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U.S.-Arab Relations at a Crossroads: What Paths Forward?

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***“GEO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS: SYRIA, LEBANON, &
IRAQ”***

Chair:

Dr. Michael Hudson – Seif Ghobash Professor Emeritus of Arab Studies and International Relations

Speakers:

Dr. Paul Salem – Vice President for Policy and Research, Middle East Institute

Dr. Judith Yappe – Senior Research Fellow and Middle East Project Director, Institute for National Strategic Studies

Mr. Bassel Charles Korkor – Legal Director, National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces

Mr. Elias Samo – Distinguished International Affairs Fellow, National Council on US Arab Relations

Commentator:

Mr. Charles C. Chidiac – President, Republican Reform Party and Chairman The Arab Renaissance Front

Remarks as delivered.

[Dr. Michael Hudson] Good afternoon everybody. I'd like to thank the National Council and its President Dr. John Duke Anthony for the invitation to participate again in this important conference. Dr. Anthony and his colleagues have given us the most difficult part of the Middle East to talk about that is to say the area that is variously known as the Fertile Crescent, as Iraq bilad al-Sham the punitive heartland of the Arab world a region that has never really fully been able to define itself. So we are talking about geo-political dynamics in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, the most supple region.

A word of history about the nature of this region there have been several projects I think as many of you know to try and define this region in political terms to establish a kind of common identity, a common sense of community. Of course originally for a very long time it was a number of Ottoman Turkish districts then after the First World War and after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, new states were established with the decisive intervention of Britain and France and at the same time a number of local political movements arose to try and shape a possible future political identity for this area.

Originally of course there was the Hashemite Project and the Arab revolt, the story of the Arab revolt in World War One and the competing Hashemite Project from the Hashemites from Jordan and the Hashemites from Iraq hope to establish a certain kind of Arab independent state under Hashemite auspices.

Later on there were more nationalists projects one of them is now perhaps not so well known, was the Syrian National Social party known by its French initials the PPS under the leadership of its charismatic founder Antun Saadaeh to create a greater Syria in this region, whose boundaries went from Kuwait and then took a short hop across the Mediterranean to Cyprus. The Syrian National party still exists if you walk down the streets of Ras Beirut you will see that they are still there but the idea of a greater Syria on the model of the PPS is an idea whose time did not come.

Finally in one of the most significant projects was the Arab Nationalist project exemplified in this part of the Arab world by the Baath and the idea of course was to establish ultimately Arab unity ala Baath in this area.

So as you can see it is not a place that is politically well defined and the states that have come to exist in the region, three of which we are talking about today are of relatively recent construction and the constructors were not really all that indigenous.

So we are looking now at a region that today is the focus of several major conflicts. On the global level you are seeing a rivalry, a renewed rivalry between the United States and Russia playing out in this region, and of course some people are

wondering as we heard today whether the US is in decline and whether the Russians are being very clever, other people are suggesting that the Russians are desperate and defensive. But there are those that think the Russians are actually predatory and aggressive. But that's an issue that now some people are describing as almost a new cold and hopefully not hot war between the Russian and American military establishments.

On the regional level we have a kind of new bipolarity that has taken root and we have heard quite a lot about that today already. We have roughly speaking the Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah coalition with the backing not so far behind from Russia, and a little bit farther behind from China and on the other side of the pole we have something that is a little bit harder to define. One might call it the Sunni alliance although that does not quite capture I think the reality of it and this of course includes states of the GCC, Saudi Arabia in particular, Jordan and Egypt Morocco and so forth and the big power backers of that a loose coalition are the United States and the European Union.

Finally and perhaps most significantly on the domestic level we've seen in the last four years the phenomenon of the Arab uprisings, a phenomena that I think we have not seen the last of by the way. An uprising that has resulted in the very strong vigorous and even violent counter-revolution being mounted essentially by the GCC states by the Saudi's and the Emirates in particular. And so that's one aspect of the domestic struggle that's going on those that want to see major change game changers and those that absolutely do not want to see that, those that want to maintain the system of authoritarian monarchies and to maintain in addition their historic friendly connections with the United States.

And then if that weren't bad enough we have the Daesh phenomenon. I was organizing a study group at Harvard last spring on the crisis of the Arab state and one of the presentations that we arranged for by Yezid Sayigh from the Carnegie Center in Beirut was called "ISIS a state in waiting?" We can question that but I think it is probably not questionable to posit that the durability, the longevity, the stability and the legitimacy of the existing state system in the area that we are concerned with today is problematical.

Now one of the questions that maybe one of our panelists will address is how is it that this Daesh phenomena which has military, political, administrative and above all apparently ideological clout. How is it that it persists and how is it that it appears to be such a major threat to almost everybody? The Daesh phenomena has high jacked the center, the Arab center and we are now waiting to see what will happen next. And to answer that question we will introduce the several distinguished members of this panel.

We will start with Dr. Paul Salem. I will not introduce them because their biographies are in your program. We will begin with Dr. Paul Salem from the Middle East Institute, he will be followed by Mr. Bassel Korkor who will be speaking about

legal aspects, Mr. Elias Samo who is a professor from Aleppo from the Syrian University in Aleppo and then we will have a commentary by Mr. Charles Chidiac who is the President of the Republican Reform Party in Lebanon.

We will begin with Dr Salem please. I forgot sorry, how could I. The piece de resistance is our final speaker Dr. Judith Yaphe who has some pointed remarks to make about US policy.

[Dr. Paul Salem] Thank you Professor Hudson and thank you Dr Anthony for organizing this important conference. Professor Hudson is sort of the Dean of Levantine studies for many of us who are his students for many many years and I think he gave a really excellent introduction and background of the complexity of the various projects that have overrun this part this very unstable part of the Middle East that is currently facing once again one of its most severe periods of instability.

This is a region where the states have collapsed, the hard states, the Baathist state of Iraq the Baathist in Syria. Where the nations, the political communities have fallen apart into their ethnic and sectarian components. This is a part of the region where regional order has disintegrated it used to be part of an Arab order, it is now contested obviously between Iran, between the Arab states and to a large degree between Turkey and the Kurdish component as well. So a region that is trying to figure out what its identity and what its structure is. This is a region also which has seen a tremendous great power surging and ebbing.

The US raged into the region in 2003 toppling the Iraqi government and in a sense the Obama administration is raging out of the region creating vacuums as some of them in the panels before us mentioned creating also shifts and instabilities and it's a region where a few weeks ago Russia after an absence of four decades has come storming back into the Middle East with aircrafts, bases, tanks and great rhetoric. So also great shift in its position internationally.

We've seen a long civil wars some only 4 years old some much older based on sectarian and identity politics, and we have seen with the collapse of states, the rise of non state actors.' Whether its ISIS or other groups elsewhere.

If we look at the some of the countries and get some sort of definition: Lebanon in a way collapsed early, as we know. The state collapsed in the mid 70's the country sank into sectarian civil war, and that civil war went on for 15 years. Some of the elements of the dynamics of Lebanon are being replayed in Iraq are being replayed in Syria. Whether the same paths to get out of these civil wars and reach some kind of stability will take as long as it took in Lebanon which was a full 15 years or whether it can be done more quickly remains to be seen.

Lebanon went through many years of civil war but it also went through periods of de-escalation. People could live throughout a period when there was not a central government something that we are not able to see in Syria today but that something

might be of interest. Also Lebanon began negotiations internally from the very beginning of the civil war. Maybe it took 14-15 years to get to the end of it but internal negotiations were a long part of the politics of that conflict and enabled an agreement at the end to be hammered out.

But lets not forget the Peloponnese civil war ended only at a moment of international confluence, the end of the Cold War and certain international and regional dynamics that enabled the outside players in Lebanon to impose or to push for an end to that civil war. There might be lessons in that experience, things to avoid, things to learn from, but certainly Lebanon I think has been through what Syria and Iraq are going through now in many ways.

Iraq and Syria are very different stories. Iraq state was broken from the outside by the US invasion but fell into internal disintegration and elements of an ethnic and sectarian division and civil war, insurgency and the rise of radical groups. Iraq however has a constitutional order, has a certain internal process of negotiation that gives it a better chance of survival and reconstruction certainly than Syria has. We have all followed the ups and downs after the US left in 2011 Prime Minister Maliki's policies and now Prime Minister Abadi's attempts to try to keep that country together. But indeed there is much more politics in Iraq than there is in Syria.

The Syrian state collapsed affectively for internal reasons rather than external but similar to Lebanon and Iraq in the Levant where you do have strong sectarian and ethnic identities unlike lets say in Egypt or some other parts or Tunisia or other parts of Middle East you saw the society in Syria break down along similar lines particularly after the regime refused to really launch a serious political process. And here we are in the midst of a very destructive sectarian civil war that is also led to the rise of non-state actors.

ISIS is sort of the most well known of them but Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham many other groups, Hezbollah and others coming from Lebanon to support the regime. Unlike in Iraq and in Lebanon there has been no domestic negotiation, no political process in Syria four and a half years into the conflict. And that to my mind is certainly one of the things that bodes ill for the future of that conflict.

In the midst of this sort of Levantine civil war that we are living through one scenario might be that at the end of these long civil wars people get tired and they settle for some power sharing agreement, decentralized government and so on. Something similar to the Lebanese model which perhaps won't be that difficult and in that scenario the basic borders of old Iraq and old Syria will be preserved but in effect there would be sort of internal cantons or areas, Kurdish areas, Alawite area and so forth with very decentralized power sharing agreements. That could be one future for the Levant.

Another future that we might see taking place in Syria is that these wars might lead to the solidification of new borders and effectively new states. Whether they are

officially recognized in the UN or not is a different matter, but we might indeed see the end of an actual Syria or an actual Iraq and the beginning of new state of semi state formations. I think we've already begun to see that with the fall of Mosul and the division of Syria. Whether that becomes a long term and permanent feature of the Levant we will have to see.

ISIS to my mind is a symptom of the collapse of political order and not a cause. After the state collapsed in Syria non state actors came to play an increasing role in Syria. One of those non-state actors is al-Qaeda which is rebranded as ISIS. ISIS is not the only non-state actor in the region, Hezbollah is a longstanding non-state actor, there are many other militias in Syria. The Houthis are very powerful; al Qaeda is very powerful.

I think ISIS is a symptom of the phenomena in which state and when state order collapses and you have ungovernable spaces all kinds of non-state actors emerge. ISIS is one of them and has maybe the most effective UTube social media policy and is the most shocking but as a basic non state actor that organizes, raises taxes and things of that nature it is not altogether that unique and the cause of its ability to rise was the prior collapse of the state. For the long term solution to my mind is the attempt to reconstruct state power at some point.

To reconstruct state power requires both a political deal and military force. In Iraq there is a potential pathway to a political way back for Iraq. The Sunnis are part of the constitutional system. There is an attempt in this government to find a way to have real inclusive and effective central inclusion in Baghdad and to encourage Sunnis to be more a part of the central government and part of the Iraqi national project. It is still problematic, its difficult it hasn't gone very well but at least there is a potential pathway there. In Iraq as well there is a military pathway forward to confront ISIS that to some degree, there's the Peshmerga forces, the Iraqi National Army, there is the Hashd al-Shaabi the big Shiite militias, and there is the potential for including more Sunni groups whether it's the National Guard or through some other mechanism. So one can imagine over time one month or one year or something of that nature ISIS could be pushed back.

In Syria I see no such potential. There is no internal political process, there are no ground forces that are available really seriously available for the fight against ISIS. Assad's forces are mainly deployed and engaged fighting off the non ISIS rebels in the north and in the south and the non ISIS rebels are largely busy confronting Assad and the regime. And until that confrontation is resolved there are simply are no serious ground forces available other than the Kurds who will only fight effectively only to protect their areas to confront ISIS.

I don't see ISIS in Syria going away anytime soon nor do I see any serious room for a political way forward in Syria. I think the Assad regime and Iran and Hezbollah, their interest is to solidify, protect and aid the Syrian rump state, which is the capital of the corridor to the west. I think they realize that that's as much as they can

manage. There is very little interest to reach out either to reconquer areas that they lost or to really seek a major new deal with the Sunni majority.

I think Syria unfortunately has moved somewhat decisively into division. I think the recent Russian intervention despite what Russian intentions might be solidifies that Assad now doesn't feel at all the need to compromise. The Iranians are relaxed that the regime is no longer under, with the Russians there, they feel better about it. So I think what we might see is a solidification of those lines, I do expect they might attempt to take the town of Palmyra, that's partly sort of a public relations coup that you take one major town from ISIS, it is somewhat close to regime lines, I think that will be about it.

That leaves the question what does Turkey, the GCC and possibly the US do with the rest of Syria, the areas controlled by all these various mainly Sunni militias if they are not in effectively going to be able to defeat a regime that is now part of this major alliance. What is the fate of those regions going to be?

I was recently in Tehran and I was struck by some of the things I heard there. Statements like they will do anything to defend Damascus and Baghdad and they will do nothing to confront or defeat ISIS per say. In other words their interests in rump states that are very close to them rather than in some united Syria united Iraq where they have much less control.

They are very comfortable with the new Russian presence, as others have indicated. I think this Russian presence is historic in the sense that it is an alliance of convenience, Iran and Russia, strong Russia relations with Iran, strong Russian relations now with Syria, growing relations with Iraq. I think the model might be is that the Russians as they are doing in Syria is rebuilding the Syrian army according to their specifications and so on, they might eventually start doing the same in Iraq.

Between the Russians and the Iranians we might have a model in the Levant similar to what we have in Lebanon, which is a limited national army, and a major pro Iranian militia that sort of keeps a line on things. Sort of like the old Baathist model, or the old Soviet model that you have state institutions and you have a party that is armed and capable of intervening or controlling the way things go.

In ending I would say as you could probably surmise is that I am not optimistic certainly the short or medium term. I think the refugee streams and crisis will stay with us for a long time. I myself am from Lebanon, Lebanon houses 1.5 million refugees. Lebanon and Jordan the small countries in this region have managed to survive so far but they are under very enormous stress. Those are things we can talk about if you wish later in the question and answer period.

Thank you very much.

[Michael Hudson] Our next speaker is Bassel Korkor, he is a lawyer and I understand he is going to have some things to say about the role of the United Nations and the question of refugees among other things. We are asking all of our speakers to be as concise as possible because we have a full panel so ten minutes would be just about right.

[Bassel Korkor] Thanks. I know no one wants to end their day when part of that day is hearing from a lawyer so I will try and be concise and I will take somewhat of any narrow view or short view on focus on the legal issues and some of their political implications. And of course I should say that nothing I say here should be taken as legal advice and non of this necessarily reflects the views of my clients.

In my law practice, my Syria related law practice in particular and any other lawyers who are here and work on Syria can sympathize with this or else correct me. I encounter persons who generally have two types of problems, those who are trying to get out of Syria and those that are trying to get into Syria. Those seeking egress include immigrants of all kinds, asylees, refugees, families, businesses, assets which by the way are stuck in this sort of legal void where you have a country embargoed from the outside, suffering from capital flight and lack of liquidity on the inside and on top of that a lack of financial and consular services available to Syrians and their families wherever they are.

Many banks even in the US by the way are having tremendous, many Syrians in the US are having tremendous difficulty accessing even basic financial services in the US. Then among those seeking ingress into the country are NGOs, medical associations, large and small contractors and others seeking to implement badly needed activities mostly in the humanitarian sector. This includes delivery of food and medicine through more traditional means but also the provision of medical services and actual construction and operation of humanitarian and medical facilities in the middle of an active conflict zone.

In a way these legal developments reflect this push and pull dynamics though granted only at the margins so far, and as I will describe briefly in a moments its also reflected in the international and inter Syrian political negotiation process.

Take for example sanctions. Of course the US and other western countries have strict compliance regimes such as for things like economic sanctions, export controls, bribery, corruption and money laundering. In the case of Syria US and allied sanction authorities have sought to tighten these laws against certain factions both among the Syrian government and its supporters as well as among extremist groups. While at the same time promulgating regulations, and issuing licenses designed to relax such restrictions or carve out exceptions for activities and support of some of the humanitarian activity I mentioned earlier when carried out by non governmental and inter governmental organizations.

Similarly the UN has over the course of the past three years or so has taken steps to pass resolutions, those rare resolutions that actually find consensus by the entire Security Council to authorize the delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance across all of Syria's international borders and even across conflict lines. Another instance is the refugee crisis as it relates to Europe, the debate among EU members as how best to handle it and the way that is both secure and humanitarian in nature and legal. Of course all that is the push, the black letter of the law.

The pull is the reality that all of this is taking place still in the middle of a war zone. Sure these international laws apply and for US actors the US law certainly applies, for those who are delivering the humanitarian assistance and one day presumably they will apply to international companies conducting redevelopment activities. Lets say the good guys, but the other guys the extremists, the warlords, the militias, the bombers there is a lack of rule of law that applies to these actors.

This lack of rule of law this vacuum of authority along with what seemed to be at best, the remote possibility of accountability and justice for those that are committing some rather egregious offenses help incubate not only the conflict but also the general lawlessness at the expense often of innocent civilians who flee in order to avoid choosing between barrel bombs on one hand and extremist brutality on the other.

And then again recall that the refugee crisis did not just begin last month. Four million refugees had already left Syria to bordering countries mostly Turkey but also Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq. But there is something that jars the systems when 250,000 refugees make their way to European borders and different countries take diverging approaches to it. I think its important to have this background to some it may sound when thinking about the UN's role and the end game here which I was asked to discuss.

Recently the UN envoy has elaborated sort of a bifurcated yet parallel approach to negotiations again reflecting the international process on one hand and on the ground Syrian reality on the other.

At one level he envisions international contact groups, which would be groupings of countries. At first the US and Russia but expanding to include important regional and perhaps European participants which would attempt to discuss paths to de-escalation as well as the parameters of an ultimate political settlement.

At the same time secondly he proposes inter Syrian working groups, which would bring Syrians from the government and the opposition together to discuss and hear he says at the Syrian governments request. He emphasizes in a non legally binding way to prepare the ground for the third step which would be direct negotiations between the parties like those that took place in Geneva in 2014.

As a note there are four working groups that are suppose to convene in Geneva under this construct, one to discuss safety and protections, one to discuss political and legal issues, one to discuss military security and counter terrorism, and the fourth to discuss the continuity of public services, reconstruction and development.

First on the contact groups, these international groupings, it is one thing to formalize a process but at the same time we know well that discussions are already taking place between the US and Russia and there have been recent visits and interactions, reported at high levels between and among US, Russia, France, the UK, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, Qatar and Iran among others. Not all with each other but sometimes in bilateral or small multilateral context. We witnessed this ourselves at the UN General Assembly a few weeks ago in New York where many of these group meetings began to occur. These countries all of them have real investments and interests and now comes the Syrian conflict and the day-to-day developments of it.

Second, and in contrast the inter Syrian working groups have so far not progressed, have not yet achieved acceptance among the either the main opposition coalition, among many of the armed groups and only in a very limited way as I alluded to earlier by the Syrian government. The Geneva consultations, which the UN envoy called for earlier this year, encountered similar objections and ultimately mostly fizzled.

Third this idea of a Geneva 3 conference on Syria. What this reflects and I think its accurate is that at some point to contain all this chaos and by the way this is regardless of unity of the country or division, but at some point to contain all this chaos, to reduce the conditions causing mass migration, to take steam out of the sails of extremists, to alleviate human suffering there must be a negotiation and ultimately an agreement at least the framework among Syrians themselves that would address the underlying grievances of the millions of Syrians that have not yet been addressed who want to see meaningful political and economic reforms, transition and peace begin to take hold in their country.

At the Geneva 2 negotiations last year the position of the opposition was that there is an internationally accepted basis for such a resolution, that being the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 including the permanent security council resolutions and international humanitarian standards in human rights laws incorporated therein.

The opposition presented a set of principals that by the way had it had elaborated on multiple occasions and different forms for Geneva 2 and has done repeatedly since Geneva 2 the most recent one I've seen was just yesterday. And there shouldn't necessarily be much disagreement on the principals or parameters underlying this proposal. Cessation of violence, a civil state, protection of all Syrians rights including non majority ethnic and religious groups, territorial integrity and sovereignty, humanitarian access, release of detainees, full participation by women, continuity of state institutions with some key reforms, freedoms of speech and

association, rejection of violent extremism, national dialogue, local reconciliation and so forth.

And we know from our own communications that there is general acceptance of these principals as defining the parameters of a negotiation process. But of course in the oppositions view this process begins with the establishment of a transitional governing body which is laid out in the Geneva communiqué which would assume all executive powers including authority over the military and security apparatuses which would govern the country and would set the stage for free and fair national elections within a specified range of time.

This view is backed by Security Council Resolution 2118 as well as by repeated statements from major world and regional powers. Moreover the Geneva communiqué calls for the formation of this governing body on the basis of mutual consent. That's a key clause. It means each side has a veto on participants in this transitional period and this transitional body during the transitional period is pursuant to this clause. Although this is important, it is not specifically called for in the oppositions Geneva 2 proposal but operationally that the Syrian president and certain others would be excluded from having any role in the transitional governing body.

Under the same clause of course certain members of the opposition would be therefore would also excluded and implicitly the opposition has accepted this and in practice this kind of process should tend to allow moderate voices, and moderate national leaders to rise to the top during the transitional period. As things have evolved since Geneva 2 unless there is some international agreement brokered this position by the Syrian national coalition is unlikely to change in the Geneva 3 conference.

Ultimately the goal in these initiatives is to stop the violence, or at least stop part of the violence, which relates to the conflict between the Syrian government and the mainstream Syrian opposition. And then maybe some new progress could be made toward defeating extremist and restoring stability. Now I know this sounds very aspirational like I said there is a broad tense and tenuous international dynamic that must be settled.

First or simultaneously at least as it relates to Syria before any of this can have any modicum of reality to it, but never doubt and I can say this that behind the scenes even in at times of heightened public tensions people are always talking, no one has cut anyone else off here, even as Russian intervention hits civilians and moderates in Syria one must acknowledge that Russia has deep and embedded interests and influence in Syria. Any negotiations would have to take that into account. But some people are always trying.

UN envoy for example is in Moscow today, next he will come here to Washington. So all this is unrealistic right now but that doesn't mean you stop talking. Sometimes

you have to keep your nose down and keep preparing for the next phase whenever it may come and in whatever context. And to affect these goals there are at least three policy objectives that need to be pursued, and here I focus on the Syrian conflict and the Syria-Syria negotiations.

One, pressure both sides to come to the table ready for earnest peace talks. Two, relieve humanitarian suffering inside Syria and three humanely and legally host or resettle Syrian refugees. Experts much wiser than me have proposed numerous tactics to try and effectuate these goals. I will sum up just a few of the following to finish.

Number one to stop the barrel bombs. The barrel bombs are some of the crudest and most destructive weapons being used in Syria. They are inaccurate they are indiscriminate their dumb bombs. They cause destruction not only on locations where they are dropped but the ripples lead to migration in other parts of the country where people fear the barrels may be coming next.

Ambassador Fred Hof said there are ways to throw dust in the gears of the aircrafts that drop these bombs, not necessarily a no fly zone. That would be presumably a US or US supported initiative and who knows perhaps it has already been tried. But now there is even more reason for the Syrian government to stop using barrel bombs than even before, and that is the fact that they no longer on their face even serve the claim strategic purposes of fighting the opposition.

Now that the Syrian government has the Russian air force acting on its behalf with all the claimed precision and technical capabilities of the Russian air force now actively supporting the fight against Syrian moderates and extremists alike the last even facial justification for using these barrel bombs is gone.

Second increase the humanitarian aid and access inside Syria there are ways to increase the aid and access to internally displaced Syrians before they flee the country and become refugees. There are ways to make certain areas safer to affectively pull certain small areas outside of the zone of conflict. There has to be a focus on that buffer between internal displacement and mass exodus.

Three. Increase and accelerate refugee resettlement in the US as well increase use of other tools in the legal system such as humanitarian parole to ensure that Syrians can go through the vetting and intake process more quickly and at relatively low cost and posing no security threat to the US.

Fourth there is more that can be done to encourage reform within the opposition to bring differing groups together, to increasing inclusiveness and reward such actions with increased international recognition and further political isolation of the Syrian government. The national coalition is not perfect, reform is needed, they know that to make a more inclusive, more reflective, a structurally more nimble to allow those who want to seek peace to seek it. Not be held back, but the coalition does maintain

significant international political capital and that presents and opportunity both to incentivize and reward peace seeking activity by the opposition in general.

On the other side of that, fifth, there could be a mechanism for accountability established, an international or internationally backed Syrian tribunal that begins to inject this conversation of potential accountability and justice in the future. You can intensify sanction activity against Syrian government and against extremists and also unfreeze assets for to be used for humanitarian purpose.

I know I have exceeded my time but I've also tried to squeeze in some policy recommendations Dr. Anthony. So thank you.

[Hudson] Thank you for a very thoughtful and helpful presentation. We turn now to Dr. Elias Samo who comes to us and quite recently from Syria and so we look forward to your reflections.

[Dr. Elias Samo] Yes, I'm glad, I'm very happy to be here and very happy that Dr. Anthony invited me. I have been working with Dr. Anthony for the last 25 years. This morning he commented on the National Council and its great work in the Middle East and he gave an example of Syria, the program in Syria that's lasted for several years and there were more than 400 people, students and faculty members, Malone's who came to Syria and spent a few weeks there and it was a very successful program. It was a program in which those 400plus when they came to Syria they were American ambassadors to Syria and they left a great positive image of America and when they went back, I followed many of them when they went back or came back to America and I lectured at various of their universities, they also became Ambassadors for Syria in America.

I was involved in that program with Dr. Anthony and we were very happy for it, and I wish we were able to continue that program. Dr. Anthony has had this program, exchange programs in the Middle East with Arab states but he made a point of mentioning the Syrian program in particular this morning because it was very very successful and thank you and Dr. Anthony I hope that someday we will be back to Syria for continuing that.

As Dr Hudson mentioned I came from Syria two weeks ago I have lived in Syria the last 25 years, out of them traveling abroad for lectures and conferences I have lived continuously in Syria for the last 20 sum years, 25 or so. The last five years I have been in Syria, I'm not about to leave Syria; I leave Syria only to attend conferences in Europe meeting with the opposition. I have been meeting with the opposition the last two or three years continuously and this coming over here is just temporary because I am going back to Syria in the next 4 or 5 days.

Now when Dr. Anthony invited me to speak I decided that I was not going to sit down and write this speech. I decided I would come stand here and speak to you. Although I am a faculty member, I am a professor of international relations at

American universities and Syria universities, I just want to come here and speak my heart not my mind. My heart thinks out loud and tell you how I feel and I reflect in my conversation here, and it's a conversation not a lecture or presentations reflect the attitude I think of most of the Syrians irrespective of their ethnic or sectarian or religious background.

Syria is damaged; Syria is in trouble. My best description for Syria today and I have described Syria this way the last two or three years is that it has become a swamp, at least part of it if not all of it a swamp. A Swamp with vicious beasts tearing each other apart and giving birth to new beasts in a jungle where there is no law and order.

And what triggered that, what triggered that at least we Syrians feel what triggered this or provided the spark for the explosion in Syria was what's known, misnamed the Arab Spring. I wrote about this two or three years ago. They asked me to write about it and I said this might have started as an Arab spring originally but it was kidnapped by the Islamists and it was turned into an Islamic spring, Arab fall and a Christian winter, and a brutal Siberian winter.

Very unfortunate and what I'd like the Arabs to do it they can, if they have the guts and the desire and determination and they have the capability to reclaim the Arab spring from the Islamists who turned it into an Islamic spring. And I wish the Arab Union will hear that because when the Arab spring started in late 2010 early 2011 it was a genuinely Arab spring with great hopes for a better future for the Arabs. But unfortunately it was kidnapped.

Now Syria is damaged very badly you hear on television that infrastructure being destroyed, the economic, the social fabric is being destroyed, the economy is destroyed but I will give you two very specific examples that constitute the greatest threat to Syria and the future.

The first example is you know, you all know that what moves nations forward to modernize is the elite it's not the farmers or the workers. And with all due respect to the farmers and the workers, my father was a farmer also but it's the elite and the unfortunate thing today in Syria is that the elite have left. I'm talking about economic, industrial, trade, professional elites, doctors and dentists and engineers and teachers they have left Syria, which is a tragedy. I don't mean all of them have left, but a substantial percentage of them have left whereby sometimes very difficult to get to a hospital and very difficult to get a doctor. That's very sad.

The other damage is a fact that also the Christian community which is to a great degree an elitist community, great part of it highly educated, very loyal very committed to Syria they also having left and that's these two elements having left its really very unfortunate for Syria.

The other tragic thing also is the fact that in Syria, once I did a study for the Minister of Education in Syria and I told them you have to build a school every day in Syria to keep the level of education in Syria that is not that good. A school everyday that means 365 schools every year; now after 5 years of war in Syria not only not a single school was built in which during the five years we should have built 2000 schools, 2 to 3000 schools have been destroyed. And therefore we have now students, young students, the future generation the future elite for Syria that will lead Syria forward in the future have been without schools for the last five years. Millions of them have been without schools for the last five years and if this continues we will have a future generation that are totally illiterate. That's tragic.

Now going back to Syria. Syria when you talk to the people in Syria you hear a different story than you hear from outside. For example what Dr Paul Salem said and reflects the attitude of people on the outside. In other words that says there is no future for Syria, that there is no possibility of maintaining its unity, its sovereignty, that there is no possibility that it could become what it was in the past, not in terms of all the structure but in terms of the geography. The Syrian inside and I am one of them you hardly ever hear this notion of breaking up Syria.

This notion of dividing Syria even the group that most likely would declare independence from Syria is the Kurdish group in northern Syria, I lived with them, I grew up with them, I spoke Kurdish before I spoke Arabic and you ask many of the Kurds they say we are Kurdish Syrians, and therefore this notion of Syria breaking up now its possible but let me tell you something the Syrian has a sense of pride in himself great pride that you don't feel it unless you are Syrian.

Dr. Hudson said Syria also known as Sham, also known as the Levant, also known as the fertile crescent, also known as the breadbasket of the Roman empire, also known as Mesopotamia, I mean these are important terms to describe one single country and then you talk about this breaking up.

Not only that but Syria is in existence in every ancient history book. It's in existence in the Old Testament and the New Testament and the Quran. It contains the two oldest continuously inhabited cities, Damascus and Aleppo, and so on and so one. And it's not easy for the Syrians to forget the notion of Syria with all these historical, cultural, fantastic attributes. It's not going to happen.

However after having said that we are facing serious problems, and I will tell you these problems and I am thinking out loud. And these problems not only Syria is facing. The Arab Islamic world is facing a big problem.

Now when you talk about Syria of course keep one thing in mind, that one of the victims in Syria is the truth, one of the victims in Syria is the truth. In Syria when you talk about Syria who had heard this. From Obama to anybody else they it reminds me of the story of the elephant and the four blind men. Everybody who talks about Syria sees it in that way, a blind man looking at the elephant. Speaking

of the elephant there's a saying about the elephant that says when elephants fight, oh I have to move fast, you have to give me a few more minutes John I came from Syria, all the way from Syria here and I deserve a few more minutes. Tell him okay. Okay. 18 hours flight from Syria and not very many people would come from Syria to give a lecture in America and go back to Syria. So take that, okay.

There are look so we talk about the elephants, so when the elephants fight they grass suffers. There are seven elephants fighting today in Syria and Syria is the grass suffering. Actually they are not elephants because elephants in their fight could be decent. These seven crisis seven earthquakes that have hit Syria and Syria has become the epicenter, ground zero for these seven-conflict crisis. It is unimaginable. These are the, I just list them.

There is a historic Islamic fight since the 10th century between the jihad, you know what jihad is, jihad and ijtehad thinking between the sword and the pen, and has continued for the last ten centuries and has surfaced now. Daesh has the jihad with the sword, and the thinking Arabs, the Muslims, the reformers, the modern Arabs have the pen but the pen is cowardly when it chases the sword.

The second struggle, the second elephant in the Middle East, in Syria, where it is located is the Shiite-Sunni.

The third one is the struggle between the Islamic Nation and the Arab Nation. Islamic Nation has no border. The whole universe is its border. The first thing Daesh did when they took over Mosul and Raqqa in Syria, they erased the border between Syria and Iraq.

The fourth one is the struggle within Arabism, between pan-Arabism and statism. Syria has its own interests. Egypt has its own interests. Jordan has its own interests. Then there is pan-Arabism.

The fifth one is the historic struggle of the Ottoman Empire, the Persian Empire and the Arab Empire. There is a struggle there that is historic and a new empire has been added – the Judaic Empire. And just the four historic empires who don't have good will to each other and have occupied land from each other are fighting in Syria.

The sixth one is the new Cold War. The new Cold War. We used to lecture 20-30 years ago about the old Cold War; some of us would say that the Syrian/Turkish border is the demarcation between Warsaw Pact and NATO. And the demarcation has come back now. Turkey with NATO and Syria with Warsaw, there's no more Warsaw, but with Russia.

Now the final one, the seventh one is the Syria Israeli conflict. Israel has a sneaky finger inside Syria and the troubles.

Let me finish by saying, what are the options that we have now?

Now today, one of the speakers mentioned, yeah, Ambassador Freeman, said in Syria America has three interests, Terrorism, doing something about refugees, the flow of refugees across Europe. And one of them is Assad. You can't compare the fight for terrorism and its importance and the threat of the refugees, which have created the notion of Islamophobia in Europe, and the third one is the war, the containing Russia. Is it going to be containment, détente or cooperation? We don't know. These three objectives for Mr. Obama.

Now I have talked with President Bashar about what I think. I wish I could talk with Mr. Obama and tell him, Mr. Obama, in decision-making we always have prioritized our interests. If you were to prioritize your interests in Syria, fighting terrorism has to be first, refugees to Europe has to be down second. Dealing with the Russians is third. Bashar al Assad is not a big deal. He is here today not here tomorrow. You have more important issues to deal with. Concentrate on them.

Finally, the final thing is look I have a mission. But this mission that I have is the mission of all the Syrians. And the mission is as follows, to maintain Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, all of us, unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.

The second mission also is to maintain Eastern Christianity. I am one of those Eastern Christians. I really have a lot more to say but I think he's going to throw me out of here.

Thank you very much.

[**Hudson**] Thank you very much. And now we turn to Mr. Charles Chidiac who I think is going to talk to us about the Sykes-Picot agreement.

[**Mr. Charles Chidiac**] Members of the royal families, excellencies, members of Congress, officers of the American Armed Forces, ladies and gentlemen.

The gentlemen before me spoke about Syria and Iraq and so on. So I think it's best to give you a short history of what they are talking about. Because if you don't know the history, you don't know the roots of the problem, then you wouldn't know how to solve it. History books confirm that on May 19, 1916 Britain and France concluded the Sykes-Picot agreement. Most people were surprised that this agreement divided the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire into five new countries before the First World War even ended. The First World War, everybody knows, ended in 1918.

However, everyone expected the sick man of Europe which was the Ottoman Empire to lose the war and it is normal for a country to lose territory if it is defeated,

especially if the territory in question was an occupied land for 402 years from 1516 to 1918. For 402 years the Ottomans ruled the Arabs. The two people who concluded this agreement, Mr. Sykes and Mr. Picot, were sure that Turkey's losing the war and their appointment as two level bureaucrats from their foreign ministries gave the agreement a low level of importance in the series of events at that time of history.

This agreement also conflicted with the agreements the British made with the Shariff of Mecca who was Shariff Husain bin Ali al-Hashemi, who rallied the Arabs to rebel against the Turks. I am sure you all remember Peter O'Toole and Omar Sharif in the movie "Lawrence of Arabia." Sharif Husain later complained about the division of the eastern part of the Arab world into five countries: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. That was the Sykes-Picot agreement, but was eventually compensated by the British creating the Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Iraq for his two sons to rule.

Over the years we heard many complaints from the later dictators of Syria and Iraq complaining about Sykes-Picot dreaming about the fact that they could be the leaders of this whole area. If we are to analyze today the agreement of 1916 we can confirm that the Sykes-Picot agreement was an excellent agreement, negotiated by the British and the French with good intentions to create a number of secular democratic states in the Levant after a long Islamic dictatorship by the Turks, I just mentioned 403 years of Islamic dictatorship by the Turks.

Britain and France build schools and universities in the Sykes-Picot countries, established democratic institutions, with the separation of powers between the judiciary, legislative and executive powers in all five countries.

The Hashemites ruled Iraq and Jordan with justice and provided security and the rule of law; developed major industries in Iraq; and provided wealth through the Iraqi Petroleum Company, called IPC until 1958.

The British also provided democratic institutions, schools, and universities in Palestine and Jordan whereby the Palestinians had the highest standard of living in Lebanon and Syria at that time.

The French also expanded the Jesuit university in Beirut that was originally established in 1875 and encouraged the Americans to develop their university to a secular university that changed it's name in 1920 from the Syrian Protestant College to the American University of Beirut. The Syrian Protestant College was established in 1866 as an American Baptist Missionary School.

The French can take credit for establishing the first republics in the Arab world in Syria and Lebanon. And their mandate encouraged the people to change their loyalty to the state rather than to their religious identify. Knowing that the thinkers of the Arab world who rebelled against the Ottomans in the mid 19th century in a

movement called the “Arab Awakening” or the “Arab Renaissance” where western oriented attached to the secular principals of the American and French revolutions that called in their constitutions for: equality under the law, freedom of the press, representative government and loyalty to the nation state.

Democracy and stability prevailed in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq until the creation of Israel in 1948 when political turmoil started in the region. General Hosni Zain, made the first military coup in the region in Syria in 1949, and abolished the democratic republic the French established. Democracy was to return for a short period to Syria in 1959 after several military coups and then Syria lost against their democratic system of government to an alliance with the Egyptian military dictatorship that took over power in Egypt from a semi-democracy under King Farouk in 1952 and established a military rule under Nasser who ruled Egypt for 18 years without a constitution.

Democracy in Syria after the fall of its unity with Egypt in 1961 changed hands from one military dictator after another each with an individual agenda trying to stay in power and keep his children.

The father of Bashar came in a coup in 1970 and his dictatorship was stable until 2011 when the people rebelled asking for their freedom and a change to democracy. Hafez al-Assad died in the year 2000.

Iraq, the other democracy established under Sykes-Picot ruled by the Hashemites was brutally entered by General Abdul Kareem Kasem in 1958 and Iraq began to be ruled by one dictator after another until the fall of Saddam Hussein at the hands of the US Army in 2003.

America failed to organize a democratic system in Iraq as General Garner first planned, turning over the country to a Mr. Brenner who in turn handed Iraq over to religious militias fighting for money and power, that’s virtually destroying today every democratic institution that was set up the British between 1919 and 1958 in Iraq.

So we failed.

Lebanon and Jordan continued to respect somehow their institutions set by the Sykes-Picot agreement and continued to survive after 100 years of struggle. In general the Arabs in the Sykes-Picot nations were given the opportunity to rule democratically and join the civilized world. However the founding fathers in Syria and Iraq failed to survive and allowed the institutions to be abolished and destroyed by the military that virtually destroyed these two countries as nation states, bringing back religious bigotry and Daesh, Al Qaeda, ... Mahdi, ... Dawa, ...Al Nusra, ...Alawite Army, supported by Russia and Iran killing Sunnis with barrels of dynamite, to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the world and ... in Yemen and so forth.

The proof of success of Sykes-Picot as an assimilating system of government in Lebanon and Jordan is in its results. Lebanon has 18 different religions; Jordan has ethnic Palestinians, Christians, Muslims and several tribes. Jordan is lucky to have a wise Hashemite power that stayed in power against all odds. King Hussein after his grandfather was killed in a mosque ruled by uniting his people and escaped 17 attempts on his life. One of them I was with him at the Dorchester Hotel in London in 1969 when someone put sulfuric acid in his nasal drops, luckily he discovered it.

Lebanon had its problems over the years with Palestinian Fatah interfering in Lebanon. It was not a Lebanese revolution it was the Palestinian interference who spent billions of dollars in Lebanon to take over power. So the Lebanon situation is totally different from Syria. Syria the people rebelled. In Lebanon there was no rebellion. So it was a Palestinian trying to take over the country.

The future is now clear. For peace and stability to return to Syria we need to go back and set up a democratic system similar to what the French built in 1919, where the Army stays in the hands of the minorities, the Christians and the Druze, and then we turn over the country in a democratic system, the overall executive power and legislature goes back to the educated Sunni new families of Syria – the Azzims, the Atasis, the Modavis, the AlJabris, the Hananos, the Barazis, the Kakeykas, the Amerbashi, the ..., the ..., the Ibish, the Mullahs and so on.

When democracy is reestablished in Syria, Bashar al Assad will disappear from the scene automatically. He will go. We don't have to tell Assad to go, we just set up a democracy. He loses his power. He will lose his power through the new democratic system of government of Geneva I and II.

In Iraq, for stability to return, democratic Arab nationalism has to reestablish itself through education and the ideology forming a new secular political parties and convincing his beatitude Ali Sistani to use his power to unite the Sunnis and Shiites of Iraq under Arabism and to take the initiative to visit Saudi Arabia and to meet King Salman in Mecca, uniting the Arabs of Iraq again to face their historical enemies who are seeking to steal Iraq's wealth, freedom, dignity and heritage.

Arabism unites and religious bigotry divides.

I am finished I just want to say what Dr. Phillip Hitti said in his book. The greatest Arab-America historian of the 20th century Dr. Phillip Hitti wrote in his history book, "The History of Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Palestine," published in 1951 that the Levant has turned today to the democratic principles of the West, like it did turn Westward in the days of Alexander the Great, 330 BC.

But with today's Daesh philosophy in this 21st century and the dictatorship of Assad for half a century, and the rule of the Dawah power in Iraq and that of Faqih spreading from Iran since 1979, we are faced with the question "is the Levant

moving westward or eastward or is it going back to the middle ages of the Ottoman empire.”

I am finished talking. Thank you. God save the Arab world and God bless American, French and British democracies and thank you gentlemen.

[Hudson] Thank you very much. And our final speaker is Dr. Judith Yaphe from the National Defense University who has some things to say, I think, about America policy in this troubled part of the Arab world.

[Yaphe] Well I’m sorry. I know it’s late. I know we’re tired. You’ve heard a lot today. But you have to hear me.

I will try to be very brief and focused and I will try to stick to a bit of reality as well.

Many of you have heard me speak about Iraq. You’ve heard me speak about Iraq in here previous conferences. Thank you for the opportunity, John. I’ve always enjoyed it. I have to say also that it was so much easier then. If you think about it I wish I had better news for you. I wish I had good news for you.

Perhaps if you come and listen to Ambassador Faily tomorrow morning he will change your minds. He will have something opposite to say. Although I don’t think it will be that much different.

Two years ago Iraq was not in the grips of a civil war with ISIS. There was no Islamic Caliphate. Arabs and Kurds were quarreling over selling oil, who owns Kirkuk, and when, not if, the Kurds would declare independence.

Sunni Arabs were complaining about disenfranchised political discrimination, rampant sectarianism encouraged by Iran, and Iraq’s politicians of all sects and all parties spent most of their energies making war on each other while they tried to maneuver for greater power and control of the state and its resources. Electricity, water, basic human needs were neglected, were not being met by the state, while this battle for power and wealth went on.

The situation in Kurdistan was somewhat better in terms of availability of basic recourses. The questions of political power, wealth distribution and demands for disputed territories went unanswered.

One year ago for those of you who were here you may have remembered me talking about... anyway, this was a time large areas of Iraq had fallen to ISIS, the Caliphate had been declared, Prime Minister Maliki was blamed, and to a great extent in my opinion, deservedly for creating the climate of sectarianism, ignoring the threat of ISIS. He was replaced with almost universal consensus by Hadr Al Abadi and you have to remember his political party, the system, Supreme Leader Khamenei,

Ayatollah Sistani, Iran and the United States all agreed that he had to go. That he bore some responsibility here.

Now, Abadi came in. He promised reforms to the provinces and a federal power sharing system, the kind of things that the Kurds and others were demanding. He fired generals. He removed the ceremonial deputy prime ministers and vice presidents. He eliminated ministries. And he sent to parliament bills for the approval of Kurdish contracting oil sales as a way to get concessions and move forward and for the creation of a new National Guard as an appeal to Sunnis in particular to try to show that there was an interest and support for their key issues.

Now... well done, we thought. We've got a reformist. Maybe things will get better. There were high hopes. But Iraqis, politicians refused to cooperate. They chose instead to focus their energies on control and undermining his authority. I think the state and the provinces have still failed to deliver needed goods and services.

Meanwhile, Kurdistan and many areas of Iraq were overwhelmed by more refugees fleeing ethnic cleansing from the Islamic Caliphate. And we know the fate of the Yazidis and other minorities was to be killed, captured, forced to convert and the women enslaved. Is there no God, you must have asked yourself if you were there. Where is the state to protect us?

Today. Here we are today. Iraq appears to be in a dangerous stagnation. Domestic politics has not improved. The Prime Minister is having difficulty in acting. The Parliament shows little ability to act and Iraqi politics seems in disarray. The war goes on with advances and setbacks I can't follow. Who is where at whatever day? Who is winning, it's extremely confusing?

The war goes on though with advances and setbacks especially in Anbar and Baiji. Terrorist attacks are commonly occurring in and around Baghdad, and the Caliphate continues what it thinks is governing. And I put that in quotes as governing can be as simple as rule by terror or by, accompanied by cooptation. ISIS is very good at that. Shock and awe. Remember shock and awe. ISIS brings that to you freely.

Now there have been since July, nonviolent demonstrations in several Iraqi cities especially in Baghdad. I stress nonviolent. People are coming out in the streets. Iraqis are coming out in the streets demanding change. They want water, electricity, 24x7, why is it taking so long? They want reforms. They seem to be supporting the kinds of things Abadi wants to give them but doesn't seem empowered by the system to do.

There are also, one must know, violent demonstrations going on in the Kurdish area. There have been especially in Sulamaniya and Irbil where the KRG security forces, fired, live fire on the demonstrators last week. The estimates vary on.. maybe it was only four, maybe it was ten. But they've also done other things and I'll come back to that in a minute. I just want to set the picture here.

Now, we're aware that there are a lot of game changers going on. But.. I won't get into.. they haven't talk about, what is the significance of Russia's presence in Syria and Iraq. Great question. I think the Iraqis are turning to anything they can. Yeah, Putin, Sheikh Putin seems to be very popular. These are very momentary things. This is a system that is desperate for some ability to protect and defend itself. And what do we expect it to do. I don't know what that new center in Baghdad means. There are some Iraqis who want to let loose, the Russians. That's not going to happen. But I think there is a great concern for survival.

Talk about Qassem Sulamaniyah, he's a general. He's in charge of military strategy. He may be much more hard line than anybody else, but I don't think that's the place to go if you want to change an Iranian policy in Iraq, but we'll come to that in a minute. I think we have to think about what's changing in Iraqi politics. The militias are many, some of them are very powerful, Iran backed, loyal to Sistani, loyal to the government, but not all under any single control. What will be the role for them in the future? They are needed to fight now but there also are dangers in the fighting they are doing. What will happen? Who will control them? And what happens when the war for Iraq is over? Assuming that there is an endpoint. I still do. I still have that faith.

Do these militias go home? Do they disarm? Who disarms them? You might ask who disarms anywhere in the Middle East? It's hard to see in any country any group disarming. But the point is this is Iraq. These militias could very easily change shape. They may go home. They may not go home. And if so to whom and to who and to what will they be loyal.

Question about Iran and Iraq. Is Iran changing its strategy in Iraq or is it just making tactical adjustments. Here I agree with something Paul said about the changes in policy because I've heard similar things from Iraqis that I have been talking to recently. Iran's strategy since 2003 has been to support a weak but united government that can keep Iraq together and unable to threaten it every again.

It succeeded in that. Iran has not shown an interest in occupying Iraq militarily. It doesn't have to. It occupies it, has occupied it in many other ways. And it has not advanced territorial claims. Although it has claims it would love including reparations for the eight-year war.

Now, Iraq's Shia are Arab for the most part. They're not Persian they are independent in spirit but realistic enough to know there is little they can do to counter Iranian influence in their country. Iran has many friends, not just the Shia. They have friends among the Kurds. They have friends and allies among the Sunni Arabs, many of whom are friendly with Qassem Sulaymaniyah as you must know. Or you may not. Take my word for it.

If there is going to be a change it will be tactical. Some say that Iran will turn to giving great support for a stronger Baghdad, a stronger central state which can then maintain greater control.

On the other hand as Paul has indicated and my sources, some of them, tell me. Iran has two strategies in Iraq and that those two strategies are to keep ISIS away from its borders and to protect the shrine cities. This could imply that Iran at some point may be willing to capitulate to ISIS as long as it leaves them alone. I'm not sure I can see that. I don't think that. That means that we can deal with them. I don't think that's going to happen. But nobody knows what the future holds.

So, some fearless predictions and a comment on US policy then I'm finished.

First of all. The Kurds will do wrong things, the wrong thing. When Baghdad is weak traditionally the Kurds have pressed hardest and are most demanding. They demand Kirkuk, they may or not care about Mosul, but they keep insisting on keeping whatever they have. And they occupy you know the disputed territories while ISIS was taking Mosul, and they say they will never give them up. I think even they themselves must be uncertain what their next moves should be. They need Iran and Turkey to acquiesce to their independence, which they have toned down if you've noticed. And they've been told to tone down the demand that neither Iran nor Turkey is interested in that right now. It's not an issue.

They need him but I'm not sure of the impact of what Masoud Barzani is doing and declaring himself President for life. He's now in the tenth year of an eight-year term, which is against the Kurdish constitution but again, I'll come back to that in a minute. I doubt whether Iraq could accept any of those demands but who knows. This whole situation is so much up in the air.

But I will say this the Kurds have done the wrong thing. And what has happened in the past week is something that some in Kurdistan has called a coup. The KDP has forced the resignation with these demonstrations, after the demonstration and the killings, they forced the resignation of the, you know there's a third party that's emerging and gaining strength. It had significant membership in the Kurdish parliament and had a deputy parliamentary speaker. They've all been thrown out of the government, out of the cabinet and been accused of provoking the demonstrations, which turned violent.

I've seen the reaction from Baghdad. You would think here's an opportunity to show some kind of interest and do something. The question is are the Kurds using the ISIS crisis, ISIS crisis? Oh my God, I must be tired – to their advantage. First in occupying territories rather than defending against ISIS and now creating a crisis to ensure the KDP and Barzani political control and eliminating a challenge to their authority. What's to be gained if you win this battle and you lose the war?

Because unless these elements come together, Shia militias, the government forces and the Kurds how are you going to defeat something like ISIS? Hmm.

I think Iran will follow its historic pattern and it will over reach. They always do. How much is Russian assistance worth to Tehran? How deep and long will Iran battle in Iraq? There's a cost for all of these things. And what's the cost going to be that Russia will demand? How far will Iran go?

Let me go to the recommendations.

My first recommendation. Let me speak to Iraq first. Then I want to speak to the US and the GCC. Let Abadi govern. He and Iraq need to show results and there's very little time. His rivals need to support his efforts. They need to stop trying to weaken his authority and they need to work constructively to keep government functioning. The public demonstrations since last summer continue to demand political reform, electricity, 24x7 clean water, and better security. He needs to establish control over these different security organizations and militias.

Second point would be the parliament. You need to approve the oil negotiations with the KRG and the proposed law creating National Guard units. Without reasonable concessions to these different elements and to these basic needs and assurances, ISIS can't be defeated. Mosul will not be retaken and it's hard to see that there is going to be any improvement.

The militias need to be brought under control and prevented from seeking revenge from Sunni Arabs and others been held responsible for crimes under Saddam Hussein. We have long always suspected and we have seen it in reality that where the Shia militias have moved in they have been responsible for ethnic cleansing of Sunnis, both south of Baghdad when Daesh was routed and it's been happening in some of the areas in the north. It's got to stop. No more ethnic cleansing in the name of "we won, it's ours, they must go." And that's true for all the sides of this. I know the pattern in the region, in Iraq, has been for successful military leaders to become political leaders and for militias to continue. That's got to stop.

If these conditions are not corrected I think Iraq will become as, I think it was a New York Times journalist who wrote this last week, but I couldn't find the source, since my computer died. He described it as a battlefield and not a country. And I think that's pretty close to reality.

Now, very shortly and then I'm finished. To the United States I just have one thing – stay committed to Iraq. You have a good chance. You have leverage. You have influence. Use it. And we haven't used it smartly and we haven't used it sufficiently in the past.

To the Iraqis I can only say two words stay free. Try to maintain your independence. You need a lot of elements of support if you're going to survive.

To the Russians. Be careful what you ask for. You are already being threatened by Daesh, publicly which is calling for attacks in Russia on them because of what they are doing in Syria and Iraq. There are always consequences to what happens in the Middle East.

Now, my final comments. And I just wrote this as I heard the last panel talk, and I have to say it. I'm sorry that so many people in the region continue to regret the removal of Saddam. I think that's appalling. I think it shows in part the kind of neglect that has gone on for a long time where Iraq was totally avoided and neglected, nobody cared. You had an opportunity, I think, to influence the course of events there in a positive way and you didn't.

I'm being very harsh in this now. But John knows that when I finish I always say something.. stupid, no critical. Iraq in my own personal opinion, and I'm not going to defend Bush administration policy or Obama per se. But I do need to say this. Iraq in my opinion would not have held much longer under Saddam anyway. But the thing that I think is to say that the US is to blame for instability in the region, give me a break. We made mistakes. I've been the first, even when I was working for the government to point that out. And I was at a think tank for the Department of Defense. I said that then, before, during and after. I wasn't punished for it. I don't know why. There were people who would have like to.

The thing is. We accept responsibility. Yeah, we had mistakes. We did stupid things. We did some things right as well. But I think you can all see that what was happening in Iraq could not have been prevented. Are we to blame for sectarianism? Excuse me, sectarianism began in 670 with the battle. And has been always present, even if it's an identity issue, it's not open militia but Iraq never had sectarian warfare until the post 2003 period and the uncontrolled rise of these militias and sectarian forces.

Now you may not like it, I will point out that when you win a war you go with the allies that fought with you and supported you. Sadly to say, where did that support come from? It came from Kurdish fighters and from Shia fighters. Where were the Sunnis and the Arabs in this? Is there something missing there. We wanted, we did look for influence from the Sunni community, which was deeply affected, as we know. I won't go into all of that now. I think you know about that as I do.

The Gulf states, there is a Western perception, let me put it as politely as I can. That the Gulf states share responsibility for events in this region for not fully wanting to deal or understanding it, but I think that the question, not my question necessarily, but the question in general that is .. where did the Salafis draw their courage and support, the ideology, this is very brutal, this is honesty. But I think you have to recognize that's what you are dealing with it as these issues are presented.

The US has a right by the way to its own economic and political debates. What is political disarray in this country? I know it's hard to understand from the outside how the American political system works. But let me tell you it is our system. And what you're seeing in all these political debates in what you can call this kind of political disarray, and I'm not talking about what goes on inside the White House itself, but in general the political discourse. This is American political tradition. You may not like it, but it's who we are and what we do.

Finally. Finally? I think we all need to ask ourselves, put the past behind us. These are all differences. I've hit on some sensitive points. But we have to work together if we're going to succeed because what threatens us in this region today is unlike any threat we've seen before. And if we don't work together – "*hallas*".

[Anthony] We apologize to all the speakers who had to have their remarks truncated because they went over. And I wanted to say that Dr. Samo, we especially appreciate you're coming all the way from Syria and there's pain in our heart that we did not give you an extended period of time. If you want to make three sentences – that's all – you can. If you'd rather defer we will accept and respect that.

What we will do, we have so many questions. We must have 40 questions here. More than that.. is a device. We will send these questions to the speakers; ask if they will please respond. We will post them to our web site. And I think we have most people's emails who have registered for this conference and you will have the benefit of their responses that way.

Dr. Samo if you want to make three sentences you can. If you want to defer which I suggest you do, you may.

[Samo] Look, do you mind if I stand up. This is very important to me. I didn't get to it. Part of the reason I can over here was to deal with the survival of eastern Christianity. In Syria, Syria is the holy land. Syria is the land of Jesus Christ. Syria is where St. Paul used the term Christians for the first time, in Antioch, Syria. I tell my Muslim friends, listen there are four big prophets. Abraham is from Iraq. Moses is from Egypt. Mohammed is from Mecca. Only Jesus Christ was from Syria. And Syria is the home land of Christianity and the homeland of Jesus Christ. Therefore Christianity should be maintained, should survive in Syria and it's on the verge of disappearing.

[Anthony] Thank you Dr. Samo.

Now we will go.

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