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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. SACHS: Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for joining us. Welcome to everyone here in the hall of the Brookings Institution on this lovely day. And welcome to everyone watching us on CSPAN. This is an event that we discussed having quite a while ago for the extreme importance of the issue.

The Yemen, the war in Yemen receives scant attention for its magnitude and for the cost, the human cost involved. And yet it is a very important policy question. Something that is central for us in U.S. policy. Of course since then events have made this slightly more in the news that it usually would and we have a full hall.

The tragic and heinous murder of Jamal Khashoggi has of course changed that dramatically and we have seen some questions even in the press of why is it that the murder of one man, as terrible as it is, made a whole set of issues more prominent than a huge war. And it's a fair question but in truth, there is no real contradiction. Jamal Khashoggi, who was part of the community in a sense here in Washington, was here with us in this hall at many events at the Brookings Institution and we fully expect he probably would have been here today to discuss this issue and participate in this event. He, his last piece famously was about the war in Yemen.

And so with that in mind I think we can turn to what is an issue that affects many millions of people in a country that is far bigger than most people think, certainly than I do and when I'm not noticing. I think of Yemen as a small place at the edge of the Middle East. It's not. It's a very large country with many people affected directly. And I can think of no better cadre of people to discuss this than the stellar line up we have today here.

We are honored to have a couple of guests with us. Fatima Abo Alasrar who is joining us from the Arabia Foundation. She has been an expert on these issues

for a long time, in part because she herself is from Yemen with family both in north and south from Aden and Sana'a. She has worked at the Yemeni Embassy here in Washington. She has worked with DFID, the British aid agency, at the Arab Gulf Estates Institute and now with the Arabia Foundation. And we are truly honored to have you with us. Thank you very much for joining.

And thank you also very much for Dr. Dafna Rand who is joining us here. Dafna is now the vice president of Care International, excuse me, I apologize. The vice president for policy and research at Mercy Corps not at Care. And in that implements a whole set of on the ground efforts in many countries including in our region. And not only a doer, she has an illustrious career here in Washington in policy. She has worked at the Senate, she has worked at the State Department including as deputy assistant secretary. She has worked in policy planning staff and has spent time at the White House as well and has a lot of experience on this issue in the previous administration, the Obama Administration when many of these policy decisions were made. And so, Dafna, special pleasure to have you here and thank you very much to Mercy Corps for lending you.

And finally my colleague, my esteemed colleague who has been a very important voice on these issues for a long time, including recently, Bruce Riedel. Bruce is a senior fellow with us at the Center for Middle East policy but he is also director of our intelligence program and comes with quite a bit of experience on this. He has spent 30 years at the Central Intelligence Agency working on a whole host of issues including overseas assignments. He has spent time working the White House under four different presidents from both parties. He was the daily briefer. He spent time at Camp David with Bill Clinton. In January 2009, the new president, Barack Obama, asked him personally to write the report on Afghanistan Pakistan, known as the AFPAK report and what the United States might do, so someone who has been in the mix of all these

decisions for a long time. His latest book, which is extremely relevant for this is Kings and Presidents on the history of U.S. Saudi relations and how they have evolved and I could not recommend it highly enough. It is the essential reading on this topic.

And finally, our moderator today, Dan Byman, another dear colleague from the Center for Middle East Policy. He is a senior fellow with us. He is also an associate dean at Georgetown University and one of the preeminent experts on counter terrorism here in Washington. He has spent time on the 9/11 Commission for Congress and has written extensively on all issues of counter terrorism and also on issues of Yemen and offshoots of Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula.

So with that I'll turn it over to Dan and please join me in thanking our panelists and welcoming them for debate. Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Good morning and welcome, everyone. Thank you very much for joining us today here at Brookings. As Natan said, we really have a stunning panel to educate us and help us think more smartly about what is probably the worst humanitarian tragedy in the world today and increasingly a strategic disaster for many countries in the Middle East and beyond.

What we are going to do this morning is begin this as a dialogue where I'm going to ask the speakers some questions. They will respond to me and perhaps to one another and then as our morning goes on, I'm going to open it up to the audience.

What I would like to begin with is simply learning more about Yemen itself and Fatima, I would like to ask you to start us off if you don't mind. Which is simply, could you give us a lay of the land about the main players in Yemen itself. So not the regional dynamics that occupy so much attention in Washington, but the tragedy and the fighting that is being born by the Yemenis. Could you explain to us what we should be thinking about?

MS. ABO ALASRAR: Yes. Thank you so much, Dan. Thank you for inviting me. I'm really honored to be here and I, thank you for that question because there has been so much focus on the international or regional aspect of this conflict without really looking at the local dynamics in Yemen. And which really threaten Yemen's sovereignty and without which we cannot really solve Yemen's issues.

And I think, you know, the media has been portraying the war in Yemen as maybe a two-sided war between Saudi Arabia and local rebels but the situation is a little bit more complex than that. So, I think it is probably useful a little bit to give the audience some context.

Back in 2014, a group known as the Houthis have allied with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and overtook Yemen shortly after the Arab Spring. The alliance was very peculiar. We were all very baffled by it because not only were the Houthis and Saleh main adversaries and fiercest of enemies but also Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former president, had actually killed the leader of the Houthi movement, Hassan Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi. At that point, both of them were really seasoned fighters, the Houthis are definitely one of the fiercest fighters in Yemen and no one was able to stop their influence inside Yemen.

They have threatened, you know, political parties. They overthrew the government of Yemen, placed the entire cabinet under house arrest and ultimately in 2014 in September they took large amounts of land. The capital Sana'a fell, the sea port of Hudaydah on the west coast. There, you know, Taj was under siege. Aden was also seeing a lot of fights in the south and it was really a brutal warfare.

And just to put things in perspective, within six months of the Houthi Saleh alliance that took place, about 7,000 people died and this was long before Saudi led coalition intervened. These statistics are local statistics from credible organizations in

Yemen and usually the media doesn't report on them. Not because of lack of access or information but perhaps mostly because no one is really interested in telling that part of the story.

So the Arab coalition intervention probably has been one of the most horrific or catastrophic for Yemen because it started in March 2015 and it was based on the government of Yemen's request from Saudi Arabia and others to remove the Houthi militia but it ended up being a quagmire as we all know and it was catastrophic because it also added another layer to the conflict on top of the local one. So now you have compounded conflicts in Yemen that are taking place and of course also no one really thought that the Houthi's were going to be intimidated by this.

In fact Houthi's just really loved fighting. During their war with President Saleh they really made a mockery of Yemen's army. Kids that were, you know, six years old would put hand grenades in tanks in the battlefield and, you know, it was just -- it was dirty guerrilla warfare and they spared no ugly tactic in this war.

And so on the outset, Saudi Arabia always claims that they are helping Yemen and surely they do in some, in a lot of aspects in economic and political assistance. But the military campaign for them is truly about their national security. The Houthis are supported by Iran economically, financially, through the media. We have recently seen also the Houthis have increased in their use of sophisticated weaponry which, you know, tribesman from, you know, the Houthi highlands you would wonder where would they have access to these weaponries. They have been able to attack the USS Carl in 2016. They planted a lot of sea mines on the Red Sea and they've had a really destructive role based all on really Iranian sponsorships as it has been proven.

But since the coalition intervened, the Houthi's have been effectively pushed back from many areas in Yemen. Initially they had 90 percent of the land. Now

they control about 30 percent but that 30 percent is heavily controlled population centers so this is where you're seeing a lot of the mismanagement, a lot of the corruption, a lot of the images of the famine, the disease that are happening, they are mostly happening in Houthi areas.

In, you know, liberated areas the situation really depends. It is not really prosperity. Every situation in Yemen is different so some areas in the north like Merib and Al Jawf have been a bit of success story. They have about over a million internally displaced people from Yemen including their own population and the economy there has been booming.

They've been doing very well since they were able to get rid of the militia and I think the Saudi's are playing a constructive role in that area not only economically but through also stopping the ballistic missiles on landing in Merib which the Houthis launch almost on a daily basis and they stop them through the U.S. Patriot Missile Systems. These areas in the north are aligned with the government of Yemen of course and with that there comes that benefit of that alliance.

The south is an entirely different story. The south has been, is liberated. They don't have the Houthis but they have terrible economic conditions and they're really suffering from government neglect but also the south is -- detests the government of Yemen because they are secessionists to the core. Yemen, for those who don't know, it used to be two countries, north and south and they united in 1990. And as soon as 1993, like just three years later the south wanted secession because they felt that the treaty of unity did not really respect them. And they felt exploited afterwards.

Now the problem in the south is that you have the Southern Transitional Council, you have elements in the south that are confronting the state and I think this is really a ticking time bomb. If we are going to have peace between, you know, the

international level, between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis or the government and the Houthis, the south has a huge destabilization effect.

And just to put things in perspective, in 1986, there was a brief civil war, south south civil war that claimed the lives of 10,000 people in three months. So currently there is a more or less a constructive role that is being played by the coalition because somewhat the southerners are more aligned with the coalition than actually with their own government.

And they also found there is an interesting dynamic there with the role of the United Arab Emirates in the south as they have cultivated a special relationship based on perhaps the Emirates disdain for the Islah party which is closely affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. And they also fight ISIS and Al Qaida which has been very active in the south to bring a destabilizing effect in liberated areas but this -- it just made the relationship between the Yemeni government of Hadi and the UAE go sour. So it's an interesting dynamic to really watch and it also brought a lot of theories that the UAE is interested in the south and perhaps in succession for its own interest because of the ports that are there in the south and the economic resources and so on and so forth.

And I was mentioning to Bruce earlier on that there is another element that often we don't think about is that there is actually close familial ties between United Arab Emirates and the southerners. Many southerners in the 70's migrated to UAE and it's a, you know, some of the fighters that we know are in Yemen are UAE fighters have actually families in Hadhramaut and Aden and elsewhere. So somewhat the fate of the region is or the fate of Yemen is really closely aligned with the Gulf allies.

And finally and really briefly well, or maybe not, I just want to talk about the Houthis and just the living conditions under Houthi controlled areas which somewhat maintain a façade of functionality and security. Houthis have a really strong grip on the

areas that they control. You can roam Sana'a without checkpoints unlike Aden where there are checkpoints every mile. And the reason because -- the reason for that is because they're really becoming more of a totalitarian police state.

I had a friend who was visiting Sana'a and she was visiting her family and, you know, at night someone knocked on the door and said who is on the third floor? So people really everything -- nothing goes there without people knowing about it. There is a culture of fear over there and, you know, we see the images of the famine and destruction and, you know, the cholera while the Houthi leadership are living a very privileged lifestyle and this is really heartbreaking.

And I want to mention as well that there is no consent for the Houthis. I mean, there is some consent for the Houthis, there is some popularity but in -- by large the Houthis have alienated most of their supporters including and especially after they have killed their one time ally, President Saleh. They killed him last year in December after he just had an alliance with them. President Saleh felt that the Houthis were not respecting their power sharing agreement and that they wanted to completely control the government and state institutions.

One thing that I feel is missing from the or misunderstood about Yemen and the Houthi rule is the Houthis doctrine which is based on a sectarian genealogical supremacy. The Houthis believe that only the people of the households of Prophet Mohammed which are called Ahl al-Bayt's are eligible to rule Yemen. So, this is really the tragedy in Yemen's current history.

There is an indoctrination, I mean, I don't know if I should call it sectarian coercion because it is really so narrowed on the Ahl al-Bayt issue. So, I think this is extremely dangerous as they're enforcing this and I often explain this phenomena, this religious phenomena and selectiveness as, you know, drawing striking parallels to Gilead

of the hand maid's tale really. And even like the Houthis have things, have (inaudible), you know, they call them the Zanabiat in Yemen where these women would, you know, storm homes of people and look into the women's cell phones to make sure that they are not saying anything bad against the Houthis, to make sure that they are in check.

I know during a demonstration in October 6 which was a demonstration in Sana'a on famine and hunger, one of the girls who was from the University of Sana'a got arrested and she told us privately the story of how one of these women just violated her and as she tried to protest, the women bit her cheek and arm. So we are seeing just -- we are seeing things that we haven't seen in Yemen. It's a moral and unprecedented moral decay to the social fabric and this goes on as long as there is this lawlessness permeating around.

The, I guess if I wanted -- I wanted to just say that the Houthis have been somewhat portrayed in the media as, you know, legitimate actors or indigenous minorities and I think that this is just a huge mischaracterization. They do have, they did have a legitimate grievance but then again, they allied with their chief violator. So what does that tell you about them? I think that in an effort to improve the situation in Yemen, there has been a lot of mischaracterization in an effort to say Saudi Arabia shouldn't be intervened. A lot of inaccuracies have been just all reported in the media.

What has been really frustrating for me as a Yemeni watching this conflict and watching people reporting on it is that the international community has really been silent on Houthi violations. I would say the most disappointing was the recent UN human rights report that was issued in August where there was no mention at all to the fact that the Houthis have killed thousands of people in Aden. Not only that but there was no mention that the Houthis have land mines in Yemen. It's one of the biggest land mine operations since World War II and it is going to continue to affect generations for years to

come.

So I, this is also why that when the Associated Press reported on, you know, the violations and the torture of the prisoners, dozens or prisoners in UAE backed prisons in the south, they failed to even mention in a foot note that there are 7,000 Yemeni prisoners in Houthi militias prisons. 2,500 are journalists. So people are really afraid of speaking up. They're not really vocal and we are trying to maybe through just giving you this alternate view of the conflict and the local dynamic understand the complexity of the Houthis militia in Yemen.

I -- there is so much to say like about the humanitarian aid and the way that it is being delivered and the role of Saudi Arabia but I'll leave that -- some room for my, the other speakers.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you and that is really kind of a fantastic foundation to build our broader conversation but I want to take your last point and extend on it. And, Dafna, if I could ask you about the humanitarian situation which, you know, was always extremely difficult in the best of times and is now off the cliff. And if I could ask you not just about humanitarian situation but what might be done about it? Not just by the U.S. government but by other governments, by the U.S. Congress, by humanitarian organizations.

MS. RAND: Sure, great. Thank you very much to Brookings, to Dan, to Natan, to the whole community here for inviting -- for hosting the panel, for inviting me. And there are statistics to answer your question and then there is analysis. Maybe I will start with a few really shocking statistics and then answer your question by analyzing some of the solutions.

Just this week, the undersecretary for humanitarian affairs at the UN, Mark Lowcock, gave his briefing on Yemen and provided the most up to date figures.

The UN holds the pen in sort of collating the numbers on the humanitarian crisis. Let me share a few of these just to, not to hyperbolize how tragic this humanitarian catastrophe is but just to relay the statistics.

Out of a population of 28 million, 22.2 million are now in need of humanitarian aid in Yemen. That's across the country. 19 million of the population lack clean water. There are 1.2 million cases of cholera although we believe that is actually a low estimate. And 16.4 million people lack access to healthcare and that's a combination of there is no doctors in their community and they can't actually physically access the hospitals. And then the third reason is that the health and medical sites have been destroyed.

I want to emphasize on the statistics that the situation has decreased, has dramatically decreased this year and since 2018. This is a humanitarian catastrophe that is shaped by a market situation. So while there might be food available, there is no money to purchase the food and the cost of food is extraordinarily high even for the best of times. So, you know, you imagine a near famine situation and you imagine no food. There is some food but no one can afford it.

Oh, I should add that Lowcock revised upwards his estimation of the number of people who are actually at risk of famine which is a category under the UN of about to enter a sort of famine red light zone. It used to be 8.4 million as of September or August. Just six weeks later so this week on October 22 he revised it upwards to almost 14 million. So and I'll get to what has changed in the past six months that has really exponentially decreased or dramatically made the situation deteriorate even from really tragic levels of a humanitarian situation.

The -- there has been a 35 percent increase in the food prices just since January 2018. So just in the past 10 months. And just to give you guys a flavor for what

this means, if a family of 7 is asking for a food basket of the sort that Mercy Corps or our other implementers might give, the food basket consists of wheat flour, dried beans, oil, sugar, and salt. That's it. That's the food basket for 7 people. The price of that has increased 25 percent in the past couple months and a lot of the price increase for some of the basic food is highly correlated with the price of fuel. The two are in limbo and affecting each other economically. The price of fuel has sky rocketed.

So let's talk a little bit about what has happened in the past six months to eight months to really affect these figures. In July there was the beginning of the offensive in Hudaydah and, you know, although there was a pause in the fighting on Hudaydah city in the port area and the media has been correct in sort of analyzing that pause. The fighting continues across that governorate. That is very important for humanitarian access issues.

As people know, the Hudaydah port and Saleef port associated are the main humanitarian access points for the entire country. 80 percent of all humanitarian goods get through those ports. So the fighting and the transfer lane, so in the transit areas in the whole Hudaydah governance has cut off road access between the port cities even if the fighting has subsided to the rest of Yemen including northern Yemen. Where, you know, a vast majority of the population is living. So, imagine roads that are just barred and the truck can't go through and that explains a lot of the new figures from the past six to eight weeks. So offer that.

I would also just offer that the Sana'a airport is a key transit point for humanitarian aid and has been closed by the Saudi led coalition since the beginning of the war. And that is an obvious solution here is to reopen that airport for entry of humanitarian goods. And that's a solution that the UN has called for and is part of the negotiations with the special envoy.

So, in addition to the governorate, the fighting in the governorate, there -- the number of IDP's in the governorate has increased and that is leading to sort of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation at large. Since the fighting began in Hudaydah there is 500,000 new IDP's in the past couple months and they're fleeing everywhere. So that just gives you a flavor for the humanitarian situation. I could go on and on. I don't want to but I want to answer the second part of the question which are the solutions and how Congress has dealt with that.

And to, you know, to commend the UN and the UN special envoy and the humanitarian organizer who have taken a lead to some extent in the international system and also the many, many donors around the world including the U.S. government who have responded with humanitarian aid. But unfortunately, the humanitarian aid, just the donations of food and fuel and water and medicine is not sufficient. The issue is really the access. The issue is the ports being opened at full capacity.

Last year in November of 2017, there was a complete blockade of Hudaydah port that through international pressure including by the Trump Administration that was alleviated a little bit but the extent of port access is still far below pre-2017 levels. So that means in 11 months there has been a decrease in the coalition's ability to permit ships into that port of Hudaydah. So that is an obvious solution is to increase the humanitarian capacity of the port to open the airport, et cetera. And that, those are really the solution set for the humanitarian crisis involves access in addition to obviously the food aid and the other aid itself.

Congress has focused on three basic responses to this humanitarian tragedy and the oversight and engagement and levels of discussion in Congress have been really unprecedented. And, you know, I would argue Yemen now features as one of the top three, top four foreign affairs issues that are across the desk of many members

of Congress and members of the Senate from both parties. It's become a bipartisan issue. So, let me offer the three ways that Congress has responded and then stop there so we can hear from Bruce.

The three main sort of lines of oversight have been in responding both to the humanitarian catastrophe but also to U.S. engagement in the war and support for the Saudi led coalition have been to focus on first the war powers issues, the authorization of the use of force who, you know, Congress now has a number of bills but the question has been in Congress, you know, have we, Congress, authorized Executive Branch to support this particular civil conflict as separate from U.S. operations against Al Qaida and other CT, counter terrorism issues in Yemen. So that question is arising and will continue to arise probably through the next period politically.

The second type of questions have been about discreet arms sales. Now the process is that the State Department will notify the Senate on foreign military sales on discreet items. Usually these Congressional notifications are really boring rubber stamps. This happens for around the world. This is not a big deal, there is a guy or couple men and women in the Senate who look at it. But over the past two or three years, this has become a huge hock for oversight, particularly looking at items that are being sold though foreign military sales to members of the coalition.

So there have actually been roll call votes of disapproval on discreet items being sold to members of the coalition where there is a belief that the item has a direct effect on the wary in Yemen and in some cases even a roll call vote on an item that had nothing to do with the war on Yemen in 2016. So that has been a line of oversight and leverage that has gained a lot of Congressional attention and will continue to do so.

And the third is the most recent legislative activity around the Department of Defense support militarily and logistical support for the coalition. So this is

the actual manifestation of U.S. support in a real time which is the refueling and logistical support and Congressional activity has focused on conditioning this U.S. support on better behavior, better actions by the coalition. So the conditionality argument is essentially that if Congress forces the Executive Branch to pressure the allies in the coalition to increase humanitarian access, to be more careful on the civilian and the targeting of civilians in the air operations and in the ground offensives, and to press harder towards a negotiation toward a political settlement, then the leverage afford by U.S. support for the coalition -- the U.S. is not in the coalition but it is militarily supporting the coalition which is an important distinction. That this leverage will change behavior.

And the certification language and the National Defense Authorization Act of last year explicitly requested that the Secretary of State certify that there had been progress along all three lines. Humanitarian access, civilian casualty, more care and regard and decrease in civilian casualties and then efforts towards political resolution. And the Secretary of State of course in a controversial move certified that there had been progress toward all three.

And I would end by just noting that the way that legislative oversight that's what a third bucket of legislative oversight was worded, it offers the Executive Branch or it demands that the Executive Branch will again have to report in both every 60, yes, every three months so every 180 days. So there will be at least two more rounds of recertification and I query whether given the deterioration of the situation really literally in the past six to eight weeks if anyone honestly can make the case about especially the humanitarian access and the decrease in civilian casualties with the final caveat that in August shortly before the certification, it was the deadliest month in terms of civilian casualties since the war began with 500 civilians being killed including of course the tragedy with the school bus in northern Yemen that many people read about

in the media.

So I would end with that. That note that the certification is due back to Congress again in three months and six months.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. That's painfully sobering for all of us. Bruce, I want to turn to you with all this in mind which is simply can you explain U.S. policy towards Yemen? The International Crisis Group did a report awhile back that called U.S. policy a yellow light of kind of both trying to stop some of the actions in the other powers but at the same time being permissive. And I would love to get your take on how to think about what the United States is trying to achieve or simply what has been going on over the years?

MR. RIEDEL: If U.S. policy was a yellow light two years ago, it's a green light right now. The United States has a general rule since 1946 when Harry Truman sent the first American delegation to northern Yemen. Has been that we don't have a Yemen policy. We have a Saudi policy, a Saudi policy that the highest levels of the administration focus on tremendously including the president. And then Yemen is kind of a subset of that. There are advantages of this.

The U.S. ambassadors in Yemen usually tend to have a lot of freedom for maneuver because no one is really watching back in Washington what they are doing since there are no political appointees to want to become ambassador to Sana'a, we end up with real professional diplomats who actually know what they are doing.

But there are a lot of downsides of this. And the biggest downside is that essentially whatever Saudi Arabia wants to do in Yemen, the United States supports. There have been some rare exceptions to this. When John F. Kennedy in 1962 and 1963 refused to support the Saudi inspired insurgency against the republican government. He told the Saudi's that they needed to reform. He actually set the ball in

training for some modest reforms. Bill Clinton had a brief moment of not listening to the Saudi's during the southern civil war in the early 1990s but as a general rule, American presidents have endorsed whatever the Saudi's want to do.

Since 2015 and the start of the Saudi led coalition war that was meant supporting the coalition warfare effort. Dafna has already mentioned the kinds of military assistance we provide, inter air refueling, some intelligence support. But the most important one is not new arms sales, it is the continuation of existing arms sales. The Saudi Air Force must get spare parts, technical upgrades, maintenance, expertise, you name it, jet tires from the United States every single day in order to operate. If that flow of spare parts came to a close tonight, the Royal Saudi Air Force would be grounded tomorrow morning or at least those aircraft that are American supply. The other aircraft are supplied by the United Kingdom so the U.S. and the United Kingdom have tremendous leverage here if they want to do it. But it was more than military support and more than the ongoing logistics supply line.

The United States also endorsed Saudi diplomacy and in particular, supported the UN Security Council Resolution 2216 which guides the UN mediation effort and which kind of sets the international tone for what is proper in Yemen. UN Security Council Resolution 2216 is completely unbalanced. This is basically written by the Saudi government and then presented to the council by one of its partners in the war at the time then Jordan. Jordan has more or less dropped out of the war since then. The resolution is essentially the Saudi indictment of the Houthi Ali Abdullah Saleh coalition. It sanctions the Houthis, it sanctions Saleh. It is so unbalanced that in my judgment it is actually a barrier to peace, not a pathway to peace.

I think it is safe to say that the UN people involved in the negotiations also recognize this today although of course they are very careful not to say that in

public. The resolution passed 14 to nothing. Only one country abstained and that was Russia. Rarely can you point to the Russians being the wise voice in international diplomacy but in this case, I think the Russians probably had it right. It is going to be very, very hard to pull this back.

If the Obama Administration supported the coalition I think it is safe to say that it did so with a great deal of reluctance. And there was a real desire to see if we can't somehow adjust the course coming up to 2016 to minimize the damage caused by this. In the end they didn't. There was some important moves to control the munitions flow but in the end, those didn't really stop the war.

There are complex reasons why the Obama Administration supported the Saudi's. I think they almost all have to do with Iran. But if the Obama Administration was somewhat reluctant and kept hoping that maybe they could find a way out, Donald Trump has shown no reluctance whatsoever. He has doubled down on the debt here, he has endorsed the Saudi's completely and as a consequence he has endorsed the war completely.

There is a fantasy in the Trump Administration that somehow if the Saudi's are able to defeat the Houthis this will be a mortal blow to the government of Iran. This is a complete fantasy.

For Iran, Yemen is a significant strategic opportunity to bog down their number one and number two enemy, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in a quagmire that they hope will go on forever. For good reason. It costs the Saudi's at least 50 billion dollars a year to continue the war they are fighting in Yemen. You want to know why Saudi Arabia is the third largest defense budget in the world. Because it is in a war in Yemen that costs it a fortune. The amount of money that Iran provides to the Houthis is an unknown quantity but it is safe to say it's a pittance in characterization of the 50

billion dollars.

To give you another example, one that Jamal Khashoggi brought up. The Houthis are firing ballistic missiles basically made in automotive shop repair factories in Sana'a which cost maybe a few tens or thousands of dollars at most. With assistance from Hezbollah and Iran. They have all been successfully shot down by Patriot Missiles since this began. Each Patriot Missile costs three million dollars to fire at a Houthi ballistic missile.

If you were the CEO of any cooperation in the world you would say get me out of this mess but so far that hasn't happened. The main reason for that it think it is safe to say is Mohammed Bin Salman. The Saudi war in Yemen is Mohammed Bin Salman's signature policy initiative. He embarked upon it shortly after he became defense minister. I think it is safe to say the that Saudi's panicked when they saw the Houthis advancing on Aden, when they saw the Houthis doing some really foolish things like announcing that they were going to be air service direct between Sana'a and Tehran. Not that air service is all that bad, but it was kind of sticking it into the Saudis right at the point that they're going to be most likely to react.

The panic resulted in war effort that has no strategy, that has no achievable end state. It was supposed to be Operation Decisive Storm in order to attract all of you who are Desert Storm supporters. It was changed from Decisive Storm pretty quickly when it became clear that there was not going to be anything decisive about it.

If you go back and look at the videos and the news coverage of the war in its first month, Mohammad Bin Salman's picture was in everything. He was everywhere. Now I have nothing to do with it. Have nothing to do with it. But he has everything to do with it. His prestige is linked to the outcome of this war and he needs some kind of victory whatever that is to be done.

Now of course it is also tied up in the whole question of what happened to Jamal Khashoggi. Jamal Khashoggi and the Istanbul murder investigation. Probably the murder investigation of the century that we are looking at. There is an opportunity in all of this, I think, for the United States and the opportunity is to refocus attention on Yemen and focus attention on ending the war in Yemen as quickly as possible. But Jamal in his last op-ed called for a very simple solution. Saudi Arabia and its allies to announce a unilateral cease fire to halt all airstrikes, all military activity on the ground, lift the blockage immediately, not partially but absolutely immediately and convene he suggested in Ta'if in Saudi Arabia the conference of all the Yemeni parties. The Houthis, the secessionists, everyone to try to come up with a new solution.

The odds that this would necessarily result in an agreement among the Yemeni parties as I think you have laid out pretty clearly is not good but at least it would get us off the battlefield and into the negotiating table. I don't see much chance that the Trump Administration is going to do this, they haven't shown much interest in trying to find a political solution. As I said earlier I think they live in the fantasy world that somehow this is going to strike a blow to Iran that will be mortal and crippling.

But I do think that the Congress of the United States has an opportunity here and I, Dafna has nicely laid out what the Congress is looking at. Now is the time for the Congress to take the big step and cut that spare parts logistical line and compel an end to this war. Thank you very much.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you, Bruce. I want to begin asking questions really by highlighting what I feel are kind of different emphasis that you and Fatima have in terms of outside powers and the relations to the Yemeni players themselves.

And Fatima, my sense from you is that you're concerned about the Houthis and the authoritarian nature of their rule, some of the barbarities they prosecuted

that you are very concerned about their victory. And thus perhaps may want the Saudi and UAE intervention to continue in order to ensure that victory does not happen.

And Bruce, the opposite question which is if outside powers do withdraw, does that mean the Houthis triumph? And does that mean that Iran wins? And how should we think about both of those? So, Fatima, if I could ask you to start?

MS. ABO ALASRAR: Yes. I mean, look, I do agree with Bruce with a lot of things surprisingly actually.

MR. RIEDEL: It's not surprising.

MS. ABO ALASRAR: And so for example, in thinking about the way this war was conducted, the air strikes I'm really not a huge fan. I mean, with the Pentagon maybe about a month or two months ago releasing that about what 6,000 civilian casualties in Syria as a result of its air campaign with ISIS, it just does not give me any hope in bombs or anybody's targeting capacity. So I don't think that that is the solution there.

But I think that, you know, listen to what Bruce said in terms of like how cheap it is for Iran to make the Houthis antagonize Saudi Arabia and provoke it and how this proportionate of a response is how much money is being spent to exhaust Saudi Arabia, to even exhaust the image. It's at its worst at the time being. There is nothing that can fix Saudi Arabia's image with what is going on. All they need is, you know, one school bus or the death of a child for this to be, to bring back the role of Saudi Arabia as a huge violator and they're not Boy Scouts though. The Houthis and the Iranians are just doing a lot of malice in Yemen but doing it very strategically.

And the United States and the Saudis have got -- and the government of Yemen, because it does have some agency, they have got to sit together and figure out how to strategically combat this the way that the Iran is doing it. So, I mean, for Iran this

doesn't cost them a thing. It's not their major issue but it's a card they play. They are I believe effectively stalling peace.

So in September -- the UN envoy Martin Griffiths who is currently in town had initially put, you know, got agreements from everybody to come and sit down together for peace talks in September 6. And guess what. Come September 6, and the Houthis are not there and they don't want to participate in Geneva. I suspect it is based on orders from Iran. You know, it's -- because what do they have to lose? They control heavily populated centers for which the Arab coalition, the Yemeni government, cannot take back without it being bloody and they know this. I mean, that is a huge card that they play in their hand.

So, you know, for the air coalition, I mean, to liberate Hudaydah or Sana'a would be like synonymous with destroying Hudaydah or Sana'a if they are doing with air campaign. This is why I somewhat supported the Hudaydah attacks because we hoped that there were not going to be air campaigns and because there was a huge fighting force that developed in the past three years through not only just the southern brigades, but also through defected elements of former President Saleh who have been fighting alongside the Houthis.

So we thought that's a clever strategy, you know, use the fighting forces to just, you know, weaken the Houthis who are already weakened by far. They have no alliances at the moment. The Houthis have no alliances with the General People's Congress which is Saleh's party. They have no alliance with Islah party which is the biggest party that we have in Yemen. Zero sympathies in the south of Yemen. The tribes around Sana'a are, have all been violated by the Houthis and they want the opportunity to just drive them away from there.

And Hudaydah which like the people of Hudaydah are just really simple

and nice people. They don't, you know, they don't want to see the Houthis there. And in the areas that you have mentioned, a WFP truck was delivering around Durayhimi, they were delivering food assistance to areas that were deprived from food just to help in an emergency situation. And what we saw on -- what we saw was a video of the Houthi militia striking the WFP truck while chanting death to America. Right. So this is killing their own population under their control.

And I think that this is an element again and I think, you know, in talking about the humanitarian catastrophe that is generated in Yemen, they are using famine, I mean, Houthis are effectively using famine. I'm not saying here that the coalition is not -- has not restricted access. The blockade was a one-month blockade but I think it generated much more, you know, fuss than actually what happened. But the market in Yemen is, I mean, I had a friend who went to Yemen and she is like listen the food is all around so what are you talking about a famine? And it was not a matter of, you know, access to food as much as, you know, Dafna said it's the purchasing power.

And in here, I think that humanitarian, well not humanitarian organizations but we ought to really rethink the way that we are doing aid. No one is interested in development in Yemen. No one is interested in, you know, economic empowerment for what is going on because they think that that is a step that should come after the war ends but we don't know when the war is going to end.

There are so many ways that we could try to help the local populations and, you know, we are not even getting that right at the very moment. People are going employed in the armies both for the Houthi militia and the Arab coalition because that is becoming like the biggest source of employment in Yemen. And if we give them, you know, an economic opportunity perhaps they will turn away from, you know, using the guns.

But I don't think people here in the United States or policy makers really think that the Houthis could be defeated. I think the Houthis they think if they have one single soldier left they're still victors. They think that, you know, they are holding the political process and they realize their power in holding this political process. I think that we need to be aware of this. We need to hold them responsible just as we are holding the Saudi led coalition responsible for a lot of things that are happening. But just remain vigilant because ultimately this is sad but, you know, maybe the intervention has been a mixed blessing because perhaps if the Saudi's hadn't intervened you wouldn't have heard about Yemen and discussed it and, you know, with such passion today just wanting to see a better outcome.

It is just a lot of -- I want to see peace. I worry if peace is going to be just a document that people sign and then worry about the consequences later. The thousands of people that are dying from just guerilla warfare or street warfare's don't generate the same amount of press in the news. So this is really terrifying what is going on in Yemen.

MR. BYMAN: Bruce, if I could ask you to think about this question as well and if there were to be some success in removing the Saudi and UAE role, would this be a Houthi victory, an Iranian victory? How do we think about, you know, Iran winning if you will?

MR. RIEDEL: From the standpoint of international public opinion, Iran won this war three years ago. The Saudi's have become the bad guy. I completely agree with Fatima. The Houthis are not good guys. These are ruthless thugs who want to create a dictatorship for a very small minority of the Zaidiyyah Shia people. But the Saudi's have given them the pass.

In the United States of course, there is very little focus on the war at all.

If you watch American news station, you rarely see a story on Yemen but when you do, what is it all about? Saudi bombing, the Saudi blockade. It is not about the intricacies of Yemeni politics. It's not about whether Houthi is a legitimate government or not. It is all about the Saudi blockade.

And I also agree with you, I think the Iranians have been telling the Houthis for a while now fight to the last Houthi. Or fight to the last Yemeni. We are all for it. If you can keep doing this for another 20 years Saudi Arabia will be broke.

The Saudi's have mistakenly maneuvered themselves into the position where all the blame is on them and very, very little blame is on anyone else. That's not a mark of a very astute strategy and policy. That's a mark of recklessness and frankly stupidity. There is a lot of stupidity involved in how they have gotten into this mess now. This is a critical moment that could pivot out, take the topic away from what happened in Istanbul and take it to we are coming to a closure.

Will the end of the coalition warfare lead to peace in Yemen? No. Of course not. It's hard to see how peace in Yemen can come in terms of an agreement between all the parties. I personally think the most likely outcome that works in the long term is to go back to two Yemen's or maybe three Yemen's.

MS. ABO ALASRAR: Two is good.

MR. RIEDEL: Two is good. I like Yemen so much I would like to have three Yemen's. (Laughter) That's going to take an awful long time to get there in a peaceful way.

Saudi's are also making another big mistake. They think that lobbying campaigns in the United States can persuade Americans to like Saudi Arabia. I have got bad news for you. Americans don't like Saudi Arabia. They may not like Iran but they don't like Saudi Arabia a lot.

The overwhelming majority of Americans believe that Saudi Arabia had something to do with 9/11 and all the Prada stations since then haven't convinced them. The sword of Damocles is hanging over the U.S. Saudi relationship and it's in a courtroom in New York. A Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act allows the survivors and victims of 9/11 to sue the government of Saudi Arabia.

It's well worth reading the indictment. They got some good lawyers. They don't make claims like Banders wife funded or silly things like that. They make very astute claims that Saudi Arabia allowed funding to go to Al Qaida up to and including the day of September 11 and therefore are responsible for negligence. I cannot imagine a jury in the city of New York that isn't going to find Saudi Arabia guilty.

So if you think we have a crisis in U.S. Saudi relations now, wait till that day comes. And Donald Trump is not in a particularly good position to say I want to do something about this. He supported JASTA and so did Hillary Clinton.

MS. ABO ALASRAR: But there is an important point there. Saudi Arabia does not antagonize the United States as Iran does. It does not perceive it as an enemy. There has been, you know, mistakes that Saudi Arabia has committed in the past. So, you know, I think about it like, you know, the Game of Thrones, where the Septs have risen, you know, unintentionally when Cersei wanted to manipulate them and then she realized that she can't necessarily control them. And I think something similar to that happened in Saudi Arabia.

You know, I know there is a lot of blame to go around Mohammad bin Salman and I -- it's really interesting. But what is the pulse of the street in Saudi Arabia? They initially saw him as a young member who is aligned with them, who is, you know, bringing things like, I mean, I used to complain a lot about saying okay, look like Yemenis are better, we have freedoms here in Yemen and, you know, women can drive and they

can't drive in Saudi Arabia. So I felt a little bit jealous that there is a war in my country and now women can drive in Saudi Arabia.

But, I mean, Saudi Arabia has a long way to go, you know, with things like again the imprisonment of Samar Badawi or, you know, the other women activists or the, you know, I think there are so many ways where they can reform culturally. But as a Yemeni citizen, you know, where I find that I have different values, then the ones that Saudi Arabia has, because we grew up in Yemen believing in a pluralistic system. One of the things we realize, I realized too it's that Yemen could not have survived without the economic support of Saudi Arabia throughout the years.

And as you mentioned, the war in 1962 when the revolutionaries in Yemen overthrew the Emamath system, the Zaydi's and it was -- it's kind of funny because the Saudi's have supported the monarchs back then. So around that time, the, you know, the Saudi is after eight years of a bloody conflict, the Saudi's withdrew and the revolutionaries took over and despite the fact that they were fighting each other for eight years, two years later the Yemeni government went to Saudi Arabia and asked for an economic package because they realized that they could not survive without it.

So there are things that are important to the -- I think if Yemen is to survive this famine with -- it cannot happen without support from the Saudi's and in the humanitarian conference both the Saudi's and the Emirates pledged a billion dollars and there is some statistic out there that, you know, it's over 15 billion dollars of aid that has come from the Saudi's for a very long time. Is this aid efficient, effective? I think there is -- I think it could be better than where it is today.

MR. BYMAN: Let me pass this to Dafna with this question, right, which is we have seen a lot of talk, right, and we have seen a lot of talk from regional governments and we have seen a lot of talk from the United States. And to kind of

highlight an issue that both Bruce and Fatima have raised which is even if there is brilliant diplomacy in the next year or two, this war is not going away.

So we have seen this war precede the Trump Administration, and who knows how long this administration will be in office, but it is quite possible that in two years or in six years this war will still be going on. As someone who has served in a different administration, what are some of the kind of issues that have come up that you feel are eternal to U.S. policy as opposed to particular to this administration?

MS. RAND: Sure and thank you for that question. Before I do so I would just note that this is an interesting conversation and it is really important for a deliberation of Yemen to recognize that it is actually two different issues. What is the end goal in Yemen, what will bring peace? How to resolve the civil conflict is a very complicated topic that really deep experts of Yemen probably if you got them in a room wouldn't all agree on but we could debate.

The second question which we are also kind of dancing around but just to be explicit is what should be the U.S. role in this civil conflict as opposed to other U.S. interests, other U.S. objectives in Yemen and the region. So just to differentiate between those two points.

And I think that leads to answer your question, looking backwards in time and Bruce is right that this was an ambivalent, contested, yellow light decision in 2015. No one ever felt 100 percent comfortable with this halfway decision. It was a responsive decision. The Gulf partners came and said please help us support our offensive, we are going ahead. They didn't say what do you think but they said can you sign up to support us? That was the phraseology or the way it came about. We are going ahead anyway, please support us.

And the thinking at the time and I, you know, this was way above my

paygrade as deputy assistant secretary of state but the thinking at the time was that there was a deep, deep critique by these partners in the Gulf of U.S. support for them. This was after four or five years of the Arab Spring where there was a sense that the U.S. had abdicated traditional alliances and partnerships in the Middle East, a sense of betrayal was on the tip of the tongue every time we had diplomatic meetings with these partners.

The first 10 minutes was in listening mode thinking about, you know, hearing the real deep sense of betrayal. This was after, this was in the context of the JCPOA, the deliberation over the nuclear deal. This was in the context of a discussion of U.S. policy where the U.S. was trying to make the case that it was only negotiating over the nuclear file, that was the term we used as opposed to Iran's other treacherous behavior so there was a very concerted effort to make it clear to allies and all over the world but also particularly in the Gulf that the U.S. was only deliberating or negotiating a JCPOA over the nuclear issue.

So in all that content when presented with the request by the Gulf partners to support the response was yes, but in a very limited fashion and I do believe that was the original mistake, right, the sense that you can actually support an offensive and a campaign in a kind of, sort of way. Again the U.S. did not join the coalition. There were eight or nine states that joined the coalition. The U.S. did not. The U.S. supported what they thought at the time very limited military support, the refueling, intelligence, targeting support, et cetera that has been written about.

And then subsequently from 2015 until today, the Obama appointees left the buildings we were in, there was an effort to caveat that support, to condition it. We spent months debating the precision guided munition sales and ultimately as Bruce noted the very last decision in December of 2016 by the Obama Administration was to pause on that sale. So it was contested, it was conflicted, it was always thought of as kind of a

limited sense of support but the mistake was really in setting the limits, right.

The partners had said that the offensive to retake Sana'a would take six weeks and there could have been option to say okay, you have U.S. support for six weeks, right. That there could have been a time boundedness to the limited support for this offensive. So the lesson as you've asked, the general lesson for U.S. foreign policy is A, there is no such thing as kind of, sort of supporting a coalition that goes to war in the Middle East. U.S. credibility is immediately on the line. U.S. signaling, you know, the argument by the partner was you need to show U.S. credibility and credible commitments to your partners for security guarantees, right. You know, this is important in international relations.

But the counter argument is when you go and support a war and you put your name to it, your credibility globally is associated with the conduct, the operations, the strategy and the policy decisions associated with the offensive. And as Bruce has said, there was never a thoughtful discussion of how it ends, what the strategy is and even down to the targeting questions with the no strike list, et cetera.

So that was the lesson is that you can't do this halfway. And I think that is an incredibly important lesson for U.S. national security going forward.

MR. BYMAN: I'm going to open it up to the audience discussion. Just a few notes, we are going to have microphones going around. Please speak into the microphone. Please introduce yourself and also you get one question and no one question two parts or anything like that. So if you persist in asking more than one question, I'm going to choose the question and I might just be bored and choose a completely different question. So I strongly urge you not to do that. So I'm going to take the questions in groups of three just so we can get a lot on the table. Please. Yes, sir. You.

QUESTIONER: Okay. Thank you so much. This has been a really interesting panel. So Saudi Arabia has, you know, I, in my opinion seems like a bad actor and they have bombed agricultural sectors in Yemen. And I'm wondering, there's a bill into the house right now HCON Res 138 to end U.S. involvement in the Saudi Arabian war in Yemen and I'm wondering if the panelists can kind of talk about that as a vehicle for pulling U.S. support?

MR. BYMAN: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Oh, I'm sorry, I'm Hassan.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you, Hassan. Yes, in the front row here or second to front row.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is James. I'm just really curious about what Iran's geopolitical ambitions are in Yemen because I, you know, I agree that there is definitely an element to the quagmire in Saudi Arabia and UAE hypothesis but I think there are larger sort of political and moral religious dimensions as well. You know, I'm a Baha'i and of course the Baha'i religious minority is being harshly persecuted in Yemen and we happen to know from anecdotal reports from people within the Houthi government who reported anonymously that this is coming directly from Iran. And I just want to know, you know, why -- what sort of ambitions are making this happen within Yemen because if this were just purely a political question maybe there wouldn't be such an interest in exporting a campaign of persecution against a small religious minority.

MR. BYMAN: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Hi, I'm Vivian Mashi, I'm a reporter with Defense Daily. Just to tag on to the question asked by Hassan earlier, I was wondering if you could address any of the bills that you have seen come up either in the House or the Senate to either ban weapons sales or withdraw U.S. support for the Saudi coalition and if you

haven't seen any that seems like they're worthwhile or that they would make a difference, what you suggest Congress should be doing in that regard? Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Okay, that's a set of excellent issues to begin our discussion. Dafna, can I ask you to start off by talking about the various Congressional proposals and which ones you think should have the most legs?

MS. RAND: Sure, and I would just note that this is, you know, we are not an advocacy space here so I can analyze some of these bills but cannot advocate for any of them independently but I can explain to you.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you for noting that.

MS. RAND: Sure. Okay. Just note that. Note that as sort of offer you an analytical view. So I said there were three different basically pockets of Congressional oversight. The HCON Res 138 is the one that is most live, most advanced right now. It is probably going to move, it seems after the midterm elections on the war powers issue.

And there the language seems to say that Congress through the 2001 authorization of the use of force authorized potentially U.S. operations in Yemen of the CT, of the counter terrorism variety against Al Qaida and associated affiliates but doesn't authorize engagement militarily in the civil conflict. So it is essentially saying there is no Congressional authorization and therefore, you know, per the war powers this is unconstitutional.

Now there is some debate I am told by people who are constitutional law experts about whether this will actually have an effective sort of war -- will it be able to be interpreted as really that is unconstitutional for the military to do the refueling. So there is some debate actually among both state and DOD lawyers as far as I understand of what will happen should this pass. But it is fair to say this is a very clear signal should this

pass of where Congress stands on the second question that was being debated here which is what is U.S. material support for the civil conflict.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Bruce and Fatima, if I could ask you to give some thought on are there other aspects of the Iranian dimension that should be discussed when we think about both Yemen itself and U.S. policy?

MR. RIEDEL: The Iranians are up to no good. Shock. They have found an obscure conflict that is in an area which Saudi Arabia feels is very much its turf. Saudi's think about Yemen much as Americans think about Cuba. Which is they're not very straight headed about it. They're constantly confused about it. Saudi's think Yemen is its backyard and that other people shouldn't be interfering in there. I think the Iranians are playing a very, very simple game.

Unfortunately, what the war is doing is pushing the Houthis more and more into the Iranian camp. When the war began, the level of Iranian support as far as can be measured and it's very hard to measure, was at the margins. Some expertise, a little bit of money, ballistic missile technology. A lot of it was outsourced to Hezbollah because the Houthis and Hezbollah actually have a longer relationship together than Iran and the Houthis have directly. As time goes along and the Houthis become more and more desperate, they're naturally turning to the only party that is willing to give them any assistance. And that's likely to continue.

I said it before. The Iranians are happy to fight to the last Yemeni. They are happy to fight to the last Lebanese. They are happy to fight to the last Syrian. And unfortunately we seem to be now letting them do all of those things.

In the Obama Administration largely because of the joint comprehensive plan of action and the dialogue that created between Secretary Kerry and his Iranian counterparts, there was at least some way to have a dialogue about these issues. By

violating the GCPOA unilaterally, and by ceasing that dialogue, the United States is pushing the Iranians to be a more nefarious player in the region.

I think on that count, the Iranians are at least playing the smart game. I think they count the months until November 2020. I think they have maybe exaggerated faith in the American electorate but I think they think the end is in sight here if they can just get there and maybe the Americans will go back to things.

In the meantime, if you can bleed the Saudis, if you can bleed the Emirates in Saudi Arabia, they're very, very happy to do so. It costs them virtually nothing. Look at the situation we have today. Iranian supplied ballistic missiles are being fired at the capital of Saudi Arabia. They have also attempted to fire them at Abu Dubai. The UAE keeps saying oh, no, nothing has ever happened here. I don't know.

The Iranians are effectively taking the capitals of their two most vibrant, most hated enemies under attack by ballistic missiles and what are the Saudi's doing about it? Spending three million dollars a shot to knock them down. They're not firing missiles that deter Iran which of course leads us to something to worry about in the future.

In the Gulf War in 1991, the Patriot System was remarkably effective. We shot down almost every scud missile fired at Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Riyadh. At the very, very end of the war, one of them hit a camp in Dhahran and three dozen American soldiers were killed. Sooner or later one of these Houthi missiles is going to hit a target in Riyadh or Jeddah and Abu Dubai and kill a lot of people.

MS. ABO ALASRAR: And it did. It did.

MR. RIEDEL: A lot of people. And then what are we doing to do? What is going to be the day after approach? What are the Saudi's going to do? But more importantly what is the Trump Administration going to do because it is going to have to

put something behind its rhetoric about doing something about Iran and we could get into a very, very dangerous situation.

That's another reason to find a way to bring this regional conflict to a halt as quickly as possible recognizing that the internal civil conflict in Yemen is not likely to end the day the regional players cease fueling it. It's likely to go on.

MR. BYMAN: Fatima, did you want to add?

MS. ABO ALASRAR: One thing I notice is that whenever there are bills and resolutions in Congress on this issue, the people who often, you know, tweet them most and talk about them most are Iranians or pro-Iranian media. So it's definitely a victory for Iran to scale their role of Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Because there is so much, you know, I think emotional upheaval in terms of what is going on and rightly so. But we have to here think about the intention and what is the overall strategy? What is it that the United States wants to do in the long term? If you want to drop Yemen like a hot potato, that's fine, you know, it is going to have devastating consequences on Yemen.

What does that mean for the strategic relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States? And I think it is much more of a really structural relationship. The United States depends on Saudi for intelligence sharing, stopping crucial threats to the United States.

One thing I wanted to mention briefly is that there is a conspiracy theory in the Arab world that the war in Yemen continues because the United States wants to extort Saudi Arabia and wants to get the biggest amount of money that it can have, you know, and it's quite interesting but really a lot of Arabs feel that this is the U.S. imposing the war in Yemen in order to get all of these arms sales from Saudi Arabia whenever it wishes. There is -- I think the longer the war goes on, the more that we are going to be prone to these conspiracy theories, the more it is going to be a quagmire, it's obvious that

there is no exit strategy.

But as we are pressuring the Saudi's to reform their role, we really need to look at Iran, you know and who to reform their role with -- when it comes to Yemen. They are not negotiating with Yemen and they claim that they have nothing to do with Yemen so but, I mean, you know, Saudi's can claim the same. That is very visible, you know, and when they say we are helping Yemen, I mean, you know, people go like but that is not what I saw on the news. That's not really how help should look like.

I mean, just like when we saw the United States intervention in Iraq. It didn't look helpful. In Afghanistan. It did not look helpful. Military intervention does not look helpful anywhere. It's a -- everybody argues it's a necessity and then, you know, for me, I worry -- I never really supported the war in Iraq but when it came to withdrawing troops I was scared because I had felt that something so insidious could come later when there is a leadership vacuum in the country, when there is no real good negotiated political settlement. And we saw ISIS soon after.

So are we prepared to see the same in Yemen? Cut off the arms sales. I don't care about it but what is the strategy that you want to implement going on, you know, forward and especially with huge levels of famine that has been forecasted. So --

MS. RAND: You know, I would just push back and disagree on the Congressional interest and analyzing it. I think it is truly remarkable because it comes, you know, for the most part from deep humanitarian sympathies. There is great humanitarian impulse on both parties. You know, we have former Marines in Senate, the Senate who come in (inaudible) come in and their first issue of business is questioning, you know, what is the IHL obligations, et cetera. So I would say having talked to many of these members of Congress that the impulse is very genuine, it is coming from a primarily a humanitarian place of concern about the famine.

Secondarily, a question of U.S. prestige and U.S. association with the war and maybe thirdly in sort of a geopolitical and increasingly so, a geopolitical concern that this is actually really deeply bad for U.S. interests. So but I would say that would be the order. And even in, under the Obama Administration we were hauled up and asked by members of the Congress of both parties what are you doing here and why are, you know, after the funeral attacks of 2016 there was bipartisan briefings asking us what is going on here. Are there U.S. sold weapons involved here and it was coming from a deeply humanitarian place that is really real and reflects the best of Americans leadership in the world.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. I'll take a few more questions please. Great. Yes, sir. Yes, go ahead. Yes.

QUESTIONER: Thank you and thank you to the panel. Is this on? For a very excellent presentation. I am Don Precard with the Human Peace Project and I want to ask the panel if the UN projections of famine are correct, which is that there could be four, five even more million Yemenis who starve to death this year. If that happens will there be an effect, an impact on either U.S. or Saudi coalition policy?

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. Yes. Yes, you.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is Bree and I was just -- you guys talked a lot about how effectively in terms of public opinion Iran has already won the war and there has been a lot of dancing around sort of the -- what does, you know, what does winning look like and I just wanted to ask is there a way out of this conflict where Iran does not win? I mean, it sounds effectively like they have so is there a way out of this where there is not a total Iranian win.

MR. BYMAN: Yes.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much. My name is Rosie Berman and I

am with the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. My question has to do with how the Saudi's see to be backing the government of Yemen but the UAE seems to be backing the separatists and whether that may lead to conflict between Saudi and UAE and how that could work out on the ground. Thank you.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you all. Let me start out please by asking Dafna, you to begin. If as unfortunately may be likely, if the worst happens, how does that change how the world faces Yemen?

MS. RAND: Yes. So, you know, I said that this week at the UN in New York Mark Lowcock revised his assessment from 8 million to 14 million in that near famine zone and I think that's right that that means that there is a much likelier chance that sometime in 2019 there will be maybe actual famine as, you know, as designated by the international community.

I would like to think that that category of famine changes things, you know, really just sends every human being and every individual who cares about human dignity, who has children, how has parents, you know, to stop and say okay, this is just too much. We have go to stop this and that would be, you know, I would like to think that that would be kind of a game changer on the international political scene.

And certainly Mark Lowcock and Lisa Grande and Martin Griffiths, the individuals who are charged with this response in the international system are such incredible leaders that if anyone had the power to shake the conscience of humanity, it's them. But it, the situation has devolved so quickly and every norm has been -- barrier has been crossed in these past couple of years in terms of what is fair and what is right. The norms of warfare have deteriorated so much in such a quick time.

The blockade of last November was such an odd, you know, it was such a clear moment and so black and white in terms of just shutting down the port where 80

percent of all food, fuel, medicine, everything gets into the people of Yemen. Right. So if that blockade couldn't stop people and say look, we have just got to stop this, you know, these are innocent civilians who are suffering. I may be less than optimistic that the actualization of the famine predictions would -- its maybe not impossible but the things that need to be addressed would be the Sana'a airport, the UN system of verification mechanism, the checking of the ships that are coming in and then the port access itself. And then the final thing is as I mentioned the transfer from the port city in Hudaydah itself and the Red Sea ports over land to the population centers.

MR. BYMAN: Bruce, can I ask you to take on the question on Iran? Is this just an Iranian win and we should accept it as it's in the win column and it is too late or is there a way to flip that?

MR. RIEDEL: It's an Iranian victory in the sense that international public opinion blames Saudi Arabia for the war. It is not an Iranian victory in the sense that they have now turned Yemen into a permanent foothold in the Arabian Peninsula. There is very little permanence about anything that happens in Yemen.

This is a country whose internal politics are baffling to watch. The capacity of groups in Yemen to be on alliance with X in the morning and at war with X at lunchtime and back to alliance at dinnertime is astounding. Ali Abdallah Saleh famously said governing Yemen was like dancing on the head of snakes. He was very, very good at it but sooner or later he stepped on the wrong snake.

The Iranian role can be minimized once the war ends by setting up an inspection regime to try to ensure that military supplies don't come into the country from aboard. Now let's be realistic. The concept of smuggling probably began in Yemen 50,000 years ago. You are not going to stop smuggling in Yemen but you could certainly make it far more difficult to bring in a ballistic missile through Sana'a airport if you had an

UN inspection regime there. The same thing at Hudaydah. It would at least provide a mechanism to minimize the Iranian role in the future.

I also think that there is no long term reason why Zaidiyah Shias would be in bed with Twelver Shias. I don't want to start of what a complex discussion of what are the theological differences between Zaidiyah's and Twelver's. We could spend hours here doing that and we would all be completely befuddled when it was over except maybe one or two of us. But there are not inevitably drawn to each other anymore than Iraqi Shias are inevitably drawn to being pro-Iranian.

But here is my last point on this. What the Saudi's have done is they have given the Houthis the check, the option of being the nationalist defenders of Yemeni nationalism. That's a very foolish thing to do. The Houthis are not the nationalist heroes of Yemen. But the war has been portrayed and the media increasingly has the foreigner against the native, ignoring all the other natives who are not pro Iran, who are not necessarily pro Saudi but who are lost in the midst because it has all come down to the foreigner acting here.

I said that was the last thing, I'm sorry. Did I mislead you? We are actually obviously now at an inflection moment in U.S. Saudi relations. The United States and Saudi Arabia have been allies now for 75 years, since 1943. This alliance has had many near death experiences. This is where I plug my book. Read about them. This is one of those near death experiences whether or not the Trump Administration wants to admit it or not.

We need to address the question how does the United States and Saudi Arabia work together for our mutual interests which is the stability of the region, minimizing the Iranian meddling role and things like that. Murdering Saudi journalists in Istanbul is not the way to go forward on that. This administration needs to hold the Saudi

government accountable for the murder or this relationship cannot move forward. No matter how important it is there needs to be an accounting for what happened in Istanbul three plus weeks ago.

MR. BYMAN: Fatima, we only have a minute or two left but can I ask you to take on the question of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in particular and how their different goals are affecting Yemen?

MS. ABO ALASRAR: Yes. In one word, there is not going to be any break up between UAE and (inaudible) so that's a no. That is not going to happen. They are not going to go certainly to any disagreement on the south.

Maybe as I mentioned before this could be the silver lightning for the southern issue as they have been thinking about secession for so long. Secession is not in the best interest for Saudi Arabia because they don't want to end up with a Houthi state on, you know, their southern border. And while it might seem attractive to the UAE, I think, you know, ultimately Yemen might move into a federal system and the UAE might have a little bit more leverage with the thought of Yemen giving, you know, so many ties and perhaps, you know, so many economic advantages that the south can offer to the UAE and the UAE could offer perhaps something in return.

So I just don't see that this is going to play out, you know, in terms of a regional conflict but there might be a local conflict should the Southern Transitional Counsel not respect the wishes of the Emirates and say we are going to do our own thing here. If no one is going to listen to them, if no one is going to let them be a party in the peace negotiations, we are definitely having a ticking time bomb of, you know, I think this would be the next conflict to watch in Yemen.

MR. BYMAN: Thank you. This has for me at least and I think for all of us been an incredibly sobering morning. As we walk out to enjoy the rest of what seems

to be a truly beautiful day, I ask us all please to remember the tragedy that is happening really before the worlds eyes in not just today but I suspect in the weeks and months and years to come.

We have had an excellent primer on how to think about Yemen. The problems, the difficulties, the disagreements so please join me in thanking our panel for an excellent presentation. (Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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