudible 00:49:09). I don't like to start from there but from Condoleezza Rice, if you will remember, she talked about creative chaos and they spoke about a big or grand Middle East. In this time there is something happening. They used for reaching to this -- I mean creative chaos and fragmentation of the Middle East, they used two things, corruption and (inaudible 00:49:46). These were tools. And they used also religious -- and not like to say Islamic because there are other religions, radicalism, not Islam from the whole area. So they are using it to reach, the fragmentation of the whole Middle East. If you look to Sudan, now two parts. Egypt now is going to be three parts (inaudible 00:50:17), and they say about the Christian state in the West and (inaudible 00:50:23) will be isolated. They're speaking about this use --

MR. FRAIHAT: It's like the maps that Jamal mentioned.

QUESTIONER: No, no, no, Jamal is a big man

please. (Laughter) So when we speak about this we see -- I want to ask you are we going to a new (inaudible 00:50:42), I mean (inaudible 00:50:45) using corruption, using Islamic or religious radicalism? Why don't we use the means of civil democratic societies which (inaudible 00:51:00) separation, rule of law, I mean, indiscrimination? This is better, that the West can guarantee its interest is here and we can lead you too to a --

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you. Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MR. FRAIHAT: Let me hear from Dr. Khaled (phonetic 00:51:15) who wanted to talk.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Ibrahim, and thank you for Mr. Nicolas and Abdelwahab. I mean I want to echo with Mr. Jamal raised regarding the rule of law and democracy; however, I think we should look back and insight -- maybe a remark for the book -- that we should look at the state itself in the region and if we compare the region, the Middle East in general to what -- and how -- the way Europe was formed, for

example, in 1970s and in the 18th century, 17th century, we will see that, you know, that the chaos in the region and the fragmentation of the societies and the absence of pluralism is not because of also the consequences of the formation of these states, not struggle for independence and so on. But also in order to reach a level of stability all states in the region have to go through a particular process. As we have seen with the French, for example, with the creation of democracy and so on. And I think most of the region and most of the states in the region are facing a dilemma, a state formation dilemma that bring to a great extent this -- or revive pluralism. We are in a late state formation process. And what makes -- I mean sinks into chaos is not only because of the colonization and so on, but is also a continuation of the processes that these states have started in the 1930s, 1950s, and so on.

So maybe a point for you, Mr. Nicolas, is that I think we should think about the state itself and also echoing what Mr. Jamal was saying, that the

rule of law, of course it's important, but also the actual state, how we build institutions that can bring people together.

Thank you.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much. Let's hear from our great speakers on the comments, to comment on the questions please.

MR. PELHAM: Thank you all. I supposed the underlying question to almost all of the -- that you've all posed.

SPEAKER: Comprehensive, comprehensive.

MR. PELHAM: What you need is a state based on democracy and rule of law and pluralism is secondary. If it was a simple kind of basic question, why hasn't it worked? Why haven't the attempts to establish -- and there have been numerous attempts to establish democratic and society of -- where states with strong legal systems and they haven't delivered an end of conflict, indeed they've exacerbated the conflict. What is that ingredient that we're missing? And it seems to me that democracy applied at its most

basic level, which is the way that it's being applied across the region, is that whichever majority wins will dominate. And it's actually become a tool for purging bureaucracies and towns and institutions of other sects. Democracy when it's been applied in much of Iraq has allowed Shias to dominate over other sects and there have been attempts by religious leaders to hold that in check, but you can go through whole swaths of southern Iraq where you had very strong Sunni communities and they've been wiped out. The al-Saadun, which was very strong in Nassyria and Basra and across southern Iraq is a tiny remnant of what existed before 2003. And I don't think that would have been possible if you'd have had a third element to democracy and rule of law, which was pluralism. If you don't build pluralism into that equation, you're going to allow for the further domination of one sector over another. It's why it's so effective in Israel as a way of enforcing Jewish majority rule over Palestinians, even in areas of Israel where, you know, Muslims and Christians almost form a majority like the

galilee.

And I suppose that comes back to the mental map that we're projecting of the Middle East in the West, and I think that's probably also seeped down into the region itself. And I couldn't agree more. I think we're doing a huge -- well, if there's one fatal flaw of what I've done it's exactly that map in the book that Jamal criticizes. I think absolutely, we're sort of somehow promoting the notion (a) that sects can't live together. That historically they haven't lived together, when actually the whole region is much more hybrid and still far more overlapping than a map like this suggests. And we're also contributing to this notion that the solution to the region's problems is one of partition. If only you separate these sects you'll get an end of conflict. And I think that actually it's that separation which is increasing the conflict, is increasing grievances, is increasing dispossession, increasing population displacement. And it's only when you can recognize that sects have lived together historically that what we're seeing now

is a aberration and that an end of conflict comes through an acceptance of others, not from an exclusion of others, that this region is going to start to sort itself out.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you. Abdelwahab?

DR. EL-AFFENDI: I would slightly modify the demand for democracy and pluralism and say peace in the sense that if you look at the region a lot of people say, why isn't there pluralism, why are they bourgeoisie in the Middle East, why isn't there civil society? But I think the issue here is that just as flowers cannot grow into volcanic lava, when civil society activists are being shot and being imprisoned and being sentenced to death and being assassinated at home, their homes burned and things like this, you cannot expect things to move forward. And I think this is where the problem of the West is there. It has always been -- I mean I'm not -- usually I argue that the problem is internal, but when some people ask why, for example, in 1989 Eastern Europe has become democratic while the Arab world hasn't. It's because

in 1989 the Soviets were withdrawing their troops from Eastern Europe and the Americans were sending their troops into the Middle East to support dictatorships which were there and pouring money into them. Nowadays the West and everybody else is supporting Egypt's attempt to -- or Sisi's attempt to exterminate and stifle civil society, and he is getting a few Europeans actually as collateral damage. And still the Europeans are supporting him, hoping that by the time he have killed maybe 100,000 Egyptians things will quiet down. They will not. And so if Europeans want to support peace it's especially also supporting Israel. Israel is kind of Al Qaeda, which is funded by the U.S. And this is a kind of -- as you write rightly in your book, is kind of people who are really mad. There are billions and billions of (inaudible 00:59:43) to make them do what they do and get the people of the region more angry and angry and angry. And then when they join ISIS they say why are they joining ISIS? I mean so there has to be something. At least if not democracy, people have to try to have

some decency in the region.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much. Let's take the second round. Yes, sir.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I think that Dr. El-Affendi had touched on this a bit. The introduction of an enemy alien state may have had an impact on polarizing sects, like Dr. Jamal was talking about, Whaabistan, there already is a state like that in the Middle East. We can call it Judiastan or Israel, where there might be an identity crisis where other parts of the Middle East feel under threat, where this enemy alien has embedded itself. Has that contributed to any polarization and extremism?

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you. Yes, sir.

QUESTIONER: (Speaking foreign language 1:01:22 - 1:01:50).

MR. FRAIHAT: Okay. Other questions? Yes, sir.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much. My question is to Nicolas. You know, you had this many famous interview with Prince Mohammed bin Salman, you

know, Saudi Prince in a hurry really. Are you finding the new Saudi leaders, really the leaders in new generation really more willing to (inaudible 1:02:23) with the Shia or with others, or do you think no, they are in fact very steadfast? They are going to promote more sectarianism in the region?

Thank you.

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much. And let me also add a question from me. Yes, sir?

QUESTIONER: Regarding Eastern Europe. I spent all the '90s living in Bulgaria and that area. To say that the democracy in Eastern Europe transitioned smoothly would be a major overstatement. Look what happened in Sarajevo, for example. Hundreds of thousands of people died in that process. And there was a rift between all of those religious factions, the Orthodox, the Christians, and the Muslims. So it's a -- the democracy transition in Eastern Europe was far from smooth.

MR. FRAIHAT: All right. Well, thank you very much. And also let me add the question from me.

You talk in the book, Nicolas, about example that you witnessed of pluralism healing and interfaith activities. So you end on a good note, you know, that there is hope. Can you give us also, share with us some like examples from that which you witnessed, you know, on these issues? It would be helpful.

Thanks.

MR. PELHAM: Thank you. I think four huge questions. I'll try and tie some of them together. On the question of Israel, yeah, I think you've hit a very important point. I think the one place where I disagree is that I don't actually see Israel as being so exceptional in what happened to the Ottoman Empire. If you look at this whole process of -- the notion of a European state, a Westphalian state, began in the Ottoman Empire, in the western flank. It began with the thrusting off of the yoke of Ottoman rule by the Greeks in the early 19th century, the attempt to establish a kind of greater Greece, resulting in mass expulsion of Muslims, destruction of mosques. It then spread to other parts of the western flank of the

Ottoman Empire into Anatolia, the transformation of -- again the Caliphate into the Turkish Republic, resulting in sort of a mass cleansing of Christian populations, whether they were Armenian or Greek Orthodox. Millions were displaced by the Treaty of Lausanne and the genocide of the Armenians that preceded that. And then you go on down into the rest of Ottoman rule and that process repeated itself with the transformation of Palestine into Israel, the kind of the Jewish millet becoming a Jewish state. Attempts by the French colonial party to do the same in Syria. And so I see that this both kind of a top down process by powers outside the region, but also a bottom up process by people from the region trying to take power within specific localities. And I think that process is still playing itself out, whether it's in what was the western part of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, or the east in Iraq with kind of -- for want of a better term -- Shiiastan or Sunnistan.

So, yes, I don't in that sense see Israel as an aberration, I see it very much part and parcel of a

process that's been happening across the region. Is that process also happening in Saudi Arabia? I think one of the fascinating -- and yet I wish that I could write another chapter in the book about Saudi Arabia, and I think Dr. Abdelwahab is absolutely right to pick me out for the way that I characterize Saudi Arabia. The country is much more nuanced than it likes to project itself to the outside world. The notion that somehow Saudi Arabia is the progenitor of Islamic state, if you compare the authorities in both it is a total fallacy. You do have, you know, just by the 100 years of Salafism Wahhabi rule in the eastern province or in the Hijaz, you still have many of the indigenous sects which existed there before Salafism arrived still exist there. And I think one of the kind of great questions for the future of the region is to what extent can Salafism itself become not just inclusive in practice, but inclusive in principle as well. And I'd like to have a greater understanding of how Whahabism applies in Qatar. It's astonishing to go to the Islamic Museum here and see an exhibition on

women under Katra rule. If Saudi Arabia can become a model not in the way that it projects itself to the outside world and I think there are cases where perhaps it did export the way that it dealt with (inaudible 1:08:31) internally was to export it abroad. But if it can have a similar understanding of what Salafism is as the way it's applied in Saudi Arabia today, then the future of the region might not be quite too bleak.

I could go on but you probably want to --

MR. FRAIHAT: Thank you very much. Dr. Abdelwahab, any comments?

DR. ABDELWAHAB: I don't have any more comments, except to say that I would like to follow from what he said. I think the book reveals a lot about the region, which is some of it is not very pleasant. I mean the conversations he had reported, for example, in (inaudible 1:09:20) or in Israel or in some of Iraq, sites of Iraq, is worrisome. But it's good that people should hear it and react to it. And I think I still also have the hope, but we are from

what he says, at the moment the forces which are on the rise are unfortunately forces which are going to cause a lot of fire before we get some calm.

MR. FRAIHAT: All right. Well, thank you very much. And now I would like to again tell you about the book. The book is 175 pages, it's available on Amazon. So you can enjoy reading the book whenever you have the time. And you can order it through Amazon; it's available there.

So thank you again, Nicolas. And let me also take advantage of the time and share with you another event, or another book even that we'll be having later in the future -- the time hasn't been determined yet -- and advertise my book (laughter) which is -- well, it's "Unfinished Revolutions" so it makes sense to have it like this. It's, "Unfinished Revolutions" from Yale University Press. It came out just a few weeks ago from the University and we'll be organizing another event for it in the future. You will learn more about it.

And again thank you very much all of you for

your time and interest. (Applause) And we look forward to seeing you again in another event in the future on the hot topics that the region is having. And we have a reception, so please help yourself.

Thank you.

DR. EL-AFFENDI: Thank you.

MR. PELHAM: Thank you.

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