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US-JORDAN RELATIONS: JORDAN'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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PARTICIPANTS:

Welcome:

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Discussion:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good morning, and good afternoon, and good evening to those of you who are joining us from outside of the Washington area. My name is Suzanne Maloney. I'm the vice president and director of Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institution. On behalf of Brookings and our Center for Middle East Policy, I'm truly delighted to welcome you all to today's event: "U.S.-Jordan Relations, Jordan's Vision for the Future." We gather virtually today to welcome Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Ayman Safadi to Brookings. Minister Safadi, it is an honor to have you with us today.

Allow me to take one moment to introduce our distinguished speaker. Minister Safadi has held office since January 2017. Prior to his appointment, he was a member of the Jordanian senate. During his impressive diplomatic career, he has also served as an advisor to His Majesty, King Abdullah, II, as minister of state, and as the Jordanian government's official spokesperson.

I will be joined in moderating today's conversation with Minister Safadi by my colleague, Brookings Senior Fellow Bruce Riedel. I can think of no one better equipped to shape our discussion today than Bruce. Bruce's career spanned three decades across the intelligence community and at the highest levels of U.S. government. He was a senior advisor on South Asia and the Middle East to four presidents of the United States from the staff of the National Security Council at the White House. Bruce's latest book, published just last year with the Brookings Institution Press, is entitled, "Jordan and America: An Enduring Friendship." And the book tells the remarkable story of the relationship between Jordan and the United States, and how leaders from both countries have navigated the complicated waters of one of the most volatile regions of the world.

Before we begin this discussion, I'd like to give a quick shout out to several people who've made today's event possible. We are so grateful to Ambassador Dina Kawar and her staff at the Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for their cooperation,

especially at a time when the pandemic unfortunately complicated our hopes to meet today in person. This event is part of the second successful year of the Center for Middle East Policy's project on the sources of Middle East instability. This is a wide-ranging initiative key to the work of our Center for Middle East Policy and key to the mission of charting path, political, economic, and social, to a Middle East at peace with itself in the world. I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to Ann and Andrew Tisch for their support of this project and for their support of the Institution as a whole. Without their generous support, our Center for Middle East Policy would not be able to produce its array of research and analysis year-round. I would like to underscore their and our steadfast commitment to Brookings' core value of independence which allows our scholars complete discretion in their work. And I note that, like all Brookings events, the views expressed today are solely those of the speakers.

A few final housekeeping notes. A final reminder that we are on the record today and streaming live. We will be taking questions from viewers and I encourage you to submit them by email to events@brookings.edu or via Twitter at the hashtag JordanUS. And now, it is my distinct honor to welcome Minister Safadi to the virtual stage for opening keynote remarks. Minister, the floor is yours.

MINISTER SAFADI: Good afternoon. Good evening to all our colleagues who are with us today, and I want to start by thanking you for this opportunity to speak to Brookings. What's going on with Jordan – this is a very, very important time, so thank you so much for that. And let me start by emphasizing, as you said, the enduring nature of the partnership and friendship that Jordan and the United States have had over decades. Our cooperation continue on both the bilateral team and also in our joint efforts to try and resolve the many crises that continue to haunt the region and deny people the peace, stability, and prosperity that they all deserve.

I'm here in Washington today for talks and demonstration on how we can further advance our bilateral ties. Obviously, our friendship is solid. The U.S. support for

Jordan has been extremely important in enabling us to address the many challenges that we face. Lots of it as part of (inaudible) in which the kingdom has had to deal with over decades. Obviously, we will be discussing the new MOU, as the current one will expire by the end of this year, and we're hopeful that we'll be able to conclude yet another MOU that would ensure a continuation of the critical U.S. support for Jordan, for which we remain extremely grateful.

Obviously, other issues on the agenda are the region and our joint effort to try and resolve crises, and this is a very critical time in the region. If we look around, we continue to suffer from many crises, unfortunately, many of them are not that promising, so we need to continue to work together on trying to find paths towards progress at least and resolve those issues. And the United States' role is key and is essential for the success of all these efforts.

Obviously, on top of our agenda here is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We're all keen on maintaining the calm. We're all keen on stabilizing the situation. But I think it is imperative to say that maintaining this calm is going to need measures that go beyond addressing the immediate needs and the immediate challenges to creating a political horizon that will revitalize efforts to achieve the just and lasting peace that is a strategic choice for Jordan and an objective for which Jordan has continued to work and dedicate all resources we have to move quickly. We cannot take the current situation for granted. Some things have got to give. That means, basically, bringing the parties back to the negotiation table with a view of moving towards the two-state solution, which for us in Jordan is the only path towards achieving that. Ultimately, Middle East peace cannot jump over the core issue to the Palestinian-Israel issue. Palestinian people deserve to live in a free and independent state on the borders -- on the lines of 1967, where occupied Jerusalem (inaudible) side-by-side, Israel, with a view to, again, pooling all our resources so that we can create a better future that we seek. So, my talks here today will be having the very important conversation with our U.S. partners and how we can create a path to at least starting negotiations and

move forward. Obviously, we know how difficult the situation is. We know how challenging. The PMA is facing tremendous challenges and more in terms of that, its ability to deliver all the needs of its people, but also, in terms of assuring its people that the path to peace remains viable and that we need to move forward. So, that is one area of concern that we will be focusing on.

Obviously, the other issue that I'll be discussing here is efforts to get to a solution to the Syrian crisis. The reality is there's been no strategy on dealing with Syria and status quo politics is not an option, particularly for some of the regions that continue to live with the terrible consequences of that crisis.

So, what I want to do is to again see how we can start a path towards that political solution. Ultimately, this crisis has caused so much destruction, so much suffering, and it's got to stop. And we all agree that there's no military solution to that conflict. The only solution is political to fight for -- provides a framework within which we can move, so that is what we're doing. And in Jordan, we are doing everything we possibly can to -- in coordination with our partners and friends to see how we can, again, get on a meaningful process towards achieving that.

As you know, Jordan would suffer the consequences of regional crises. We've been at the receiving end of every crisis in the region, and the receiving crisis, in particular, has had a tremendous negative impact on us. 1.3 million citizens in Jordan, only 10 percent of whom live in refugee camps. The rest are in every city, town, and village of the country. Fifty percent of Syrians in Jordan are under the age of 15. And the needs of the refugees are no longer (inaudible). They need schools. They need jobs. And most importantly, they need to live a dignified life, and I say that at a time when we bring the alarm about the dwindling support to its refugees and to its host communities. So, yes, there are other problems, as well, in the world, but those refugees remain there, and their needs remain essential and we cannot victimize them twice; once by conflict and the second time by not helping them and abandoning them to despair and bitterness and anger. And that will

be a threat to all of us.

Obviously, our eyes are also on Iraq, and we believe that Iraq has achieved a tremendous victory over Daesh, stabilizing Iraq's key to the stability of the whole region. So, we remain committed to supporting Iraq and making sure that Iraq continues on a path towards regaining its stability and providing the dignified and prosperous lives for its people.

Again, I can go on for -- there are lots of challenges with which we are grappling in the region, but what matters is probably step back a little bit, refocus, and have a proper, sort of, assessment of what we're doing vis a vis each conflict. We cannot continue to double down on policies and action that has not resulted in the desired objective. We have to reassess, and we have to do what's right and try and resolve those crises. So, I'll just stop at that as an opening for the conversation and I'll be more than happy to engage and respond to any comments or questions. There again, allow me to say a big thank you to you and your colleagues for this opportunity.

MS. MALONEY: Minister Safadi, thank you so much for those opening remarks. You've given us a great deal to think about and a great deal to discuss over the course of the next hour that we'll be here together today. Let me just start with a kind of broad picture. You've arrived in Washington at a time of fairly intense diplomacy for the United States and Europe. You've come at a time when the Biden administration has really put a great emphasis on the focus on strategic competition with great powers, particularly with China, but also, of course, with Russia. And there has been a sense that the intense focus of Washington over the course of the past 20 years, particularly since the 911 attacks, on the Middle East has waned as these other issues have begun to loom much more urgently. And I wonder if you have a sense from your conversations with the Biden administration about U.S. staying power in the region about how this pivot to deal with the broader strategic competition may impact the amount of time and energy, particularly at the highest levels of the administration, for the very protracted and dangerous issues that we face in the Middle East.

MINISTER SAFADI: Thank you. Look, I mean, we do understand the United States has to deal with a lot of issues that go beyond the Middle East, but our understanding and our discussions with the U.S. continue to lead us to conclude that the U.S. remains interested in the region and is trying to do whatever it can to help us tackle all those challenges. I mean, obviously, priorities could shift from day to another given the nature of developments that take place, but ultimately, on the peace process, we do appreciate the position that the new administration has taken in terms of reasserting its commitment to the two-state solution. The very clear stand it took against settlements is an impediment to achieving peace and restoring support to (inaudible) which is key because we all understand how important it is for (inaudible) to be able to continue to deliver its key market services to 5.6 million Palestinians. So, the U.S. has made an announcement they are extremely important and that have restored (inaudible) we can work together towards, again, revitalizing talks and get back on the table. On Iraq, the U.S. remains supportive of the Iraqi process to try again and stabilize and move on with the political forces that would address the challenges that that country faces. So, on all those fronts, we continue to talk. We engage on almost a daily basis, and we try to work together. But what I would like to say is that we cannot just rely solely on the U.S. to come and do everything for us. We have to do the heavy lifting in the region ourselves, and we have to engage in a two-way traffic whereby we do what we have to do, and the U.S. is there to support and come up with ideas. So, that is really the premise of what we're trying to do in Jordan, is to see how we can come with ideas, with proposals, and work that would ultimately be a new basis for a joint partnership in trying to address those issues.

MR. RIEDEL: Mr. Minister, let me also welcome you to Brookings this morning and to the United States. I'd like to stick with the issue of your neighbor to the west, Israel, and the Palestinian territories. It's no secret that King Abdullah and his father found dealing with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unpleasant and, more importantly, unproductive. But you now have a new government in Israel and last year, you

and the Israeli government initialed a really monumental agreement on developing solar power to produce desalinated water. For a country which is as water-stressed as yours, this is potentially a major, major breakthrough. Could you say some words about your relationship with the new Israeli government, about this agreement, and whether this agreement can be broadened to include the Palestinians, as well.

MINISTER SAFADI: Good morning to you, and allow me to start by wishing you a happy birthday. I know it was yesterday or the day before, so best wishes, and again, best wishes for a happy New Year to all of you. And, yes, you're absolutely right. I mean, our relations with Israel in the previous government were extremely difficult. It is no secret that the impact of these policies have been detrimental, not only to Jordan-Israel relations, but also to the overall effort to bring about peace and stability and progress towards solving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. With the new Israeli government, obviously, we have our agreements and we have our disagreements, but we do talk. We're engaging, and we're engaging from a departure that we want to be able to contribute to an ecosystem that will allow all of us in the region to move forward, again, with the peace process because the more progress you make with the peace process, the better the chances for all of us to come together and address many other challenges, including the challenge of the shortage of water, climate, and other issues. So, we have open channels with the Israeli governments. We talk. They know our position extremely well on the two-state solution and the need for creating economic and political horizons for the Palestinians and for the peace process. And we're also looking at ways to which we can contribute to a better, sort of, environment in terms of addressing a lot of the bilateral issues that need to be addressed and have been ignored, again, due to the policies of the previous government in the past. We're all talking about the (inaudible) now, but I'd like to remind you that we also -- many, many years ago, we were talking about the Red Dead, which was a major project that would not only have contributed to addressing the water shortage issue for us, the Israelis, and the Palestinians, but also would have had a major environmental impact in terms of saving the

Red Sea, allowing for creating energy and all of that, and we were about to issue the (inaudible) before the previous Israeli government decided to walk out and move forward.

So, the bottom line is that we're aware of the challenges. We remain committed to doing everything we possibly can in Jordan to achieve the strategic goal of peace, and as we do that, we believe we have to engage, and we're engaging very frankly, very openly, and very seriously with a view to, again, trying to create a better environment from that in the past, and ultimately, bring everybody to the process of revitalizing the peace process and move forward.

MS. MALONEY: Let me just pick up on this same issue and on the final remarks that you just made about bringing everybody into the process. Obviously, one of the few enduring achievements of Trump administration diplomacy, one that the Biden administration, I think, has supported and in many ways doubled down on, has been this effort to bring about a different relationship between Israel and other core Arab states. The Abraham Accords and the broader engagement of various Arab leaders directly with Israeli leaders is a big change in the context for the regional environment and, of course, for the peace process itself. I wonder what you see is Jordan's role as a longtime interlocutor with the Israelis in this broader engagement of the Arab world and how this process may be able to assist in getting to, as you said, the core issue -- the peace process cannot jump over the core issue, as you said in your initial remarks, of statehood for the Palestinians.

MINISTER SAFADI: The reality is it is not because of the absence of peace treaties between Israel and the other (inaudible) that we had a conflict, and that includes peace treaties with Jordan, Egypt, and the Abraham Accords, as well. It's because there was a conflict that those peace treaties did not exist. So, ultimately, we need to stay focused on the core issue. If these treaties are looked at as an alternative to addressing the core issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then the conflict is going to be with us, and every day, Palestinians and the Israelis are going to wake up next to each other and deal with that conflict. If those treaties are looked at as an encouraging factor to refocus on the

core issue, then I think we'll be able to move forward. So, again, I lump all of our peace treaties together and say they cannot be an alternative to solving the core issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the focus is to try and move forward. The fact is, there's been, again, very little progress. Conditions on the ground are worsening. We see the two-state solution is the only way forward, but we all know that that solution has been undermined by changing facts on the ground that are making it less and less viable, and the question is, if the two-state solution is compromised, then where do we go from there? I would not say the one-state solution, because the one-state solution is not a solution. It will be the one state's reality and it will be an ugly reality whereby apartheid will be institutionalized and that's something that will not bring peace to all of us and will not solve the conflict and then allow all of us in the region to move forward to addressing our common concerns, including water, including climate, including energy. So, I think that is the key. The issue here is that no peace treaty could be an alternative to addressing the Palestinian-Israeli issue and that is where we need to focus so that we maximize the benefit. Again, in Jordan, we signed a peace treaty 47 years ago, so when we speak, I really like to believe that we speak with the credibility of a peacemaker. We've done everything we possibly can to make sure that we move towards that propensity and, again, that's why we say we need to get back to the key issue which is try and create a political horizon to move forward. As we look at the situation on the West Bank and Gaza, how (inaudible) going to be and we don't want to wake up one day and find ourselves dealing with the same events that we had to deal with last year. When the situation is so fragile, sparks could be many -- it could be many, and we want to avoid that. We believe the only way to do so is to, again, create economic horizons, create political horizons, and get the parties back to the table so that we send a message to the people that the issue is still on the agenda. The issue is still a matter of concern for all of us and we want to solve it.

MR. RIEDEL: Mr. Minister, let me turn to your neighbor to the north, Syria. The civil war in Syria is now more than a decade over. As you mentioned in your opening

remarks, its impact on Jordan has been horrific. 1.3 million refugees. But the civil war has also dragged in many other countries. Russia. Iran. Israel. Almost daily, Israel bombs targets in Syria. And yet, it's increasingly clear that the regime of Bashar al-Assad is not going away, and that it has consolidated its grip on the major urban areas of the country. Is it time for us to acknowledge reality here and begin dealing with Bashar al-Assad again, however unpleasant, however distasteful that may be because he is the unfortunate winner, it appears, of this civil war, and we need to engage him, or should we continue to shun him?

MINISTER SAFADI: We need to bring the Syrian crisis back to be about Syria and the Syrian people because it's no secret that over the past few years, Syria became a battleground for regional and international (inaudible) and that did not help. And, again, if we look at the consequences of eleven years of war in Syria, they've been (inaudible) in every way possible. Where do we go from here? Do we continue, as I said, to double down an approach that did not work, or do we say, wait, let's see what can be done within the realm of what's possible and what's real and move forward? Our position in Jordan has always been that we need to solve this crisis. We all agree that 2254 is a benchmark that has the support and approval of everybody, so let's start our political process and let's engage effectively against very clear benchmarks that would put the interest of Syria and the Syrian people first. That is what we're trying to do here in Jordan. That's what we're talking to all our friends about because we just simply cannot continue with the status quo. And again, status quo politics do not work, and with all due respect to all, we're within the range of fire. I mean, we in the region have been affected more than anybody else. We continue to be affected and it is incomprehensible that everybody gets a set on the table in trying to resolve the Syrian crisis except for our collective (inaudible). That would be as effective. That would be engaging. So, I think the short answer is that we need to work altogether towards a political solution that would aim to end this crisis, would aim to provide support for the Syrian people within the parameters of 2254, and move forward. There is no other alternative. The only alternative that we've seen over the past

few years is the status quo politics, and as I said, that's just untenable and cannot continue. So, we have to move forward. And again, we need to look at the suffering of the Syrian people. Three million Syrian kids of school-going age are not going to school, and you can imagine the longer-term impact of that reality. So, we just cannot continue with business as usual. We have to look at ways of trying to pool our resources and move towards a solution to that crisis. We need to preserve the unity of Syria (inaudible), we need to make sure that terrorist groups do not exploit the (inaudible) that exist, to regroup and present challenges to all of us, we need to make sure that no foreign power has the ability to project threatening postures to the region and beyond from Syria. So, we've got a full list of things to do, but we have to start, and I think we have to start to the political process, and (inaudible) with our brethren, our European partners, and I think everybody agrees that it is time to really try and seek how we can work more effectively towards realizing that political solution.

MS. MALONEY: I'd just like to follow up on that and ask what you're seeing from the Biden administration on this issue and whether you see that there is a different or larger role for the United States to getting to a political solution at this stage of the Syrian crisis.

MINISTER SAFADI: I don't want to speak on behalf of the administration, but we're engaging very thoroughly, very deeply with the United States administration to see what we can do together and in coordination with our partners to move forward. I would say it is key for U.S.-Russian agreement also to be able to move forward with that issue. So, again, we're engaged with all of them and we're working with everybody to see what horizons we have and what steps are needed to be able to move forward.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me stick with the bilateral relationship. It's no secret that relations between Jordan and the Trump administration were difficult. The Trump administration put forward a so-called deal of the century that basically dealt Jordan out of the picture and promised to annex large parts of the West Bank of Israel. You've had a very different relationship with President Biden. He is a well-known figure in Jordan. He's been

there many, many years. He was very strong in supporting Jordan last April publicly and very, very unequivocally. We now have a military presence in Jordan on the ground. We've long had Americans training Jordanians, but we actually now have American combat forces there, including last year, marines. Marines who went on to help with the evacuation in Afghanistan. You've mentioned that the relationship is strong and good. Do you envision the King making an early visit to Washington? What kind of signposts should we look for in the months ahead about broadening and deepening this relationship in the first half of 2022?

MINISTER SAFADI: As you wrote in your book and as you know very well, the partnership and the friendship that Jordan and the U.S. has is solid. It has continued to grow and get wider and deeper across various U.S. administrations. With the previous administration, I have to say when it came to Jordanian-U.S. relations, they were, you know, they were solid. We continued to cooperate -- we continued to do -- under the previous administration, as well, the U.S. support continued. So, that is a solid (inaudible) that was not affected. Obviously, when it came to the peace process, the previous administration had its views. We had our views. We, again, engaged in very frank and open conversation, and we said yes to what we thought would work and we said no to what we thought would not work. So, that disagreement on how to go with the peace process did not, I believe, impact the solid nature of Jordanian-U.S. relationship. On the "deal of the century," our position is clear. We always said that there's no alternative to the two-state solution. We're against the confiscation of land, the Area C and Palestinian territories. We believe that (inaudible) should have, and should continue to be, supported because there's no alternative to (inaudible), so that is where we (inaudible). As you said, the president knows Jordan very well. His Majesty and the president have had a long-enduring friendship. They knew each other from many, many years before and His Majesty was here and visited the president with an excellent meeting that spoke to the strength of their relationship, and we remain highly grateful to the commitment of the United States to support Jordan, so engagement of the administration continues on all fronts, we -- not just on the bilateral, but how we can work

together towards our joint objective of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. His Majesty has spoken with the president many times, as well, and hopefully, there will be other meetings soon in the future because that is the nature of our relationship. We continue to talk and we continue to meet, and we look forward for another summit between His Majesty and the president. On the issue of the military cooperation, as you know very well, we've always had a very strong military cooperation of the U.S. in terms of supplying our military needs in terms of cooperation in the fight against terrorism where we continue to fight side-by-side and shoulder-by-shoulder, and with the U.S. troops, their presence is frameworked within an agreement that does not allow for any military operations out of Jordan outside coordination and agreement. Their main presence there is to consolidate the working relationship, the coordination of the training, and the fight against terrorism. So, I would say that what you see in terms of the development of the military relationship was born out of the commitment of the two countries to work together, and is geared towards addressing common challenges in ways that are coordinated and agreed by the two and within the framework of the agreement that does specify what can and cannot be done in terms of the military presence and the (inaudible) is to Jordan on what kind of operations happen there and we have -- again, we're friends. We're partners. We respect each other's sovereignty and we work within that framework.

MS. MALONEY: I wondered if we could broaden the aperture just a little bit in terms of Jordan's relationships across the region. There was a summit in Baghdad in June of 2021, that His Majesty King Abdullah II attended, alongside Egyptian president and Iraqi leaders. This is happening with increased frequency, the engagement among Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan, and there has been some talk, including from several of the leaders themselves, about a new Levant. And I wondered if you could talk about Jordan's policy towards its own (inaudible), toward its closest neighbors, and how Jordanian diplomacy is looking toward building these relationships among its key Arab neighbors.

MINISTER SAFADI: Thank you. I think -- let me start with Iraq and say that

we've had for years a very strong working relationship with Iraq. We continue to support Iraq's stability. We do believe that it is imperative that Iraq succeeds in getting its stability, rebuilding its country, and restoring its key role in the region. As such, on the (inaudible), we continue to work together, economy, investment, trade, energy, collecting of the (inaudible), looking at major projects like the (inaudible) oil pipeline, so there's a lot that we're talking about with a view of consolidating that relationship. And also within the trilateral mechanism with Egypt, the idea is that we are natural partners and there's a lot of (inaudible) from which everybody would benefit if we're able to maximize our ability to work together within a clear, sort of, roadmap where we can have win-win for the countries and for the region. And I want to emphasize that this is a mechanism that we developed for our -- what's right for us -- it's not against anybody. It's not a block in the old traditional definitions of blocks and regions. It's simply three countries realizing that there is a win-win scenario for everybody if we're able to work together and move together, and it is, again, key that we support Iraq because we cannot afford -- nobody can afford for Iraq not to succeed in what it's trying to do in terms of rebuilding and restabilizing and ensuring the defeat of terrorist forces. The region -- look, we do need -- I think everybody in the region realizes the need to build better institutions of regional cooperation. I think COVID has shown that we need to work closer together in terms of, for instance, food security, water security, climate, health cooperation, pharmaceutical industry, so that we come together and we pool our resources and move forward. So, Jordan's position -- Jordan's policy diplomacy has always been geared towards trying to build better institutions of regional cooperation and there's a lot to be done there. And I think all of us in the region do feel conflict fatigue. All of us in the region are realizing more and more that it is important that we all work together when addressing those crises and move forward. So, in a nutshell, I would say what we're looking at is to expand areas of cooperation in the region and on grounds that will ensure a win-win for all (inaudible) and beyond the political slogan, as I might say in practical manners, how can we work together? Everybody will benefit from creating regional mechanism for food security. Everybody will

benefit from working together on the environment. Everybody will benefit from addressing the chronic water shortages in the region. So, that is the nature of the conversation we're all having bilaterally with each other and also under the umbrella of the Arab League, where we are at a stage where we all realize that there's much more to gain from working together and trying to approach it in a way that is sustainable, that factors in the priorities and needs and specific needs of each country, building on that which is common, and respecting that which is different, and channeling relations in a practical way that would ultimately reflect on progress towards our most important goal, which is providing a decent prosperous, dignified, safe life for our people.

MR. RIEDEL: Building on Suzanne's widening the aperture, can I widen it a little bit further to the east? Five years ago, the Iranian nuclear program was under very strong international supervision, backed by an agreement endorsed by the United Nations and signed by all five members of the Security Council -- permanent members of the Security Council. The Iranian nuclear weapons program seemed to be no longer the threat that it had been for so many years before. In addition, the United States and Iran had a very open dialog. Secretary of State John Kerry spoke with his Iranian counterparts frequently. Today, none of that's true. The agreement has been violated by the United States. The Iranians have proceeded with enriching more uranium. The United States and Iran have no dialog at all. We're not even meeting with the Iranians in the meetings in Vienna. The Americans kind of hang around in the hallways trying to get any information they can from the Europeans and others. On the other hand, you, Mr. Minister, met with your Iranian counterpart, I understand, (inaudible) last year. What is Jordan's view on restoring the JCPOA, restoring dialog in the region, including with a country that has been widely criticized for interfering in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, but which is still one of the major players in the Middle East?

MINISTER SAFADI: Thank you for this question. And again, I think we all recognize the need for ensuring the need that the Middle East does not embark on a nuclear

race and, therefore, the issue of nuclear armament must be addressed. We in Jordan have always been advocates of a Middle East free from all weapons of mass destruction. But when we look at the relationship with Iran, the nuclear issue is one issue. But there are other issues that need to be addressed in order for us to be able to have good relations with Iran. And I can say very comfortably that all our countries want good relations -- good neighborly relations with Iran, but in order for that to happen, Iran needs to stop its interventionist policies invasion. And, again, as I said, we have too many crises in the region. We have too many conflicts. We do not need, we cannot afford another conflict. What we want are healthy relations with Iran, and in order for those relations to be healthy, in order for avoiding more tension in the region, those relations need to be based on respecting the principle of non-intervention in our affairs, and Iran's policy in the regions needs to be addressed. And the way to achieve that, we believe, is dialog and, therefore, we're seeing a lot of Arab countries engaging in dialogs with Iran and, again, the purpose is to make sure that relations are based on not interfering in Arab affairs. That's what we want. That's what we seek. (inaudible) Iran and the foreign minister in Pakistan is part of the OAC meeting which was called for by Saudi Arabia to address the rising challenge in Afghanistan and how we can all work together to make sure that Afghanistan does not collapse into chaos and does not become yet again a safe haven for terrorists, and you know better than anybody how dangerous that situation would be. So, again, all Arabs want good relations with Iran. The path to achieving those good relations is addressing all issues that have been the root cause of problems and tension and that does not end with the nuclear component. That has also addressed our relations in the regions and Iran's policies in the region. And, again, all of us are ready to move in that direction, but those issues are real and those issues must be addressed.

MS. MALONEY: Let me just stay on the topic of Iran for a little bit longer. Obviously, as Bruce noted, the United States -- the Biden administration has been heavily engaged in diplomacy on and around Iran without the benefit of access to direct talks with

Iranian diplomats, and that is not, obviously, the Biden administration's preference. It is the decision of the Iranian government. We've seen the resumption of the nuclear talks in Vienna and at least some more positive noises about the possibility of, if not reconstituting the joint comprehensive plan of action in its full form from 2015, perhaps some kind of a breakthrough that might bring both sides closer to some kind of compliance with the original terms of the deal. Perhaps an interim agreement that might provide -- or some sanctions relief for Iran in exchange for resuming some of the constraints on the nuclear activities that were presupposed by the original deal. If that kind of a breakthrough happens, either the return to the nuclear deal or some kind of an interim nuclear agreement, how will the region view that, particularly because the concerns originally about the deal were that it dealt only with the nuclear issue and not with the very legitimate concerns that many of Iran's neighbors have with its interventionist policies across the Middle East.

MINISTER SAFADI: As I said, I mean, addressing nuclear issue is essential and it's very, very important. But it's not enough. And again, going to the bottom line of what we all want in the region, which is good relations where we can all cooperate and work together, in order to get there, we need to address other aspects of that relationship. So, on the table for discussion and for resolution must be other areas which cause tension in the region and which, at some point, came to very, very critical stages. And that means addressing Iran's policies in the region, its relationship with its neighbors, and again, stopping interventionist policies and respecting the sovereignty and not interfering in those relations. That is the area. Again, we all want good relations. We cannot afford another conflict. We don't want another conflict. It is important to address the nuclear file, but it is also important to address causes of tension in the region, and that, as I said, has to result in a reality where relations are built on the principle of non-intervention and respect of the sovereignty and good neighborly relations.

MR. RIEDEL: Mr. Minister, you mentioned Afghanistan earlier. Jordan was a supporter of the operations in Afghanistan, including putting troops on the ground for

medical purposes and others. Last August, the United States withdrew from Afghanistan, and as a result of the NATO Alliance, withdrew from Afghanistan. This came after 20 years of successive American presidents, Republicans and Democrats, say we would never, never abandon Afghanistan. Afghans now feel abandoned. Believe me, I hear it all the time. I don't want you to speak about the American operation, per se, but I do like to hear, do you think that the Taliban government in Afghanistan is now a dangerous threat to the region? Are you worried about the rebuilding of terrorist facilities and terrorist camps in Afghanistan? Do you also worry just about the symbolism of a very radical and extreme and intolerant Islamist government coming to power in Afghanistan?

MINISTER SAFADI: As you said, Jordan was involved in Afghanistan many years ago and our involvement was two-fold. One, was part of the international effort led by the U.S. to fight terrorism and fight terrorist groups in Afghanistan and making sure that they do not (inaudible) capacity that would enable them to threaten the security and stability of all of us. And the second part was a humanitarian role whereby Jordan provided medical facilities and tried to work to help the Afghani people. The situation now is, obviously, not ideal, but the question is, where do we go from here and what choices do we have? The Taliban is back. It is there. Do we leave it to its own and then, not just in terms of terrorism, questions must be asked. Does it have the tools to govern? Does it have the tools to stabilize? What will happen if it fails? Can we afford for Afghanistan to fall into lawlessness and chaos again? Or do we try and have a benchmark engagement that is coordinated among all of us with a view to making sure that all the issues of concern to us are addressed? Again, as I said, we do not get to choose -- we did not get to choose how the situation evolved, but we have a reality there now and I think we believe that we need to engage, but that engagement should be geared towards realizing very specific objectives that would ultimately and most importantly benefit the Afghani people. And then again, mitigate against all the issues that we just raised against all of us. And I do believe that (inaudible) had a key role here in coordination with the U.S., Europeans, and other partners,

and we need to engage, and that engagement should be based on very clear objectives that we have in terms of respecting human rights, in terms of respecting women's rights, education, in terms of, again, not allowing terrorist groups to exist and operate from there. I do believe this is the only way we have to go forward, so the simple answer is I think we need to engage, but engagement should not be outside an agreed framework in terms of what we can do to address this reality and make sure that whoever is in charge in Afghanistan is moving in the right track. And I think we have a big role to play, particularly Arabs and Muslims, to try and, again, work with the Afghans to make sure that we all stick to the true values of Islam which are values of peace, respect for others, respect for human rights. It's a lot of work. It needs to be done. I don't think the Taliban should be left on its own, and I don't think we should just resort to statements and positions that are not going to change on the ground. I think we need to have a very clear institutionalized approach that identifies that which we want to achieve in Afghanistan in terms of stability and respect for human rights, and moving forward in fighting terrorism, and we should agree on who does what and how and where and move forward with that.

MS. MALONEY: Let me just stay on the topic of counterterrorism for just a few moments. One of the concerns that many have with the U.S. departure from Afghanistan, as well as the changing nature of the U.S. mission in Iraq, has been our capacity to respond and to preempt terrorist attacks across the region. Obviously, not just those emanating from Afghanistan, but what we've seen in terms of extremist groups that have operated in various parts of the region. Jordan is no stranger to this, as both the victim of terrorism, but also a very important partner in the U.S. effort to counter terrorism across the region. What is your sense of the state of the threat at this time, and of our joint response to that threat?

MINISTER SAFADI: Well, we continue to work very, very closely with the U.S. and with other partners under the umbrella of the International Coalition Against Daesh. That's an area that we all have clarity on what needs to be done and we coordinate very

closely. That said, the threat of terrorism remains very important. As I've said repeatedly, Daesh has been defeated, but not destroyed. And in order to make sure that Daesh and (inaudible) and other groups do not regroup and rebuilt their capacity, we have to have a realistic approach to fight against terrorism. You've got military components of the fight. You've got the intelligence component of the fight. But you also have the intellectual component of the fight where we have to work to discredit their claim to the representation of Islam and to suffocate their ability to disseminate (inaudible) and rejection on the intermittent elsewhere. Terrorism thrives on chaos. Terrorism thrives on hopelessness. Terrorism thrives in places where there's lawlessness, where people have no hope, where people have no education, and it's key, therefore, that we work more rigorously towards solving the regional crises which Daesh and others penetrate. And we have the Aqaba Process in Jordan that tries to really offer a platform for all of us to come together and look at the terrorism, sort of, map collectively and holistically, not just in terms of geography, because if you get terrorists in Syria and you get them in Iraq, and you don't get them in Libya, they're going to regroup. If you don't get them in Libya -- you get them in Libya, and you don't get them in Somalia in Africa, they're going to regroup. So, we have that holistic approach and that's why His Majesty launched the Aqaba Process. I think the threat remains potent. We have to stay resilient and we have to continue to fight on three forums. Military, where there's a need. Intelligence cooperation is important, and remember, a lot of the terrorist corporations that we've seen in Europe and elsewhere have been (inaudible) relying on the internet to get resources, and that's where they're being radicalized, as well. Now, we see Daesh trying to regroup on our border and Syria. We see them trying to regroup on our borders in Iraq as well. We see them in the (inaudible) area and other parts of Africa. So, we cannot say that the fight is over. Maybe its nature has changed. Daesh no longer has territorial control, but the (inaudible) has shifted now to the virtual sphere and to the other spaces, and I think key to that is countering the messages and defeating their ability to spread their agenda of hate. And that's an area, by the way, in which in Jordan, we're doing

a lot of work and we're sharing our experience with our partners and we continue to work very, very closely with the U.S. and other partners in the global coalition and with our brethren and the partners in the region and beyond, as well.

MR. RIEDEL: I would be remiss if I didn't bring up one other country in the region where the situation is profoundly sad and disturbing, and that's Yemen. We're now entering the seventh year of the war in Yemen. It is clear the Houthis are not going to be defeated. It is also clear that the Yemeni people are paying a horrendous cost for this war. The U.N. recently estimated that almost 400,000 people have died in this war. The vast majority of those deaths did not come from military operations. They came from starvation and diseases that are usually under control. We also have the truly extraordinary situation in which the cities and military facilities in Saudi Arabia are under steady, almost daily, attack by the Houthis, using missiles, drones. The disparity in power between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis is extraordinary, but it's the Houthis who are attacking Riyadh and other places like that. As we all know, some of that is with the assistance of the Iranians. Jordan has been trying, I understand, to play a useful role in promoting dialog in Yemen these days. Could you speak a little bit more about what Jordan's role has been and how you think this process can be given some boost so that we can put an end to this terrible humanitarian catastrophe?

MINISTER SAFADI: Well, first of all, let me first, again, emphasize what you just said that this is a horrific humanitarian catastrophe and the impact of it is going to be with us for many, many years to come from a humanitarian development and educational perspective. So, ending this crisis is a priority for all of us in the region and the international community. The problem, as I said, is that this was not seeing progress in efforts to resolve the conflict because of the refusal by the Houthis to engage in two agreements that have been reached, including the (inaudible) agreements that we all thought put us on the right path to go forward. The other thing I want to emphasize here is that we do stand by our brothers in Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries in doing whatever they can to defend

themselves against those terrorist attacks by Houthis and to their cities and to their civilian targets as well. We believe that in order for that crisis to end, the Houthis need to commit and work with the U.N. and work with the others to implement the many, many agreements that have been breached and the many resolutions by the Security Council that have been taken. And Jordan, again, we host, as you know, the U.N. mission for Yemen. We provide them with every support that they have. Quite often, they ask us to convene a meeting for various Yemeni groups and we do that in coordination with them. There's been a lot of meetings that address the use of prisoners and exchange of prisoners, and some success was achieved there. But I think we know what needs to be done to solve that conflict. As I said, there are agreements and other (inaudible) that have been breached over the years do offer a political path. What has been missing is commitment by the Houthis to implement what they agreed to and to engage in earnest in those political processes with a view toward moving forward.

MS. MALONEY: I'd like to bring us back to where we started to talk a little bit about this really monumental deal for water cooperation with Israel, but really, again, to widen the aperture and to talk a little more about the impact of climate across the region and Jordan's role to try to mitigate that. The Middle East, of course, is a potential significant victim of what we're seeing in terms of climate change. There are predictions that many of the cities of the region may become uninhabitable even within our lifetime. The region is warming at nearly twice the global average and may reach at least 4 degrees Celsius increase by 2050. Jordan has, of course, played an important role in terms of convening its neighbors, in terms of its own efforts to promote renewable energy, but I wondered if you could talk about how Jordan, as an energy poor country, may see the prospects for addressing climate change while also ensuring resilience and sustainable energy.

MINISTER SAFADI: That is a major challenge for us, and you know we're one of the most arid countries on earth and even if we have the most efficient management system of water resources, that is not enough. We need to continue to look for new

resources. We signed the MOU with the Israelis and the Americans, as you know, and discussions are there to see how viable and how fast we can move with that. That's one aspect of it, so that's still in a very, very early stage, and technical talks are taking place, and ultimately, we are going to see how we can implement in ways that will address our needs. We also have other national projects in Jordan. We have the (inaudible) Conveyance Project which would help address some of our water needs, as well. Of course, we have the hope that the Red for Dead, which the previous government unfortunately walked away from and aborted, would have had a major impact, again, not just on meeting our water needs and the Palestinians' water needs, and Israelis' water needs, but also in terms of a very positive environment that would preserve the unique ecosystem of the Red Sea. So, we do have our plans. We are pioneers in the region in terms of our solar energy capacity and development. We're going to continue to do that. We've already met the 14 percent target of carbon emission that -- we met it about last year, so now we've moved up our goal to 30 percent and we continue to work on that track. But ultimately, in order for us to be able to address that challenge, we all need to have a regional global approach to that and we're committed to working with our partners on how to move forward with that. So, as I said, solar energy has been a success story in Jordan. We're moving with that, creating and finding water resources, including desalination is something that we're working on. But also, we're looking at ensuring a much more efficient utilization of the water resources that we have, so we're looking at the distribution network, how we can address certain leaks in it, and make sure that we use every drop of water. We're also looking at improving the agriculture sector and irrigation techniques to make sure that we have a much more efficient utilization of our meager water resources. The challenge that we're facing in Jordan also is the increase in population as a result of regional crises and as a result of refugees coming to Jordan and their numbers growing as the years go by, so whatever plans we had had to be adjusted constantly to address the growing demand that's emerging from the refugee populations that continue to be there, and also, as we look at improving the efficiency of our

economy, moving to bigger industries, we also want to be able to meet their needs for water and energy resources. The cost of energy in Jordan has been extremely high and that has impacted the viability of a lot of businesses, so we're looking at ways through which we can bring down that cost. And that has taken place against the backdrop of major economic reforms that we've been working on, alongside political reforms that would create a better sort of environment and a better ecosystem that would allow for addressing the needs of our people, making sure that we have foreign investment that creates more jobs and accelerate the development process that we have. As I said, the last ten years have not been very nice to us, the extent of shocks with which we've had to deal with the last ten years in terms of refugees, in terms of threats from the border, securing borders, in terms of closures of borders, disruption of trade, disruption of terrorism, that has been very, very difficult for us. But then again, measures that we've taken are putting us back on track. We just had three successful (inaudible) which speaks to the soundness of the measures that we're taking. Now, challenges are big. They're enormous, but we're also clear on where we need to go and how we're going about it, and we continue, unfortunately, to have to mitigate against external shocks. Just one example, for instance, our border with Syria are 367 kilometers. In the past few years, the biggest threat from the situation there was terrorist troops. A lot of them were on the border. Now, the biggest threat is the smuggling of drugs and that's a huge challenge for us. Hardly a week passes by without our military aborting one or two attempts to bring drugs into the country, and the difference between now and a few years ago when it comes to drug smuggling is that in the past, we were looked at as a transit market because the smuggling was in traditional drugs that are a bit expensive in Jordan was not, you know, is not high enough to have a big market for that, but now, with the advent of chemical drugs like (inaudible), we're becoming a target and that's a challenge that we're facing. So, you know, again, if we look at the whole ecosystem, we've had some tough times in the past, but our work to mitigate continues to be strong and solid and anchored in clear planning and towards clear objectives. And I want to say we would not

have been able to do all of that had it not been for the support of key partners like the United States and other partners in Europe and elsewhere.

MR. RIEDEL: One more of your neighbors, Lebanon, is in acute distress. It had a horrible explosion in its port. Its economy has basically fallen apart. It also has, in essence, a state within a state, that Hezbollah, which operates as one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world that just this week they hosted a major conclave of anti-Saudi dissidents, including representatives of the Houthis. But some states in the region have cited that it's time to just freeze relations with Lebanon and, in effect, walk away from it, and have urged their citizens to leave the country. I don't believe Jordan has been in that camp. I believe you've continued to insist on engagement, even acknowledging how difficult the situation is. What are your thoughts on moving ahead in Lebanon and trying to save that country from even worse downfall?

MINISTER SAFADI: Well, I mean, we are really extremely alarmed by what's happening in Lebanon and we're extremely saddened, as well. Lebanon was a great country. Its people have been always very resilient. They've been able to overcome many, many challenges in the past, and now they're in a situation where poverty is rampant, services are disrupted, people are not being able to put food on the table, and that's an alarming situation. As I said, we have enough crises in the region. We don't want Lebanon to continue down the very dangerous path in which the country is moving, and that's why from the first day, His Majesty has made sure that we do provide our Lebanese brethren with every possible support that we can. Like, after the explosion, we dispatched a military hospital that was there trying to provide support. After that, we coordinated support to Lebanon with all our partners, and we continue to do everything we possibly can to help them. We cannot afford for Lebanon to fail, and I think we are aware of the major challenges that Lebanon is facing, but we cannot abandon it and we continue in Jordan to do whatever we can to help the Lebanese because the consequences of Lebanon going further into its crisis are going to be enormous for all of us. We are aware of the challenges,

but we have to help. We continue to help, and ultimately, Lebanon is going to have to address a lot of its own internal challenges, and the Lebanese government is going to have to do what it needs to do to meet the needs of its people. But I think our support globally and regionally is important. The alternative to that support is, again, is not something that we want to think about and, therefore, we continue to engage and we continue to do whatever we can. We are in discussions with the Prime Minister and his government and recently, as you know, we've been working with them on trying to provide them with both electricity from Jordan and gas through Jordan. We've been able to conclude an agreement that would allow for the exportation of energy through Syria into Lebanon, connecting our grid to their grid. Also, discussions are extremely advanced in terms of providing Egyptian gas through Jordan, through Syria, and there, we're doing all of that in coordination with the United States, with other partners, with the World Bank to make sure that we do get this support to the Lebanese because they simply need it. Lebanon was a bleeding Arab country in terms of enlightenment, population, modernity, all of that, and I think we need to do everything we possibly can to help the Lebanese. They need to help themselves, obviously, but in Jordan, we are going to continue to do whatever we can to help in that process. We cannot afford to have Lebanon fail and we hope it will not.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you, Mr. Minister. We are nearing the end of our time, but I do want to try to bring in one question that actually several of the members of our audience have posed. (Inaudible) from the Greentree Foundation have both posed questions in our chat about what concrete steps and mechanisms the Jordanian government is taking to facilitate foreign investment in the country, recognizing that this is such an important priority. So, I'd like to give you just a moment or two to talk about that before -- we know that you do have another appointment and will have to close our session in just a few minutes.

MINISTER SAFADI: Basically, we're doing everything we possibly can to move -- we're trying now to look at all adjustments that need to be made to make the country

much more attractive. For investment, we do realize that we need the private sector to play a major role in the economy in order for us to be able to create the jobs that are needed. As I said, against the backdrop of unemployment in Jordan, on average, about 25 percent. We do realize that attracting foreign investment is key so there's a whole package of economic reforms in terms of bringing down barriers. Again, legislative reforms and changes that would ease doing business in Jordan, looking at ensuring that we have an IT sector that's very active, that all the infrastructure for investments are there, and also, as part of that, we're working on trying to find markets, build complimentary to our region so that industries and businesses, when they come to Jordan, they also have the opportunity to export into the region and, therefore, expand the area of their operations. We're trying to highlight further the fact that if you do business in Jordan, then you have access to some of the biggest markets in the world because of free trade agreements that we have with the U.S., with Canada, with some of Europe, and with African countries, as well. We have not moved as quickly as we would have liked in the past. Again, part of it due to internal factors, part of it due to regional circumstances, but I think I have to say that our marching orders from the government are clear. We need to move forward effectively and there's a comprehensive plan that the government has announced to address all deficiencies in the economy and to take all the steps necessary to render it more effective and to ensure that it functions better, including a key area, which is looking at all barriers to bringing investment and address them quickly and effectively, and make sure that everybody realizes that Jordan is open for business and that Jordan does offer opportunities, and now, again, there's a lot of competition. We're aware of that, and investors are not going to come unless they know they're going to have good returns. So, we're doing everything we possibly can to make sure that we provide the environment that allows them to work successfully, and also, help open markets and, of course, we have a tremendously able workforce in Jordan and that is an advantage, as well. So, we have major economic reforms. We don't have the space or the time to go in details of them now, but they're available and we're aware they're being

shared and you'll be seeing more and more announcements of such measures in the near future.

MS. MALONEY: Thank you so much, Mr. Foreign Minister, for this incredibly rich and thoughtful and wide-ranging discussion. We recognize that you have a very busy schedule during your time here in Washington, and we're so grateful to you for the time that you've taken with the Brookings Institution and all of our audience on Zoom. We look forward to staying in touch and to welcoming you back, we hope, in person on your next visit to Washington.

MINISTER SAFADI: Thank you so much. Thank you for the opportunity and thank you for this wonderful organization, and again, I'm looking forward to seeing you soon in person and my best wishes for a better new year for all and hopefully, we'll all get over COVID soon and get back to business as usual. So, stay well and stay safe, and thank you so much. I'm honored for this opportunity.

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