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P R O C E E D I N G S

DR. FELAB-BROWN: Good morning to all of you who are joining us in the Americas. Good afternoon in Europe and the Middle East, and very many thanks to those joining from Asia and having stayed rather late for our conversation today.

I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, Senior Fellow and Director of the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors at the Brookings Institution.

The purpose of the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors is to examine how they interact with populations and governments, to explore their evolution adaptations, and their interactions also with regional and global powers, and how they sometimes become hybrid actors, and very recently in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan in fact, the formal governing entity.

I am delighted to be having a conversation on these issues in the Middle East today with an absolutely brilliant set of my colleagues in the Initiative of Nonstate Armed Actors at Brookings. What a pertinent time to hold the conversation in which we will explore Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Libya, Iran. Given the shooting this morning of Hezbollah protestors in Lebanon and fear that this could lead to greater civil strife and violence, givenSunday's elections in Iraq with the hybrid and nonstate armed actors—thePMF, Popular Mobilization Forces, also known as Hashd al-Sha'bi. So the political fortunes seem, certainly the street power remains very strong and a whole set of other developments in the Middle East, it so much centers on nonstate armed actors.

And one of the things that is really terrific about the several speakers that we have today is the ability to explore not just the daily media situation, but really the long-term development of those actors. Because I have the pleasure of speaking with folks who have followed those issues for a very long time in great depth.

Let me introduce them in the order in which the conversation with them will take place. My colleague, Bruce Riedel, is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Brookings Intelligence Project at Brookings. He served for 30 years in the Central Intelligence Agency, he was a Senior Advisor on South Asia and the Middle East for Presidents of the United States on the National Security Council. And he

was also the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Near East and South Asia Bureau at the Pentagon, as well as Senior Advisor to NATO.

Bruce has great experience, very many accomplishments, what's really at the core of many key developments and U.S. policy responses in the Middle East. I just want to highlight two, namely he was a member of President Bill Clinton's peace process team and negotiated at Camp David and other Arab-Israel summits. And he also was President Barack Obama's Chair of the Review of American Policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan that was also announced in March, 2009.

One of the reasons why Bruce is just such an amazing colleague at Brookings is that he's a terrifically prolific author of great books. There are too many to list right now, but I want to highlight two of his latest. *Beirut1958: How America's Wars in the Middle East Began*, and his latest book, *Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship*. The book isfreshly out, I highly recommend it. It is one of the most authoritative pieces of work on the relationship of a core U.S. ally and actor in the Middle East, as is all of Bruce's work, just a terrific read.

It is also a tremendous pleasure for me to be having the conversation with Dr. Ranj Alaaldin, who is Nonresident Fellow in Foreign Policy at Brookings, another of my colleagues in the Initiative of Nonstate Armed Actors. He's also the Director of a Carnegie Corporation project on proxy warfare in the Middle East that has various strengths, one of which is a Track II Initiative to bring together belligerents and practitioners to establish de-escalation mechanisms in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

Ranj has been an amazing scholar of many issues pertaining to nonstate armed actors at Columbia University and LSE. He has conducted field work across the Middle East interviewing clerical figures, political figures, Shia militias, ISIS prisoners and very many other actors. And I am always so honored and pleased to highlight the field work of my colleagues.

And among other things, Ranj is leading a project: Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation on public sector reforms in Iraq. And Ranj is also a terrificallyprolific author, like Bruce, having been featured in premiere publications.

And finally, a truly amazing honor and just delight also to be joined by Stephanie Turco

Williams, yet another colleague in the Initiative of Nonstate Armed Actors and Nonresident Fellow in the Center for the Middle East Policy at Brookings. A premiere expert on international mediation efforts and conflict resolution in failed states, Stephanie has served as the Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Libya and the head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya.

And to a very large extent it was Stephanie's amazing work that produced a nationwide Libyan ceasefire agreement that was signed on October 23rd, 2020, and the political agreement reached on February 5, 2021. Those agreements produced Libya's first unity government in seven years and under her direction the parties to the Libyan conflict also agreed to hold national elections on December 24th of this year.

In addition to this amazing work in Libya, Stephanie has had many similar accomplishments in the U.S. Foreign Service where she worked for 24 years with a career focus on the Middle East. She headed the U.S. Embassy in Libya prior to taking the UN Portfolio. She also served as the Deputy Chief of Mission at U.S. embassies in Iraq and Jordan, yet another overlap in the conversation we'll be having, and is chargé d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy in Bahrain during the Arab Spring.

So I couldn't wish for a more knowledgeable, wonderful set of interlocutors this morning.

Bruce, let me start with you. One of the things that is so amazing about your work and why I enjoy so much our conversation and interaction is because the scope and time that you can provide to analysis. And so let me dispose of opening big question on reflecting on nonstate armed actors in the Middle East several decades ago, including in the way you speak about them in your book on U.S. Jordan relations.

MR. RIEDEL: Yes. First of all, thank you very much for that very warm invitation and introduction. Jordan in the late 1960s, particularly in 1970, was the scene of one of the first emergences of nonstate actors on a global geopolitical scale, in this case several Palestinian fedayeen movements, fedayeen means those who sacrificed themselves whoset the stage. In June 1967, of course, Israel won the 1967 war. King Hussein had made the disastrous decision to join Egypt in that war, and as a consequence, lost all of the West Bank and Jerusalem,occupation of which endures to this day as a

constant source of friction in the Middle East.

As a consequence of losing the war, the Jordanian Army was virtually annihilated, the Jordanian Air Force was annihilated, there was no Jordanian Air Force at the end of 1967. The country was flooded with refugees from the West Bank, Palestinians. And quickly among those Palestinians emerged a series of groups, all calling for a war to, in their minds, liberate Palestine, some liberate the West Bank, some liberate all of Palestine from Israel and [inaudible, 09:55].

These groups came in different sizes with different orientations. The largest and most famous was a relatively moderate organization Fatah, led then by Yasser Arafat, who had just emerged on the regional stage. Fatah was relatively independent from outside control although it did have connections [inaudible, 10:23] government.

There were much more radical groups. The most radical of them all was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, led by George Habash, a Christian Palestinian who was a Marxist radical. There was also the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Communist organization. There were other groups that were linked to Syria, like Al-Saiqa; another one linked to Iraq, the Arab Liberation Front. And there was even a very tiny, very, very small Islamist group, one of the first emergences from Islamic politics in the Middle East. .

These groups tried to operate against Israel but were largely unsuccessful. Soin the end they ended up operating against the Jordanian regime and each became a state within a state. Jordan in effect had states within the state who were both operating against the Jordanian government and operating against each other, and in many cases trying to gain prestige on the international stage.

But gradually in the late 1960s the Jordanian military was rebuilt with help from the United States and the United Kingdom, and the King began to think seriously about a crackdown. The forcing event was in September of 1970 when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, over the course of about 24 hours, hijacked five international airliners flying in and out of the Middle East.

One of these was flown to Cairo where the passengers were evacuated from the plane and the plane was spectacularly blown up live on television. Four of them were hijacked and landed at a

remote desert field in Jordan called Dawson's Field. The passengers were also taken off but were held as prisoners. In turn for which the PFLP wanted Palestinian prisoners of Israel released to their care.

It also became clear over time that the PFLP in Jordan also was receiving support from the government of Iraq. In fact the hijackings were orchestrated with the assistance of the government of Iraq. This is the very early days of what would become Saddam Hussain's Iraqi Republic [inaudible 12:55]. Iraq also had the division of troops in Iraq and Jordan. They had arrived too late to fight in June 1967 but had decided never to leave. So there were about 20,000 armed Iraqi troops in Jordan.

The King, in short, faced a quite severe problem. But he took up the battle and initiated a crackdown on the fedayeen groups, turned into intense street conflict in Amman and other Jordanian cities, particularly in the refugee camps, and became quite a battle. The PFLP tried to assassinate King Hussein several times, were thwarted in all of those. And all of this was taking place in a Cold War setting. Russia supported Syria and Iraq and the Palestinians; the United States of course supported Jordan and Israel at this time.

In the memoires of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger it is the United States and Israel which are the heroes who rose to the defense of King Hussein. In this version of history it was the threat of at least Israeli intervention if not joint American-Israeli intervention that kept the Syrians from intervening on the side of the Palestinians. That's not the Jordanian version of events.

The Jordanian version of events is that Israel and the United States talked to each other a lot, sent a lot of cables to their embassy in Amman, but actually didn't really do anything on the ground. The decisive factor in defeating the Palestinians in 1970 was twofold. First, the King engineered an elaborate intelligence con job on the Iraqis, which convinced the Iraqis that the Americans, in fact the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was prepared to bomb Baghdad if the Iraqis supported the Palestinians. There was no truth to this at all, it was all a bunch of faked papers that the Jordanians had given to known Iraqi agents to deliver them back to Baghdad. But it worked.

And as for the Syrians, the Syrians were defeated by a combination of the Jordanian Air Force and the Pakistani Defense Attaché in Amman in 1970, a man who would go on to become much

more famous, named Zia-ul-Haq. Zia led the Jordanian military in driving the Syrians out of Jordan in 1970. This of course gave him considerable stature back at home but which would in the end lead to him becoming the dictator of Pakistan.

While 1970 ended in a series of ceasefires, some of which were orchestrated by the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, then suddenly died just at the moment of truth, and passed on to Anwar Sadat. In general the Jordanians got the upper hand in the fall of these negotiations and gradually forced the fedayeen out of Jordan. Fednayeen moved into Lebanon and three years later the same problem developed in Lebanon, the Lebanese Civil War in which the Palestinians again played a significant role.

Lebanon of course never recovered from the war of the 70s. Jordan on the other hand has recovered quite well. In the last 50 years it has been a relatively stable country that had very little political activity during the Arab Spring in 2011. Its stability is a little bit in question today, we can talk about that later if you like. But on the whole it's been a success story. A rare success story in the Middle East where a country that many people thought 75 years ago had no future. And the British who created Jordan used to call it the vacant lot back in the 1920s because there was nothing there, has turned out to be a stable, relatively benevolent state, certainly compared to its neighbors. And while not prosperous but with a healthy economic growth, all of which is remarkable given the country has absolutely no natural resources aside from two great archeological (inaudible, 17:55): Petra and Jerash.

So Jordan is the place where nonstate actors, at least in the Middle East, first made their major appearance but were decisively defeated.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you so much, Bruce, for this great snippet from *Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship.* If you haven't bought it yet while listening to Bruce, I hope you will rush to buy it in the rest of the conversation.

I would like to quickly ask you before I turn to Ranj to reflect in perhaps three minutes, five minutes on what has changed with nonstate actors? So you mentioned this was the moment of the first major appearance. What are the similarities and differences with nonstate armed actors, you know,

in my mind several come to mind, just as I was listening to you, such as the hostages of the plane hijacking survived, that they were taken out. Not necessarily something we could expect today, but your thoughts on what's same, what's different 50 years later.

MR. RIEDEL: You're right. Palestinian groups were of course labelled terrorists, by Israelis and by the United States government. But they didn't kill the passengers. Like they went to extraordinary lengths to ensure their safety and survival. I'm not suggesting it was a fun trip, nobody ever wants to be held, kidnapped at the point of a gun, but, yes, unlike what we would see with Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State, they were not murdered on the spot.

Another big change of course is that the Palestinian movement was all about nationalism. It was all about basically building a state, a national home. Nonstate actors in the Middle East today are primarily religious oriented, building an Islamic state. Either literally building a caliphate which did not work out, or operating in the name of Islam to attack the enemies of Islam, United States of America, to a lesser extent Israel, Israel is a hard target to attack. Even there the biggest threat to Israel from a nonstate actor today comes from Hamas, the militant outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood. And we see this also in groups in South Asia like Lashkar-e-Taiba, which also has a militant Islamic flavor to it.

It is also worth noting that while these groups have tremendous impact [inaudible, 20:55], in most cases they do not accomplish their self-professed goals There is no Islamic caliphate, there's a lot of turmoil but there's no Islamic caliphate. The United States did not abandon Israeli like Al-Qaeda hoped for.One nonstate actor that has actually done really well, well I think there's two. One of course is Hezbollah, in Lebanon, which basically [inaudible, 21:27], and the other, which doesn't get as much attention, but should, is Ansar Allah orthe Houthi movement in Yemen. Which now basically controls all of the territory of what used to be the Yemen Arab Republic, and fires missiles and rockets in Saudi cities with impunity on a fairly regular basis. The Houthis are good examples of a nonstate actor who are on the cusp of becoming a national government.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much. I'm hoping that we'll have time to come more to Yemen later on in the conversations. Many of the questions that were submitted were are about

Yemen, and so I look forward to exploring that.

Ranj, let me turn to you. Bruce just spoke about Houthis, the Houthis nonstate armed actor being on the cusp of becoming another armed actor like the Taliban. But of course we also have the Hash'd al-Sha'bi model with the nonstate actors really melding into the state and being a key feature of the Iraqi state, effecting even on the Iraqi payroll and having very close relations with key political parties in Iraq.

So let me give you two questions. One is to reflect on what happened in the Iraqi elections, what were the hopes of the protestors that pushed for the early elections, did those hopes materialize, and what are the PMF fortunes, some of the surprising outcomes.

But also perhaps you can fold into it somewhat of a historic overview as well for us because although the PMF emerged out of the struggle against another Islamic nonstate armed actor, the) Islamic state in Syria and Iraq, many Shia and non-Shia nonstate armed actors populated Iraq since the 80s really, and were a key feature of developments in Iraq. So if you can take both the immediate issue of the elections and PMF and what this means for Iraqi politics, and also the longer sweep.

MR. ALAALDIN: Thank you, thanks very much, Vanda. It's a real delight and honor to be joining you all for this timely discussion.

I'll take the question in reverse order if I may because I do think there's maybe three key inflection points, seminal moments that really set the stage for and pave the way for some of the most powerful armed nonstate actors that today are equal to or have supplanted formal state authorities, state institutions. And particularly in the case of a country like Iraq, but most certainly also Lebanon, you can't really examine this issue without starting with the emergence of the Islamic Republic, and subsequent to that the 1980 to '88 Iran-Iraq war. Because that's really a moment where you had the emergence of a state that was dedicated to institutionalizing support for armed nonstate actors, a firm dedication to establishing a systematic approach to engaging these actors, to fostering ties with them, to creating them even. And you've got today the likes of the Badr Brigade which was directly established by the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq war.

And that's particularly important because sometimes there's a tendency, for example, to equate Western support for certain armed nonstate actors with Iran's support for armed nonstate actors. But in reality the former, the Western support is more sometimes opportunistic, it's ad hoc, it's not really the way the West does the business of warfare, at least not yet.

And here it gets also more interesting because you've got really two tiers. The first is a set of groups that are ideologically aligned with the Islamic Republic, with its leadership. And that can be a generalization because there are certain intricacies that require closer examination, and perhaps we can do that during the Q&A discussion.

The second tier is of course those armed nonstate actors that Iran works with in the same way the West does. There might be episodic moments of mutually beneficial interests, there might be some political alignment, but it's not quite the same as the first tier.

And I would also say in relation to the first tier in particular, there are certain groups, even those that are ideologically aligned, that don't quite make the cut from the perspective of the Islamic Republic.

The second key inflection point relates to a different set of armed nonstate actors, those that seek a state of their own, which is rather different to those actors that in a way are contesting one another, contesting the landscape for control of a state rather than to actually create a state. And I would argue in that particular example you've got actors that are more, let's say, amenable to adhering to international norms, to working with Western powers, you know, to preaching, and to some extent exercising the business of democracy, human rights, and so forth.

And that's of course the Kurds that I'm referring to, which is the most notable example in the region. And the key inflection point here with significant reverberations for Syria, we're seeing the manifestations of that today, have seen it for the past 10 years since the onset of the Syrian Civil War, as well as Turkey, and of course Iran.

And here I would say is also an example of where Western intervention and engagement can sometimes go very well. The Kurds in 1991 with the emergence of the no-fly zone embraced that

exercise with rather encouraging results. And we can also look at maybe comparisons with how the Libyans for example managed the engagement, the creation of a no-fly zone during the Libyan uprising.

The third is the Iraq War, which in many ways resulted in a rapid proliferation of militia groups, both pre-2003 firmly established organized powerful groups, but hundreds if not thousands of fighters that emerged from the ruins of the post-conflict phase after the invasion.

And that's where I think we can start to get into the discussion of evolution actually. Because an organization like the Badr Brigade, before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, was largely a militia group. It was established to fight, to combat enemies, rivals of the Islamic Republic and so forth, and not really engage in the business of governance. Whereas the Sadrist Movement before 2003 was a social movement dedicated to providing respite for the impoverished, for the Iraqis that suffered immensely under Saddam Hussein as a result of the sanctions, as a result of his brutal totalitarian rule.

The Sadrist evolved from being a social movement to a social movement with a militia and an armed wing. So that's a transition to insurgency. Whereas the Badr Brigades became a parastatal actor integrated firmly within the state, responsible for the business of governance.

And here I would say actually evolution is not perhaps always the right word because as we saw with the elections on Sunday in Iraq, one has actually made a rather remarkable transition to a actor that can provide services and be a viable political electoral actor, whereas the other, the Badr Brigade and its ilk, its allies, haven't quite really embraced or rather haven't really effectively engaged in the business of governance, grassroots mobilization, as effectively as the Sadrists, and we're seeing the results of that with these elections.

I think when we're looking at the evolution of armed nonstate actors it's really the credible ones that have resiliency, that can not only entrench themselves through a combination of, you know, violence, coercion, and intimidation, but also at times effectively filling the void that is left by the collapse of state institutions, formal state authorities.

Some just do it better than others. That can be a result of a multitude of factors. Again, the legacies of conflict, history, the charisma of the leadership, the pre-existing support base that some of

these actors had. Because ultimately, and again coming back to Sunday's election in Iraq, violence can only get you so far. The PMF tried their utmost to try and derail the elections, to try and coerce the population into boycotting the elections, which large parts did, but not because of the campaign of violence and intimidation. That's a more complicated question. It was more a case of widespread voter discontent rather than, let's, say fear of potential reprisals.

But ultimately they suffered a political decline. They went from being heroes, battlefield heroes during the war on ISIS, to potential pariahs, I would go so far to say. So there are serious question marks facing the future of that organization.

I would say, I don't know how much time I've got left, despite all this, despite all these challenges and so forth, the future is theirs for the taking. And by theirs I mean armed nonstate actors in general. So if you look at some of the figures presented by the UN, the World Bank, the MENA Region has the world's highest youth unemployment, which stands close to around 27 to 28 percent. We're talking about at least 3 million people seeking jobs a year, a potential 101 million people who could be classified as impoverished, and 52 million as undernourished. And that's an ideal breeding ground for militias. Combine that with the fact that you've got at least, roughly speaking of course, 100 to 150, possibly more, thousand fighters that don't answer to state institutions, that have varying levels of engagement with civil society and other potential actors that could perhaps put a check on their power, on their influence to try and hold them accountable. Then you've got a rather precarious situation overall.

So I'll leave it at that, and obviously I'd be more than happy to dissect some of the broader strokes during the Q&A discussion.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: And I'll look forward to that as well. Many questions come to mind, including about the evolutions of PMF, and how them, it's fortunes are or not, we are at one moment. Well thank you so much, Ranj, for those comments. They just make clear to me once again why I always go to you when I need insights on Iraq and nonstate armed actors in the Middle East more broadly.

Stephanie, let me please turn to you. You had the opportunity to watch from the ground

of U.S. policy across Middle East the evolution of nonstate armed actors and the evolution of U.S. policy on dealing with them, and where in many of the places we have been talking about in such key leading policy roles.

Perhaps you can give us a moment update on where we are in Libya as we are to head to the December elections. But also more broadly the evolution of nonstate actors in Libya and in Lebanon, also given today's events.

MS. TURCO WILLIAMS: Thanks very much, Vanda, and thanks for this opportunity, you know, to join this very distinguished panel. And I'm going to do what Ranj did, I'm going to answer your questions sort of in reverse.

Let me start though since you asked me to speak about Lebanon and Libya, I thought I would be remiss if I didn't mention the strange story that somehow connects the two countries. And this goes back to it happened in late August of 1978 when a gentleman, an Iranian Lebanese imam by the name of Musa al-Sadr who is a distant relative of Muqtada al-Sadr in Iraq. One day he visited Libya in late August on an official visit. And he vanished really from the face of the earth that day. People say that he was going to meet with Gaddafi. It is presumed that he was murdered in Libya, you know, at the behest of Gaddafi. And until today this event, this unsolved mystery, you know, serves as a major bilateral irritant in relations between Lebanon and Libya. And in fact one of Kaddafi's surviving sons, Hannibal, married to a Lebanese woman, he's currently being held in the Beqaa Valley by the Amal movement, the social political military movement which Imam Musa al-Sadr founded in the 1970s. Of course his disappearance came just months before the Iranian revolution. And one does not know, you know, would events in Lebanon have unfolded the way they did had the imam departed safely from his visit to Libya.

But let's go to the subject at hand. You know, as I was reflecting on this I remembered a refrain that I heard in my service in Iraq and Libya and also in my discussions with many Lebanese, which is this yearning, this call for what Arabs say is the (speaks Arabic). They want the return of the state. And I think that it is this context through this lens, that we should examine perhaps the phenomenon of the nonstate actors, the hybrid groups, proxies, you know, whatever is the term that we want to use.

And so why do these groups thrive in the first place, and what is it and why is it that official military forces, you know, whether we saw in Iraq in 2014 when the black flags appeared in Mosul, or very lately in Afghanistan. Why did the official forces sort of melt away in the face of these less numerically, or nonstate actors, these forces? Is it because in some cases that these official forces, who are poorly paid, don't want to defend what some described as the vice, the vertically integrated corrupt enterprises which have come in some instances to encompass the entire state bureaucratic security and military infrastructure.

So as we turn to Lebanon and the evolution of Hezbollah, rather, and I'm grateful that Ranj touched on the role of Iran, so rather than focusing on the parties, the organizations well known, you know, regional activities as an Iranian proxy and its raison d'être, as the Moqowama of the resistance against Israel and the West and its interference in many of these regional conflicts, I propose rather, and I think it's very timely given what we saw unfold, the tragic events that are unfolding in Beirut today, is rather to focus on Hezbollah's role in the domestic politics, which has significantly mutated, and which I believe poses risks for the future of the organization.

You know, today's events where you saw Hezbollah and Amal partisans come out against the judge who is investigating the August 2020 port explosion, and the violence is descending. I saw right before we got on I saw that it's now six killed and more than maybe like 25 wounded. It's a case in point where I think Hezbollah's involvement in domestic politics and defense of the corrupt status quo is putting it at odds with many of its Lebanese compatriots.You know, the Lebanese people are very well aware of the Hezbollah's control of the port, the customs apparatus. And so the threats against Judge Bitar are seen in this light and against the widespread calls for justice and accountability for the many victims of the port explosion.

And then more generally we see that the parties Hezbollah's direct involvement in parliamentary and government affairs, the fact they have Ministers in every government since 2005. And all of this associated baggage, the fact that it serves both the militia and the political party. And in the government it places its people in ministries and service ministries where it can use this access to what

are deteriorating and dysfunctional official institutions to ensure cover up for its illicit activities, its criminal networks, money laundering, and collection of monies from the large Shia diaspora.

So it has been thus able to exploit the extreme weakness and almost entire disappearance of the state structure, the collapse of the state. And not to mention its alliances with this, you know, vast array of corrupt political elites.

So it's rather than its evolution as a state within a state, I would say it has evolved to a state within a nonstate. So and of course we saw that its standing took a real hit in the October 2019, you know, the protests, the cross-sectarian protests and uprising against this corrupt elite. And its popularity has seriously waned. And it's causing deeper and deeper divisions in the country given this need for accountability and justice.

So, you know, I think as we monitor the events from today ongoing, you know, one of the things to look out for is will Hezbollah continue, you know, Nasrallah has said that he supports the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled parliamentary in the spring and presidential in the fall of next year.

I think for the U.S. and the other, you know, international, like-minded in the international community, they're going to, you know, we need to push for these parliamentary elections to take place. We need to put our weight really fully behind those who are calling for reform and an end to politics as usual in Lebanon. And we need to defend the right of expatriate Lebanese to vote in these elections.

I think we need to continue with the designation of the Hezbollah financiers in the Gulf, but there should also be sanctions against those who obstruct justice, refuse accountability, and engage in kleptocratic activities. So I would say more widespread use of the Magnitsky sanctions should be employed. And we should continue, I think there's a very good thing happening in the region, ironically because of the withdrawal of the U.S., you know, first from Afghanistan and perhaps more broadly is now you have actors are talking to each other, they are these quiet talks happening between Iran andimportant regional players and this can help to deescalate.

Briefly turning to Libya, I would just say the big difference between a group like Hezbollah and the

Libyan groups is, well Hezbollah does rely heavily on Iranian financial support and their criminal sources of funding. You know most of the Libyan armed groups are on the official Libyan government payroll. They also accrue rent through, you know, through illicit activities. You know, in fact in the height of the war, the attack on Tripoli in 2019 and 2020, this was a self-funded civil war because the UN-recognized government in Tripoli was in fact paying the salaries of some of the forces who were attacking them. And these forces, some of these armed groups actually also have direct line item budgets from the president and council, and they have extraordinary authorities that put them at odds with, you know, the state ministries, for instance the Ministries of Interior and Justice.

So you can say that these groups in Libya are state-financed but they're not state-controlled and they're not accountable to the state. And as I said, many are engaged in their illicit, you know, rent-seeking activities.

And, unfortunately, despite the fact there are many, many plans on the shelf for DDR and SSR in Libya, none of them have been implemented. And the extent to which, you know, there was a military project, a project for the jaysh , the Army underway in Libya, at least during my tenure and prior, that was happening in Eastern Libya. It wasn't happening in Tripoli, and the UN was not involved and not supporting what was happening in Eastern Libya with the rise of Haftar and the so-called Libyan National Army.

But let's be careful here because that's really more of a supra, you know, militia. It's a better organized militia but it's not disciplined. In fact, its forces have been accused of committing war crimes. But Haftar was able to, you know, collect, you know, support from foreign patrons as he continued his campaign to rid the East of extremist forces.

So what we really need in Libya is a military and security institution building project. It has to happen from the ground up. And this, you know, is and should be part and parcel of the comprehensive strategy that we designed in the Berlin process where there has been, you know, some implementation in the intra-Libyan tracks. There are no easy shortcuts. I think we have to ask how we do this all in the context of the United States clearly walking away from the, you know, so called nation-

building projects.

But, you know, this includes full implementation of the October 2020 ceasefire. Wide ranging economic reform, unification of state institutions, decentralization, promotion of the private sector, educational reform, and the provision of vocational training. And the implementation of the political roadmap to end this transition and, you know, maintaining the momentum for holding the national elections. So the discourse on reform has to be accompanied by serious implementation. And there must be accountability.

So let's just briefly on the issue of elections, which is the hot topic in Libya. Look, in my mind there are five conditions that have to be met for elections in Libya. You have to have 1, a popular demand for holding elections. That's clearly there, there was a voter registration campaign that was held, numbers of those who have registered are high, there's a lot of enthusiasm, people are, you know, founding political parties and declaring themselves as candidates. There's the HNEC, the Higher National Elections Commission, it's technically prepared and ready to hold elections.

So then you come to the thornier conditions. You need political agreement for holding elections, you need a viable electoral framework, and you need security in place. And the three are interrelated. So there is no, in my mind I don't see a lot of political agreement right now. There's still sharp divisions.

And then thus the electoral framework which should of sort of weirdly developed, unilaterally developed, and is therefore open to a lot of challenge with laws that were not passed in the most transparent manner. And then that feeds into, you know, can there be stability and security, or the necessary security for elections.

Look, all of this goes into what the political mediation needs to address, and that is the democracy paradox in Libya. It is the use of non-democratic means through a democratic process to achieve non-democratic goals. So the first part of the paradox is this fear around the holding of presidential elections that it will be one election, one time. That is something that needs to be worked through a political mediation which addresses eligibility requirements and provides guarantees for the

holding of presidential elections.

Secondly, with regard to the democratically elected institutions that are currently in place, the House of Representatives, the higher state council, routinely use non-democratic means to first and foremost extend their own shelf life. And these are both legislatures that, you know, need to be replaced, their shelf life expired long ago.

So again, this is what the political mediation needs to work through so that you can indeed maintain this momentum and hold national elections in Libya.

And with that I'll stop.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: That was absolutely phenomenal, just a grand sweep through history, nonetheless with really highlighting some of the key issues, state functioning is essentially vertically integrated corrupt cliques, appropriating money for themselves, their clique, as opposed to broader publics. The desire for the return of the state, and yet the state being so weak, and with just enormously rich detail and great recommendations for both Lebanon and Libya. Thank you so much, Stephanie, just terrific.

Now you spoke about the many DDR efforts, the many DDR plans being written and staying on the shelves. And you spoke about the United States walking away from what it mis-calls station building, what really is state building.

And it's a really good transition for me to ask all three of you in the same order, starting with Bruce, about the evolution of the toolbox that the United States uses to deal with nonstate armed actors. If all of you can take perhaps five minutes, no more than five minutes, to reflect on that and then I'll go to audience questions.

Now one of the things, Bruce, that struck me in the Jordan story was the overwhelming reliance on state armed forces as a response and the success in that case of essentially heavy military response crushing the nonstate armed actors, something that many governments love to do today but are not successful with that.

So if you can please start with the question of how has the toolbox evolved, what's good

in the U.S. policy toolbox, what's lacking, what are the gaps.

MR. RIEDEL: Oh, you're right. In 1970 King Hussein, with American support, was ordered to the use of force. Negotiations about ceasefires were never negotiations about political change in Jordan. They were always about simply halting shooting. In each case they came after the Jordanian military had achieved more and more of its objective.

Key, of course, for the King, was that he had a very, very loyal Army that was professional, well trained, and that even while some 40 percent or so Jordanian ranked rank-and-file troops were Palestinians, very, very few of them, defected over to Assad.

So in this case you had a military you could count on. That's very rare in much of the Middle East and South Asia. There are cases, but there are a lot of cases where military (inaudible) and falls apart.

My thinking about the American toolbox, we have all too often resorted to calling nonstate actors terrorists. We actually have a whole formal designation process which is very easy to do and virtually impossible to undo. So one of the results of the 1970 fighting was that the United States designated the Palestine Liberation Organization and all of its constituent parts a terrorist organizations, which meant for the next 20 years we couldn't talk to them. We found ways around that, the CIA famously recruited Ali Hassan Salameh, the number 3 or 4 official fatah, so he could be a, so we could have a dialogue with them

I can tell you I've read the file of Ali Hassan. He was never recruited by the United States. If anything, he recruited us, not the other way around. But it did allow for dialogue to go on. Following this designation process puts us in a box that effectively is a self-containing operation that makes it very, very difficult to talk to people. I'm very glad that Joe Biden has decided to get the Houthis out of that box at the beginning of his Administration. I think that was a very wise move.

In many cases these people win, and we have to talk to them. We have to be able to engage with them. And this designation process really doesn't help. It's fine to call them a terrorist if they are a terrorist. We shouldn't link it to a whole series of injunctions, largely on what we can do dealing with

them over time. Or at least we need to make it much easier to redesignate somebody a terrorist organization sometime in the future.

For a variety of reasons three American presidents never designated the Taliban as a terrorist organization. Parts of it have been designated, individuals within it have been designated, but the organization as a whole has not. And whatever you think the results are of this withdrawal from Afghanistan this summer, we're in much better shape not having found ourselves in a position where we designated the Taliban a terrorist organization, therefore can't talk to them, not even the most simplest thing, like getting American citizens stranded in Afghanistan out of their country.

I'll stop there.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks, Bruce, but, you know, even the existing sanctions that are on key Taliban individuals, key ministers and UN sanctions of course, are really dominating the policy discussion and constraining policy very severely. And with respect to the Taliban and what we can do with respect to Afghanistan, including the excruciating difficulties of finding ways to channel in humanitarian aid. The European Union just authorized 1 billion. The aid has to go to international NGOs which is a mechanism to get some aid in but still creates a whole set of challenges and complications.

But indeed, as you mentioned, the terrorist designation is a noose on the U.S. policy that is very difficult to get out of. And real exploration needs to take place how to off-ramp from the designation.

Ranj, if I can have your perspectives on what is working well in the U.S. policy toolbox, what's been effective in Iraq, what's not worked well. And perhaps you can reflect also on the U.S. killing of Muhandis in January of 2020 where there were hopes that this would perhaps splinter the PMF. Did that in fact materialize, did we see splintering in the PMF in Iraq, and was it in any way linked to that killing? And was it in any way linked to the electoral outcome now. But broadly, any element of U.S. policy toolbox you would like to take in five minutes, please.

MR. ALAALDIN: Well thank you, Vanda. It's an interesting question. Interesting because in a way, it inadvertently perhaps, suggests that the killing and the subsequent splits within the

PMF contributed to Muqtada Al-Sadr's electoral ascendancy. But I'm not quite sure if American policymakers want to take credit for that just yet.

Most certainly the answer is it did result in splits, disagreements. There's turmoil right now within the PMF, within let's say that the cohorts of Iran-aligned groups that contested the elections. We're talking about an institution, an organization, a set of actors that function around cliques, around charismatic personalities. And it's a network that needs regular maintenance, effective management, and so forth. So when you're really taking out, eliminating one of maybe two or three actors, or in this case two actors if you include Qasem Soleimani, then you've thrown the organization into disarray because I don't think the PMF organizationally ever actually prepared themselves for the day where Muhandis would be eliminated in such a manner. But no doubt they will be drawing some lessons from that moving forward.

So absolutely. Now there's always second order effects when it comes to such engagement. And it's normally the Iraqis on the ground who suffer the repercussions. When you've poked a bear like the PMF, it will respond, it will respond by way of initiating full-scale crackdowns against civilians, against civil society, in a way that's designed to discredit and undermine the U.S. So I do agree with the line of analysis that suggests, you know, there's a flip side to taking out these individuals, there could be immediate consequences.

But this comes back in a way to the crux of your question in relation to the American toolbox. I think when there are imminent threats, the toolbox is quite obvious. There are ways of neutralizing imminent threats, but I don't think the U.S. and the West in particular, has yet to fully grasp a way or a set of strategies or has established institutions that can engage this rather messy, unconventional, hybrid security landscapes in the medium term and then the long term.

And by that effectively I mean we need to really reformulate how we approach supports for those actors that do want to adhere to certain international rules, that do want to align themselves with the West, but it just so happens that the West doesn't really have the capability and the framework through which to engage them.

So, you know, policies in relation to armed nonstate actors tend to change with each passing government or administration. I think that has to change firstly. So firmer guidelines, principles that can direct the shape and let's say formats of U.S. engagement with armed nonstate actors will be a good place to start.

But in the two minutes that I have left let me also say that sometimes it comes down to the basics. So firstly, mediation. And, you know, we are very lucky to have Stephanie with us because this is a good example of what can go very well and how to execute certain policies very effectively. And we need to draw on these lessons on these examples where things have gone rather well because we have a tendency to focus a lot more on where things went wrong and to actually learn from those mistakes.

But I would say it might actually be more effective in taking it in reverse order, actually looking at and scrutinizing even the success stories, of which there are many, but don't always really generate the headlines as the mistakes, as the errors.

Secondly, basics include for example in the Syria conflict, throughout the civil war you had nonstate actors that were not included in peace negotiations and trying to negotiate ceasefires. And that doesn't really correspond with the reality of warfare today on the ground. It makes no sense to exclude armed nonstate actors that have far more legitimacy, influence and sway on the ground than their so-called counterparts who are, you know, stuffed into five-star hotels in that capital, this capital, with the hope of devising something which can actually let's say be implemented on the ground itself.

But that requires consensus with other countries. I don't think it's a problem for the U.S. per se. You've got to have agreement with the likes of Russia, with the likes of Turkey, and of course Iran, on which groups should be included, should not be included. Personally, I would say they all need to be included if they are in fact effective or not, and regardless of whether they are odious actors or not.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Ranj, you touched on some of the key policy questions and issues of course, high-value targeting, when it works, that was of course a very significant part of the effort in Afghanistan, splintered the Taliban, the killing of Mullah Mansour. And policy that did

not work out, the Taliban, they remained rather amazingly cohesive despite the fact that it is a broad coalition of actors with very different policy preferences as is visible now that they are ruling.

In some cases in general they come to productive effects in Afghanistan as well, but very dramatically in places like Mexico targeting trafficking groups but the splintering vastly amplified and augmented violence.

And you spoke about a very thorny issue with whom we negotiate. Who should be at the table, who should not be. All this very challenging with respect to nonstate actors, terrorist actors, very robust debate now going on about whether there should be negotiations that with Al-Shabaab in Somalia, perhaps down the road with Al-Shabaab in Mozambique. And even more complicated debate about when and how if ever should there be negotiations with criminal groups, and under what terms.

But, Stephanie, let me turn to you for your reflections on how to deal with nonstate armed actors for the policy toolbox. And perhaps you can bring in some of the effective tools, some of the softer tools that Ranj previewed and that you were so successful in implementing in Libya.

MS. TURCO WILLIAMS: The Libyan story is still ongoing so let's, you know, I'm going to be an optimist because I think that's necessary in the context in the least. But also, a realist.

So I'm going to look at it from my vantage point as a practitioner, and particularly from my experience in the UN. And as I joined the UN after being a U.S. diplomat, and I realized, particularly working in Libya, that the disadvantages through the bilateral lens, let's put it this way, of foreign powers, looking at certain conflicts or countries, through only a particular channel, through a particular lens.

So let's take the case of Libya where counterterrorism was the number one priority for the U.S. government. That necessitated a certain partnering or association with nonstate hybrid actors, armed groups, in Libya. This ran counter to the task which was assigned to the United Nation's support mission which I subsequently joined, which was to promote the norms and values and to help the UN-recognized government build, you know, and strengthen state institutions.

So, in another context many of the Europeans would only look at the Libyan issues through the lens of counter-migration. Which necessitated also, you know, partnering or having

relationships with either, you know, armed groups or hybrid groups, you know, which were engaged in illicit trafficking and smuggling of human beings.

And so again, this contradictory behavior makes it very difficult to really build the climate for a real transition to the return of the state, the nation-building, the state-building institutions. And that was made most obvious by the way, through the attack on Tripoli where, you know, because of the counter-terrorism priority in the U.S. relationship, you know, he had become a counter-terrorism partner and then suddenly his star rose to the point that, you know, essentially, you know, the White House gave him a green light to attack Tripoli, to attack the UN-recognized government.

This is what we tried to address through the Berlin process when the gentleman that I worked for, Ghassan Salame, went to Madam Merkel and established this international architecture with these intra-Libyan tracks where it's a comprehensive organic process which has to be, you know, heavily monitored, where you need all parties of the international community and the Libyan tracks. We had three Libyan tracks, economic, political, military, with an overarching international humanitarian law, human rights track.

This is a garden that needs to be constantly tended because, so our saying was the three Libyan tracks needed (speaking Arabic). So they would run in parallel but you didn't necessarily have to have progress simultaneously in every track. You could use progress in one track to push for advancement or progress in another track.

And that's why we underpinned a lot of this, you know, what undergirded us was the economic track. Because you cannot, you know, you cannot tackle the systemic problems in Libya without looking, why do the armed groups predate, you know, why are the institutions divided? This is a struggle over access to resources and authority. You need to tackle, you know, how the economic and financial institutions operate. That's why we push for the international audit on the central bank, the results of which, by the way, should be made fully public to the Libyan people, as should the whole process for the implementation of the recommendations of this very important audit. You can use benchmarks, you can push, this will create more trust and confidence in the entire political process and

make this predation on the state far less attractive to the armed groups.

By the way, there's an audit of the Lebanese Central Bank, which is also under way. I think that that is a process which needs to be conducted with the utmost transparency.

So these are, you know, you need to move on all tracks, doing this in the context now of the United States withdrawing from the region, you know, I hope it's not, you know, I hope that we can find a middle way between complete abandonment and the full scale fiasco of nation building, you know, that perhaps was undertaken in Afghanistan. There's got to be, you know, a middle course where we can balance our resources and our energy and our priorities because, you know, if we don't, we're going to be pulled right back into the region and we're going to have to use those hard power tools. And so I think there's a way that we can find this middle way.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: That's a good transition to several questions that came that I'll bundle together about states, governments, regional powers, embracing militias as a way to prosecute with their policies. So whether it's Iran sponsorship of groups like Hezbollah and other fedayeen groups or whether it's the United States aligning with particular militias in the Middle East, sponsoring, building them, embracing them in places like Afghanistan or in Somalia, with Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, are all sponsoring paying building their own militias and the U.S. did so.

I would invite all three of you, perhaps in the same order, Bruce, Ranj, and Stephanie, to reflect on how should we shape that engagement. On the one hand it seems very tempting to resort to the militia options, particularly when the United States doesn't want to divulge its own military forces, likely an increasing feature of the coming years. On the other hand the successes tend to be limited and often come thall kinds of backfire and all kinds of problems down the road.

Do we have a better way to engage with the militias? Do we have a better way to shape them toward less predation, toward more accountability, toward less engagement in human rights abuses, often war crimes that push all the people into the hands of the opponents they are going to battle? And is there any way to get them to DDR, the utterly elusive element that we stand up the militias that they never want to go away, they never want to give up the power.

So to all three of you, perhaps starting with Bruce, are there better ways to deal with the militias that are aligned with our objectives, at least at the moment when we start engaging with them.

MR. RIEDEL: Well I'll go back to the Iranian-Palestinian. After 20 years not talking, we began talking. And for a brief period of time in the Clinton Administration, we were successful creating a Palestinian authority which did move was a militia/terrorist organization out of human rights abuse. Not 100 percent, far from 100, but far better than it had been before.

So this is a good example of where engaging in a political process helped to tame a militia, and we ended in the end, the former militia now became the security forces fighting against terrorism. Didn't work 100 percent, and of course with the breakdown in the Arab-Israeli peace process it's very much in jeopardy today. I have serious doubts that the Palestinian authority as we know it now, has a long-term future unless there is some resumption of of the political processes (inaudible, 1:12:51) Israel. That sure doesn't look like it's on the horizon now. That's one way.

In Lebanon, Saudi led process of political, also helped. It didn't solve the civil war by any means but it certainly tampered it down. So engaging in a political process, getting these nonstate actors to negotiate, is one mechanism by which we can turn them away from violence, and we badly need to do that. For example, now, in Yemen), we need much more dialogue with (inaudible, 1:13:40). We have some dialogue, but nowhere near enough.

Now the Houthis are going to be a difficult party to engage with. Their catchy little slogan, death to America, death to Israel, death to the Jews, is a bit of an obstacle to talking to them. But in practical matters they have never killed Americans, they have never killed an Israeli, and there aren't any Jews anymore in Yemen.

So, yeah, it's an ideological problem but at some point, we're going to have to negotiate with Houthis. How are we going to stop them from firing missiles in Riyadh and other things like that. How are we going to integrate them into the Middle East.

I'm optimistic that if we can get such a dialogue going, their ties to the Iranians are going to, not go away, but become smaller and smaller. Because at the end of the day there's very little Iran

can do for Yemen. It has no money to help reconstruct the country's infrastructure. It has no way of building health (inaudible, 1:15:07) Yemen so badly needs. The money for that can come out of the international community, some of it hopefully will come from Gulf (inaudible) who have billions of dollars to (inaudible), possible to be required to spend at least some percent (inaudible) together.

So engaging in a political process, is in my view, absolutely one of the most useful things we can do dealing with these nonstate actors.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. And I'm very glad that you spoke about Yemen, that you gave us some details on Yemen and the policies you use. Terrific, Bruce.

Ranj, to you. Can we deal with militias better? Can be both better protect them when they are threatened, and can we reign them in so they are not as abusive and don't become the problem themselves.

MR. ALAALDIN: I would say absolutely, yes. So militias don't operate in a void. So we're normally talking about complex, interpersonal, interdependent links and networks. It's a complex web, to put it simply, in which these actors operate.

I always like to emphasize let's start with the political enablers of these actors. And there is a trend here where when you've got a particular actor that emerges with a certain level of muscle, a willingness to fight as a group or set of loyal fighters, there seems to be a tendency on the part of political actors who have had or have absolutely no association with such actors, to actually try to coop them. And these are, by the way, actors with whom the U.S., the West, other international actors have relations with. So if you want to impose costs and constraints on nonstate actors that are odious, that are complicit in human rights atrocities and so forth, let's begin with their political enablers. Because I do think they tend to get away with far too much in that regard and there are ample examples of this.

By default, you're constraining the political space in which militias can operate, you're in a way containing their ascendency, but also by default you're opening up the space for those actors that can hold them accountable, to sort of have a role in this equation. And by that I mean civil society, by going after the political enablers, you're in a way let's say creating an incentive structure for these political

enablers to start shifting their focus on civil society, and ideally, in the more medium term perspective, focusing on empowering and improving other institutions like the judiciary or ensuring there's a free press that can shed light on these atrocities. And that's a crucial part of the accountability question.

But ultimately, look, you know, somebody mentioned hybrid security orders might have been used at the beginning, Stephanie as well. And this is the reality of conflict and governance in the region for at least the next decade, if not two decades.

And that's where I would reemphasize my point about having some level of an institutionalized approach to armed nonstate actors, and particularly those that, as I say, are odious and whose interests and objectives do not align with the values and interests of the United States and the West more broadly.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks, Ranj. As you mentioned, accountability is something that Stephanie talked about and that I would say is fundamental. Now in my view a problem for U.S. foreign policy, has been that when we deal with actors who are our allies, whether they are nonstate armed actors, militias, or whether they are event spates, we really struggle to find the will and the capacity to impose accountability on them even for very extreme abuses and very extreme misbehaviors. And we tend to subordinate a broader governance quality questions through just a very short imperative of killing enough of the terrorists.

But so, we treat them with sort of two kid gloves. On the other hand, we often don't take the position that we want to shape the nonstate armed actors who are our opponents, and instead believe that the only mechanism to deal with them is to crush them, as opposed to perhaps shaping their behavior to make them less odious.

But, Stephanie, to you, please with respect to these questions, can we better deal with militias than has been the record?

MS. TURCO WILLIAMS: Yes, absolutely. And here I'll refer to the Libyan case again. Before I joined the UN when I was, you know, in charge of the U.S. Embassy to Libya, I really didn't meet any of the Libyan armed group actors.

When I went to the UN, within the first two months I was with my boss (inaudible, 1:20:36), I was sitting around the table in the City of Zawiya, next to Tripoli, and we were negotiating a ceasefire for what was then a kind of mini attack on Tripoli with a whole range of armed group actors. And that was like a very intensive, you know, mediation. And from there, and many, many of us from the U.N. mission had contacts with a lot of armed group actors across the country. This is very important now in the context of the ongoing, you know, political mediation.

Because these are the guys with the guns. You're going to need to sit and talk with them and assure them, and listen to them, which was something that we did, you know, in the course of many exchanges with the groups in Tripoli and the west, and of course there was the whole, you know, relationship with the so-called Libyan National Army and Mr. Haftar. And so that is which, you know, the United States does obviously speak to Mr. Haftar.

But I would argue that now, you know, with a lot of attention surrounding the electoral process in Libya, that this is an opportune moment for, you know, the United States and others in the international community to really sit and listen and, you know, if possible provide, you know, assurances and talk about this comprehensive strategy, this roadmap to help Libya, you know, and this long period of transition and move to a more, you know, permanent, secure, and peaceful period.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you. We are eight minutes, seven minutes away from when we need to end, so we have time for at least one question. I would love to have two questions, but let's see if we can get to the second one.

Let me continue with you, Stephanie , and then offer Bruce and Ranj the opportunity to come in. And let me ask you about Tunisia. One of the questions, there were several questions that we got from the audience, is what's the state of Tunisia today, and what does it mean for nonstate armed actors? Tunisia was one of the surviving, perhaps only surviving positive outcome of the Arab Spring, where are we now.

Stephanie, let me turn to you, open with you, please.

MS. TURCO WILLIAMS: It's very worrisome what's happening in Tunisia. Indeed, it was

sort of the shining example of the Arab Spring and yet it has turned to, you know, literally the Arab Winter with these unilateral decisions being taken by the president.

And really what is the off-ramp here, you know, the exclusion of certain parties, the shuttering of the parliaments. I am afraid that violence could return to Tunisia and again, looking at it through the Libyan context, of course, both of these countries, their security is interconnected, and one cannot help but recall that in the ranks of (inaudible, 1:23:52) and Al Qaeda, you know, there was this unusual percentage of Tunisian nationals. And so, if people don't really see that there is a reasonable and peaceful, you know, off-ramp here, then I'm afraid that you could see a return to serious violence in that country.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Bruce.

MR. RIEDEL: I am just struck, 10 years after the Arab Spring, desolation that has resulted, we have broken (inaudible) like Syria, Libya and dictatorship which is far more abusive (inaudible).

Could the United States have done a better job? Ironically, we all think we tried too hard to support (inaudible). That's one of the reasons why the Saudis are (inaudible) on Barack Obama, whereas as American we regret the fact that we did too little to (inaudible).

It's hard to be an optimist about the future of the Middle East. Ranj laid out the economic problems. Those are only going to get worse (inaudible) fades out of the future (inaudible) the price of oil. Oil is no longer necessary as it (inaudible) it's the Middle East (inaudible). It's hard for me to find ways to be optimistic, and if I'm wrong, but I look at a region (inaudible) with a lot of nonstate actors involved in a lot of violence for a long, long time to come.

So, Vanda, you have nothing to worry about. Your initiative has a bright future ahead.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thanks, Bruce. Ranj, if you want to take on the Tunisia question, but since you have three minutes at the end, maybe you want to answer a different question, namely that I was hoping to ask, namely on the evolution of PMF, where we are right now. You know, your description about the evolution of the Saudis from a movement dedicated to providing relief to the poor, to

militia, now back to political force as opposed to Badr from militia into parastate entity now being challenged kind of reminded me of the basic choice that any nonstate armed actor faces. Is it namely do they only rule through mailed fist, or do they also try to rule in addition to the mailed fist, also through the provision of services? At least services such as order, suppression of street crime, and the distribution mechanism if they cannot provide other services like socioeconomic relief.

And of course, the PMF are deeply integrated into many economies in Iraq. They dominate those contracting in Iraq, they are integrated into illicit economies of the country, as for that matter are the Sadrists. So the political decline right now, in my view, is not their end, and there is a big conversation going on whether they might be even more dangerous now that they are not part of, that their role in the state is weaker than when they were so, that their role in the state was so strong and powerful.

Your reflection. If they are going to be mostly street militias dominating Iraq's economies, are they going to the less or more dangerous and how we should deal with them.

MR. ALAALDIN: And how long do I have, just?

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Two minutes.

MR. ALAALDIN: Two minutes, great. All right. I mean this could easily relate to Tunisia. With Tunisia I would say it's not a post-conflict set, it's a transitioning society. It's transitioning into a different set of political dynamics. And I think those distinctions are important when we're looking at nonstate actors. Is it nonstate actors in the context of tumults and first conflict, or are we really talking about volatile political transitions?

Insofar as the PMF is concerned, this comes back to the question of institution. I would say this is an opportune moment for Iraq, but also the international community and the U.S. Because you've now got the political superiority of the Sadrists as a counterweight to the PMF, you've got a very viable protest movement which secured 10 seats in the elections, honest electoral debut, and despite all the events that unfolded in the runoff, particularly the assassinations and atrocities against activists.

And third, you've also got splits within the PMF, groups that have now withdrawn from the

organization that are more aligned with the Iraqi state, more aligned even with the interests and objectives of the United States and a greater, let's say, receptiveness towards adhering to international norms and human rights norms.

So, this is an opportune moment. But the PMF is also an organization that cannot be underestimated. It does still have its own very strong patronage networks, support bases. There's tens of thousands of Iraqis that depend on the organization and its leadership for respite, for their salaries, for their livelihoods.

So, whilst it suffered an electoral decline, I actually think, and this could be good for the overall "democratic process" of course in Iraq, they'll look back on this, hopefully reflect and simply muster up a more effective electoral strategy the next time around because they are not alone in this. All the other main actors, including the Sadrists, have suffered electoral defeats, numerous political defeats, but they all have a tendency to be rather resilient and bounce back from these moments. So absolutely let's not rule the PMF out of anything, but hopefully they'll look towards electoral management and strategy, politics rather than the barrel of a gun to, you know, to achieve their objectives.

DR. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much, Ranj, this is always great listening to you and learning from you.

Stephanie, the insights that you brought were phenomenal and I'm so pleased that at Brookings and at the Initiative we can benefit from them, as can our audience.

And, Bruce, is always a phenomenal colleague with tremendous insight on wide set of countries and very difficult regions of South Asia and the Middle East, and the author of yet another absolutely terrific book, *Jordan and America*.

Thank you all very much. And the audience, I look forward to having you join us for other events of the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors, which in November will be an event on Mozambique and the terrorist group Al-Shabaab there, as well as an event on conservation policies in Africa.

I hope that you continue to follow our website and use those features, articles, reports, op-eds, and blogs by my terrific colleagues in the Initiative, including Ranj, Bruce and Stephanie.

And I wish you all a good day.

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Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

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