



**Transcript of Panel 3: Geopolitics: Ideology and Fragmentation in the Middle East  
Margaret Thatcher Conference on Security  
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The video recording of this panel is available on the [CPS YouTube channel](#).

Sir Peter Westmacott: Our topic for this discussion; Ideology and Fragmentation in the Middle East. We've got a regional dimension to it rather than everything in the world that's to do with what's going on, ideology and the challenge that others were discussing this morning and we've got the ideology and the religion side. So these are both geo-strategic events and there are the differences of the different communities and religions which we've been talking about earlier today. So, I think a rich set of subjects for us to look at.

We're doing this at a time as Henry Kissinger and others have been saying earlier today, at a time of extraordinary unpredictable change, radical challenge to so many of the things that we thought were certain particularly the ones that were firm when everything else was wobbly. We discovered that some things that were wobbly turned out to be firm and the things we thought we can take for granted, we can't. There's a great line in Henry Kissinger's latest book *World Order*, which talks about chaos threatens side by side with unprecedented interdependence. Which is a very elegant way in my view of saying we're all in this together and we're really not sure what's going on and it's in all of our interest to work together to try to find a way through it all. It's a multi-polar world, not a uni-polar world now and it's certainly not as others have explained a stage where history has ended and everyone has come round to agree on a kind of universality of liberal western democratic values.

With our panel, we're going to look at geo-politics, we're going to look at ideological differences. We're going to do it at a time when we've got the United States of America which is in many respects disengaging from the Middle East but at the same time, it's doing a pretty direct warning to the Syrian government earlier today that if it uses chemical weapons again, there will be consequences. My words not theirs but that was the gist of it. At a time when the British government which I have the honour of representing for more than 40 years is somewhat absorbed with its own future in Brexit and less directly involved in a number of these global issues as earlier panellists were saying earlier on. So an important and difficult time for us to look at all these things.

Not very long ago, when we talked about the Middle East, the tensions tended to be between, I simplify but you get my point, between Israel on one side and the Arab world on the other. Then, it became something which was more to do with Sunni Arabs against the Shia world partly on the back of a resurgent Iran, what's gone on since 2003 and indeed further back since the



Iranian Revolution. The most recent events that we've seen in the Gulf suggest that some of the most difficult tensions we have to manage are now not Sunni-Shia but indeed Sunni-Sunni within the Arab world. So what's going on?

Let's not forget that in that part of the world, there's another important country which used to be the poster boy if you like for the separate of state and governance, of religion and governance and the way that Rabbi Sacks was talking about earlier today; Turkey. Secular republic, the great achievement of Ataturk, splitting off religion and the caliphate from the need to modernise and create a great western state of Turkey. Where has Turkey got to now? A country which straddles both Middle East, Asia and Europe. A country in which today, going back to what others were saying about the legacy of Greco-Roman civilisation, you'll probably find more remains of those two civilisations in Turkey today than you do in Italy and Greece put together. So a country which has got a very important part of the heritage if you like that we inherit in western Europe. So, a lot of things mixed up, a lot of complicated issues, some theological some ideological, some geo-political.

We are extremely lucky to have this amazing panel in front of me. A couple of words of introduction if I may. First of all His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al Faisal bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud. Many of you will know him extremely well. He was for almost a quarter of a century the head of the intelligence directorate of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He was Ambassador to the United Kingdom, he was dragged kicking and screaming from London to Washington to become Ambassador of the Kingdom in United States of America. He has numerous honorary positions, honorary degrees, trustees of a lot of different organisations, notably something of which I've been involved in for a quarter of a century which is the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. His Royal Highness and I were there together with Prince of Wales the other day for the opening of the new building there. Nobody better to make sense of what's going on in that region than Prince Turki, well known to many of you and much loved by many of his friends in this country and further afield.

We also have Senator Joseph Lieberman, also somebody very well known in this country. Been here many many years, many many times, he was 24 years a member of the United States Senate, he ran for Vice President with Al Gore, he was a Democrat, he became an Independent. He has been prominent in all sorts of really critical issues that have affected the United States and the rest of the world. They range between cap and trade and climate change where nobody else was really understanding the importance of it, some very brave attempts to move on gun control. He was writing about violent Islamist extremism almost a decade ago, again ahead of his time.

He has been an expert on cyber security and on a number of defence and foreign policy issues for a long time, well known for his strong support of Israel and a pretty firm line on some of the things which Iran has been up to in recent years. Of course, very recently, I hope the Senator doesn't mind me



saying this, he was talked about as a possible head of the FBI, he's probably delighted he didn't get the call. We're delighted sir that we've got you here with us.

Joe Lieberman: Well, if I'm delighted, there is someone else here who is ecstatic and that is my wife.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Then the third member of our panel is ambassador Omar Saif Ghobash who's father as it happens was the first foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates. He has survived the experience of doing a degree at Baylor College Oxford, he's got perfect English. He has been eight years Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates in Moscow which must be something of a record. I think although it's top secret, it won't go outside of these four walls, he's likely to be moving to Paris for a slightly less of a hardship posting later this year.

He is well known for not only representing his country and representing or explaining to his own colleagues and others what's going on in Russia but also for addressing some of the really difficult issues for young Muslims. Earlier this year, he published a book called Letters to a Young Muslim which was addressed to his son and something which I think a lot of us would like to read and look forward to learning more of your wisdom ambassador as to what are the issues which young Muslims today need to try to address.

With those three very distinguished members of my panel, let's get cracking. Your Royal Highness, I thought we might start with you. I don't want to anticipate what you're going to tell us but I do know that when you first looked at the title of the conference which was all about a crisis of Western security and values, that your first reaction was; the world isn't just about the West. This affects the rest of us too. So, without further ado, over to you sir.

Turki Al Faisal: Thank you very much Mr. Ambassador. Thank you Lord Saatchi for inviting me. Margaret Thatcher is not only of the United Kingdom. She was a world figure and we will never forget her position when Iraq invaded Kuwait. She was a stalwart defender of not only Kuwait but the principle of non-intervention in other countries and freedom for everybody. She will always remain as a beacon for us in the Middle East and someone to look up to. I'm very privileged to be here at this conference that is being held in her name. Let me just start by saying that first of all, I am not a government official anymore, thank God. Secondly, that my former work instead of leaving Middle East in my retirement with a clear head and a better understanding of the world, it has simply left me even with even more questions. As the world develops, I get even more questions than that.

An anecdote from my time in the United States which I think is relevant today and that is; after the congressional elections in 2006, I was then Ambassador in Washington and a new batch of Congressmen and Senators came to take up their position. They asked to see some of the Arab ambassadors in Washington and I was invited. After finishing my talk with them, I mentioned



that the world had become so small that any resolution, any law, any declaration coming out of that august community of representatives of the American people has a direct bearing and a direct effect on me as a Saudi citizen. That therefore I would like permission to be passed by American Congress to allow me to vote in American elections. There was polite laughter but unfortunately no response. In any case, the world today is even more interconnected than when I was Ambassador in 2006 in Washington and that's because of social media.

From that context, yes, I do see that the problems of the world today are not confined to the West, they are all over. We in the Middle East of course are primary victims if I can put it that way of what is happening in the world today. The biggest movement of people by force is taking place now in the Middle East as a result of problems in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya and in Yemen. Also, the issue of terrorism is afflicting us as much as it is afflicting the rest of the world if not more so. I think as Rabbi Sacks mentioned earlier this morning, the victims of present day terrorism are mostly from the Muslim communities not just in Muslim countries but in other countries as well.

So, we're all in it together. If there are going to be any solutions to the problems that face us, they must come from all of us. There is no one part formula that can apply to all of us but we should work together in trying to find whatever means and capabilities to overcome the challenges. Those were mentioned earlier in the previous discussions; whether it is poverty, whether it is unemployment whether it is even issues of political grievance, social grievance, economic deprivation et cetera, et cetera, they all make up for a very combustible condition that is exploding everywhere around us. We must find the means to overcome them. The West sometimes in some of the countries and some of the political thinkers or even leaders as Henry Kissinger said about the United States, the United States sometimes feels that it is a special country. China also feels that it is a special country and I think if you look around the world, you'll find that that sentiment is equally present in other countries as well.

But what makes us special in my view is our humanity. In that context, there is much for us to work for. I don't think we're and a state of clash of civilisations, whether it is Judaeo-Christian civilisation or Islamic civilisation or Chinese or whatever. I do think however that we are at this time in the world, we are in a clash for civilisation. For those who propose violence and extremism and have no regard for human life whatsoever, they are the enemies of civilisation and we are Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, whatever religion, we're all the victims of that nihilistic and rather vicious and terror driven view of the world espoused by some of our societies. Therefore, we must work together to overcome that challenge.

As I said, there's no part formula but by working together, by discussing these issues together clearly and openly and not hiding behind any political, social or any other impediments, I think we can overcome the present-day



challenge of terrorism. We must share intelligence, we must share knowhow, we must share the view of ourselves as human beings and not accept that we are divided by tribe or by nation or by religion or by sect. As Ambassador Westmacott talked about the differences in the Middle East being now not just Israel and the Arab world or Sunni and Shia but Sunni and Sunni makes me say that that proves that the problems is really political and not based on religion or sect. It is the politics that drives this issue and identifies it as a means of sect or religion or even nationality.

Therefore, I think finding political solutions is what we need to do. The West if I may say as a contributor to world history and humanity has a responsibility to work with us in overcoming these challenges that we face. And there are many. If we look at today's world and see where the impact of our problems in the Middle East are happening, they are happening all over the world. The biggest migration of people today is taking place as a result of problems in our world; migration into Europe for example. The issue of not only refugees but the economic deprivation of those refugees, where they go and how to get there, thousands of them dying in the sea in order for them to reach safe shores. This is all a common problem for all of us. You can't resolve that simply by managing crisis. You have to resolve crisis.

The problem in Palestine and Israel, more than 60 years of hardship. Just yesterday and today, there's one of the symptoms of that crisis with a rocket launched into Israel and an immediate response from Israel militarily into Gaza. That has to stop. We don't need divine revelation or an Einsteinian genius to know what the solution is for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is two states next to each other with mutual understanding and mutual guarantees for both peoples. That is precisely what the Arab world has espoused for the last 15 years or so since the late King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia proposed the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002. We have to get the political leadership in our part of the world, particularly in Palestine and Israel to work on that basis. I think all of us are looking hopefully to the efforts being undertaken by President Trump now to try to find an equitable solution to this problem.

Other issues cannot be left unresolved. We heard earlier about Russian intervention in the Middle East and the lack of American resolve under President Obama and withdrawal of American power as you introduced Mr. Ambassador. None of them are looking at the price that the Syrian people are paying for what is happening on the ground. There is total destruction taking place at this very moment while we're discussing peacefully in this august hall about the welfare of peoples around the world. Nobody has been willing to take the necessary steps to stop the fighting in Syria. Yet all the military hardware is there to stop the fighting and nobody is doing anything about it. That is the responsibility unfortunately that we have to undertake and it's not something that we can shirk or run away from. We have to put an end to the fight.



Lastly, I would say that the West also has a responsibility to us. I come from a country that is very much in transition and very much in a developing mode. We look upon others for examples of good governance, of transparency, trying to emulate them and acquire some wisdom from them perhaps. Yet the system in the West as we look upon it seems to be pushing for polarisation. We're seeing this happening in the elections not just in the UK but in the United States and in other European countries. Respectfully, I would say that some of the problems in the West are self-inflicted and therefore you have to look at your own system and try to resolve these issues so that the people in your countries don't seek resolution and solutions among the extremes but rather go back to the middle ground and become more of an example to follow than at the present state.

That applies as well to the very necessary and much maligned institution of the United Nations. How can we believe that 1.5 billion Indians, nearly an equal number of Muslims from all nationalities and 1 billion Africans and I don't know how many hundreds of millions if not already a billion Latin-Americans are not represented on the Security Council? Is that acceptable in today's world when we've become so interconnected and so intertwined by social media and so on? So, we have to find a way to reform that necessary institution, the United Nations, and make it a more, if I can put between quotations, "a more democratic institution" than it is today.

Just one last word and I'll stop talking; media plays an important role in that. The seeking of sensation in the media is part of the problem. I know people in the west talk about freedom of speech as being laudatory and a very positive principle and value but the question is, how far. How far can the media bring sensation rather than common sense to the readers or the viewers of the news and other media organisations. That is something I think that we have to think about. Thank you Mr. Ambassador.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Your Highness, thank you very much. Before I go on, can I just remind people, if you would like to submit questions, please follow the advice and send them up through Twitter and they will be brought to me in a moment. In a second, I shall ask Ambassador Ghobash to say a little bit about what's really going on at the moment in the Gulf Region. But before that, perhaps I can turn to Senator Lieberman. Senator, you have a long experience of the region and of looking at what the United States can and cannot do to help address some of these complex issues. Eloquent set up by His Royal Highness, how does it look from your perspective?

Joe Lieberman: The Middle East looks ... First thanks very much for your kind words of introduction, great to be here. I'm here both as a member of the board of the Gatestone Institute, a core sponsor of this conference, and also the chairman of a group called United Against Nuclear Iran. That's part of my focus. I would say that one of the reasons why people like Dr. Kissinger and a lot of us feel that we don't remember since the end of the Second World War, the world



being more unstable is a combination of events. Part of it is in the Middle East.

The name of Margaret Thatcher, I think it's important to say and this is a very simple statement but I think true, that she in her career reminded us of the impact that a leader can have if that leader acts boldly or courageously based on principle. I know you talked about the ... His Royal Highness perhaps talked about the Gulf War in '91. It was one of those twists of fate that Ms. Thatcher was in the US just a day or a day after Saddam went into Kuwait and met with President Bush 41. I think what emerged from that was the leadership that the President Bush showed at a critical turning point. So, the world cries out ... The world is unstable and cries out for leaders who can work together as Prince Turki said, to try to calm the instability.

For a long time in the Middle East, we focused on the central conflict being between Israel and the Palestinians. That is not the central conflict today but it remains an important conflict and resolving it would help overall in the region. Of course, I agree with Prince Turki that the only viable resolution is a two-state solution. You can't solve this by opposing on one party, the Palestinians, an unacceptable resolution. So, we have to continue to work on that. To me on the ground, the growing aggression, aggressiveness of Iran and the aggressiveness of the radical Islamist terrorist groups particularly Isis or Daesh has become the central threat to stability in the region.

Two things have happened recently that I think are acts of leadership as I just described and give us some hope about the future in the region. One is indigenous which is the extent to which the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] or the Arab nations are not just working together but showing a kind of initiative and a willingness to take tough stands to take on those who threaten them and the region. That's quite different. It is really represented by these two countries here, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who have enlightened leadership, modernising leadership, and in the case of Saudi Arabia obviously new leadership in the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. That's a good sign I think for those of us who want to see progress in the Middle East. The relationship of those countries to Israel, though generally covert, is critically important not just to the security of the region but to the possibility for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The second point I want to make is perhaps surprising and it's about President Trump. I'm speaking as somebody who very strongly and enthusiastically supported Hillary Clinton for president last year. During the campaign, President Trump certainly sent out signals that if he were elected that we might return to a kind of isolationist America. At different times, he described NATO as obsolete. He, even after being elected, seemed to question the One China policy, he kept talking about 'America First'. But it turns out and I'm going to speak very broadly and too quickly and if you want to ask questions I'm glad to try and answer them. It turns out that in many



ways, he is following a fairly traditional foreign policy as it turns out in a lot of places in the world; Asia, Europe. Now he's said that he supports NATO including Article Five in case there was any doubt. He supports the One China policy for instance.

But the most significant change in American foreign policy from the Obama administration to the Trump administration has been in the Middle East. How would I describe this briefly? I think the president has made clear that he believes, he sees who our enemies are and who our friends are in the Middle East and he's going to be with our friends both generally but specifically to help them against their enemies. That means the enemies are as been noted by the President, Iran and radical Islamist terrorist groups. He has clearly escalated in cooperation with our allies the fight against ISIS on the ground. We can now see that it's succeeding. The Daesh as it's called is clearly being pushed out of Mosul and out of Raqqa in Syria which they designated as the capital of their new caliphate and they're about to lose their capital. I'm not so naïve as to think that's the end of the terrorist threat but that is progress.

I think he is very clearly said to our allies in the Arab world including the two countries represented here, we are with you. We are with you in the fights against the terrorists and against Iran. We are also with Israel to the extent that you can play a role, that is the Arab nations, with us America in facilitating or attempting to make progress in the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. He is willing to do it. So willing that he's committed his son-in-law to the effort, I mean, how much more. I think I'm going to stop there. I wouldn't say I'm optimistic but I would say that in the midst of tremendous instability in the region, there are now these two major forces. One indigenous, powerful, more active than ever before diplomatically and militarily, the Arab nations. The US now not as the last administration in my opinion was Iran-centric, which is how can we make this enemy into our friend, but seeing that Iran is our enemy and all you have to do is listen to what they say and with our allies, challenging them at every turn.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Thank you Senator. We might come back to Iran in a moment. Perhaps before that I could ask Ambassador Ghobash to give us his perspective. What's going on in the Gulf? Where does it go from here? How do we calm things down if that is indeed what the objective is? Then let's explore a little bit more some of the themes that the senator has touched on.

Omar Ghobash: Thank you very much. I just wanted to say, my new claim to fame will be that I was on stage with the Prince, the Senator and the Ambassador. So this will be on my new CV from now on. Thank you. I do like the idea of organising my thoughts around what's going on in the Middle East. So, I've put some points down. I think one of the most important things at the moment over the last couple of years has been the economic pressures of low oil price. Many people will complain that we're not making as much money from oil as we used to and therefore we can't sort of hand it out in patronage systems. Actually, it's a very exciting time for those who are interested in reforming the



economies of the region. I can say that certainly in the Emirates, we as a government are looking forward to the day when we will actually make no money from oil. We're building our economic plans on that basis.

It also seems quite clear that the Saudi government, if I may mention, is taking remarkable steps to not just reform their economy but even some suggest implement cultural change through the austerity programmes. Again, this is just comments from people who are observing the situation. That's very interesting for us for the Emirates to observe what's happening in Saudi Arabia.

I think the second most important change is the change in the US administration. This is not to say that we were completely under the domination of American administrations but it does suggest we have a better understanding of the direction of the current administration rather than the previous one. Some people have asked us in our activity regarding Qatar whether we have been emboldened by the current President, the current administration in the US. I think, I get a little sensitive about the idea of being emboldened and being given permission. We actually do have our own strategic interests that may differ from the United States, western Europe, or Russia and China. What it does mean is that we do recognise there are system constraints on us. It's very difficult to point out or call out Qatar on its behaviour when you have an administration that is more or less neutral about that behaviour.

So, I think that's also something we need to be very aware of. We're hoping that that support and that understanding will continue but we also know in the region that we have taken a very important stand against not just militarised Islamist extremism but the extremism of thought because that's where we think it's really coming from. It's not just money going to organisations, it is pumping these ideas into people's heads on a daily basis through media.

I think the third point that I'd like to make is that leadership has come of age. The founder of the Emirates died 10 years ago and his sons have now come into an understanding both of how to run the country, how to develop an economy that is less reliant on oil, how to develop relations with countries that were not traditionally within our spheres, so Russia, China and now India where we previously had very strong relations with Pakistan. There is a growing confidence that actually we've got a socio-economic experiment that has worked in a very tough environment. I often look at the example of Libya which could very well have been one day a United Arab Emirates in terms of economic productivity and stability. A relatively small population, homogenous both religiously and ethnically and with immense natural resources. Instead, it's devolved into this awful Islamist kind of haven. So, we look at that and we think this is what we could have been had things not been thought about clearly.



So, we've got this leadership also in Saudi Arabia a young crown prince who is pushing forward reform. That actually allows the Emirati leadership and Saudi leadership to come together to form a very important axis going forward. I think also that very importantly, after September 11, there was a tremendous amount of criticism directed towards the Gulf States. The Gulf States were accused of propagating these terrible narratives, anti-western narratives based on Islamic theories I suppose. What we've done is, we have begun to take responsibility within our own societies. It did take a little while. Initially, the response from the region was to say, well we need to improve the image of Islam in the west.

Today I think we've actually come to a realisation and you'll see this in the public media in the Gulf, perhaps not Qatar but certainly in the rest of the states, both written and audio-visual where we're having these very public debates about what it is that we are doing with Islam. What kinds of narratives are we allowing to flourish and what are the kinds of narratives that we could actually be promoting? So, the changes that we've made in our religious kind of system to the extent that we can control a narrative in the Emirates is that we have taken our mosques and we have imposed a certain amount of control and perhaps even direction. Instead of being sort of encouraged to hate the outsider or others who are not connected with Islam, actually we're being told be positive, work on local issues, focus on volunteering. I think that's also something that's extremely important to understand on our context or in the context of our battle at the moment with Qatar.

I think I should say a couple of words on Qatar. We've long observed Qatar promoting extremist agendas both online and with the Al Jazeera television station. We've also seen on the ground whether it's in Syria, Yemen or Libya or even within our own countries, we've seen Qatar promoting, funding, financing and in many cases directing extremists who all are really at a minimum there to cause chaos and at a maximum looking to overthrow governments. We've looked at this we actually signed a document with the Qataris in 2014 I believe it was where they explicitly accepted that they should stop funding Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups and begin to tone down their very anti-stability rhetoric.

So, when the world looks at what we're doing to Qatar today which is basically withdrawing our trade and political cooperation with them, this shouldn't come as a surprise. This is something that has been bubbling up for a very long time. We've finally decided that we aren't able to take it anymore. Actually, one of the reasons why this is not going to be settled any time soon is because for us it's a matter of principle whereas for the Qataris, it seems to be a matter of waiting, waiting this out and perhaps waging a media war. It's not a media war for us. This is not going to be won by public opinion in western capitals or anywhere else. It is actually a matter of principle. We all focused on fighting extremism both the financing and the propagation of the ideas that we find in the Qatari media. So, I'll hand over back to you.



Sir Peter Westmacott: May I just ask one follow up question Ambassador? It's all over the public domain now that there's quite a long list of demands which Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have issued to the Qataris. That if this crisis is to be diffused, they've got to do a number of things in a very short space of time. Do you really expect all those demands to be met within the coming days or do you think that's something that is to be discussed and negotiated?

Omar Ghobash: Well, we've given them the 10 days to consider it and we've had no positive response so far. So I think that there's a general sense that this is not going to go in a positive direction. The Qataris have known these demands. It's not a surprise to them. This is something that they've known about and we've discussed with them on many occasions. I think this is also a function of the way we discuss issues in the Gulf in particular. There's always this issue of face and preserving somebody else's face. It's even been mentioned by the western press with regard to Qatar that no self-regarding entity or government could accept such a loss of face. Actually, that applies to the other side as well. That applies to us as well.

In this showdown, is it Qatar that saves face and an extremist agenda wins for the region or is it countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates who are all looking forward to a positive and a more productive Middle East? Are we going to save face and move forward? I think we need to stop talking really about saving face and the Qataris need to recognise that actually extremism is simply going to destroy all of us together including the Qataris.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Thank you very much. Prince Turki, may I take you back to the subject of Iran for a moment. There's been quite a lot of discussion on this panel about Iran's responsibility, about its aggressive approach to parts of the region. It's also a country in which there was a presidential election not very long ago where the reformist candidate, so-called, did a lot better than the choice of the supreme leader. The young people seemed to be voting for a degree of change inside Iran and yet there are still issues of the revolutionary guard and there's still obviously a great deal of concern amongst the Arab Gulf countries about Iran in policies in the region. What would it take to improve that relationship? What does Iran need to do to try to rebuild confidence with its neighbours?

Turki Al Faisal: Let me just reflect on something that Senator Lieberman said about President Trump's son-in-law participating in finding a solution to the Middle East problem. I come from an area where nepotism works very well and hopefully now that America has taken us as an example there, maybe we can get somewhere. Iran has a transnational policy. It is not happy or humble to think of itself as a nation with borders and with interests for its people and engaging with others, mutual cooperation and mutual respect and so on. Their transnational ambitions extend as far as the world community.

Khamenei in his will when he died and before that in the setting up of the Iranian constitution that he put in place identified those ambitions quite



clearly. Which was that he was delegated to prepare the world for the return of the absent Imam. Those who are not conversant with Shia theology, the absent Imam disappeared some 800, 900 years ago, maybe more than that and his return is supposed to come and be a precursor to the end of the world when harmony and goodwill will reign all over the world. Khamenei set himself up as a representative of the absent Imam. We see those ambitions being practised today by his successor. Not just in our part of the world. In the news today in the BBC, there was mention about Iranian ambitions to have a corridor extending from Iran across Iraq into Syria and into Lebanon which they call the Shia Crescent but it goes beyond that. It goes to Shia Muslim communities everywhere.

Among Shia communities, there is resistance. For example, the Grand Ayatollah in Iraq Sistani who in the rigorous structure of the Shia community ranks higher than even Khamenei of Iran rejects the idea of the so called Wilayat-e Faqhi which is the rule of the cleric that Khamenei instituted. The vast majority of Shias around the world reject this idea as being heretic. That nobody can put themselves as a delegate or as a representative of the absent Imam.

So this transnational ambition is today in practise and you see Iran canvassing and collecting so called Shia militias not just from our part of the world but bringing them from Afghanistan, from Pakistan, wherever Shia communities are, to do the fighting in Syria for example. Who are they fighting? They're fighting fellow Muslims. That is the basic difference I think and point of conflict between not just Saudi Arabia, the UAE and others in the area so called Sunni countries but even within the Shia community, there are opponents to this heretical view of the world that Khamenei introduced in Iranian ambitions. How are we going to overcome that? Prince Ahmed bin Salman when asked about this issue, he said, "Show me a way that I can talk to someone who believes he has divine rights to interfere in my affairs." We don't have a direct line to God but it seems that Mr. Khamenei the successor of Mr. Akhmeni believes that he does. So that is the ultimate problem for us.

Ironically, who else has this transnational ambition in our part of the world? It is the Islamist terrorists like Daesh who promote this ideas that there are no borders in the Islamic world. That they want to go back to the time when the so called Khilafah ruled and there are no Syrians, no Saudis, no Iraqis but we're all Muslims together and so on. The irony is that here in Saudi Arabia, we're facing the ambitions of these two transnational political entities that want to impose their will on the rest of us. When I mentioned about working together to oppose terrorism, falls into that category. We have to oppose the terrorism that is practised by Daesh which I prefer to call Fahish by the way because in Arabic Fahish means obscene. I think they are obscene.

We have to oppose as the Senator said the ambitions of a transnational Iran that by force is trying to impose its will on us. Another irony in all of this is the first victims of Khamenei and his transnational and so called Wilayat-e Faqih



policy have been the Iranian people themselves. These elections that you mentioned taking place there, are they going to be taken as a certificate of good conduct. When you think that no candidate can present himself without the approval of the Grand Ayatollah, Khamenei. So yes, there are moderates and extremists in that make up but Rouhani could never have run as president had not Khamenei allowed him to.

So, it's a play on words. When they talk about elections, I don't think they should be considered to be a viable and a so-called example of Jeffersonian Democracy or British Democracy, et cetera. From their context, I think the Iranian people if given the choice, and this is not something that I say, this is something that Iranians say themselves, they would like to get rid of the whole system and not just vote for Rouhani or whoever is presenting himself as a candidate. If you can suggest to us Mr. Ambassador how we can talk to the Iranians on these issues, I'm sure the kingdom will be more than happy.

We're linked by Iran by three unchangeable factors. One is geography. They are our neighbours forever. Two is a common Islamic heretic. We believe in the same God, we believe in the same divine book and we believe in the same prophet as being our prophet. Three, we're also linked by blood. Arabs live in Iran. We have many people of Persian origin live in the Arabian Peninsula. They have come throughout history if you go back to Sassanian times or Akkadian times or Kaldinian times, just look on all the empires that have come to our part of the world. The interchange of relationships between tribes, people and civilisations is a common link between us. I wish that we could find a way to emphasise these three things that bring us together. But as I mentioned earlier, the politics intervenes in there and then you have the problem of Sunni versus Shia, you have Qatar against the rest of us or you have et cetera, et cetera. This is the problem that we face.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Thank you very much. I'm looking at the clock, we've got just under quarter of an hour and I've got quite a lot of questions so I'm going to ask each of the panellist to be fairly brief if I may in their answers and I'm going to try to bunch the questions. Senator Lieberman, can I come back to you? I've got three or four around the various themes of Turkey. One is what difference does it make if the demand to Qatar to close the Turkish military facility there is acted upon and what does it mean in terms of President Erdogan's desire to get involved in regional politics. From the American perspective. Do we think that the security and the homogeneity of NATO is threatened by the way in which Turkey is moving in a direction, my questioner goes, de-secularisation?

A broader one which is why has the West, why have western governments ignored the implications of what's happening in Turkey since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the way in which we assembled the region after that happened as leading to many of the divisions and the territorial difficulties that now exist in the region in which we're all wrestling with. So series of



questions around end of Ottoman Empire, role of Turkey, de-secularization, security of NATO.

Joe Lieberman:

Those are big questions but I see the clock so I'll try to be quick. The changes in Turkey under Erdogan has been dramatic and not good. Turkey under Erdogan is not what it was when it came into NATO. To me, both the government follows policies that are contrary to the values of NATO which are human rights, freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom of the press et cetera et cetera. But also, I'm afraid that Turkey has become an unreliable ally. I don't think that leads us to want to go to war with Turkey but it says to me that we have to recognise what is reality and not fool ourselves. That they're not genuine allies of ours and I think we all have to adjust our policy to that.

This is why I admire what our friends in the Gulf together with Egypt et cetera have been doing. I said it and I want to repeat it again. The increased energy of their foreign policy and their military policy is a turning point in the Middle East. The presidency calling out Qatar which even with us the US has essentially been riding two horses at once. Sometimes those horses go in different directions which makes it very hard but they have our base at Al Udeid which we appreciate. On the other hand, there's so much evidence that they've been supporting, financing terrorism and now we've got our allies standing up and saying this has got to stop. Really, we ought to do the same with Turkey but we haven't. We the United States ought to do the same with Turkey. In fact, I think the Europeans ought to do the same with Turkey because we're kidding ourselves. I repeat in closing, Turkey today is certainly not Turkey under Ataturk and it's certainly not the Turkey that was accepted and embraced in NATO.

Sir Peter Westmacott:

Thank you very much. Ambassador Ghobash, one for you please. Prince Turki was saying that western societies have got to look at some of their own contradictions and difficulties and the radicalization which is home grown as well as the export of Jihaddism and suicide bombers from parts of the Middle East to other countries. Can I ask you as somebody who's thought and written about the role of young Muslims, do you feel that in response to the number of young people who are doing these horrendous things in the name of Islam that leaders in the Islamic world both in the faith and in politics have done enough to say this is not Islamic, this is unacceptable to our faith?

Omar Ghobash:

You've picked up on my sense of the subject. I've actually expressed my own irritation over the last few years in public whenever there's a terrible terrorist incident and somebody goes on TV and then says, listen, we can settle this matter now. This has nothing to do with Islam, Islam is a religion of peace. I've said this before, after September 11th, it was a kind of a reasonable emotional reaction to the situation. But I think actually what we're beginning to realise now is that we have allowed ... If we're to take responsibility for the world around us, and we have allowed a certain narrative to spread. I personally think that much more can be done. I do think that there needs to be much



more theological debate, public, open theological debate where questions are posed not just between theologians and clerics and scholars but also normal members of society, civil society, students, doctors, historians, not theologians, they've done so much already. So just to have a much broader debate about really what are the parameters of our religion and what are the core values.

There are some people, I know that there's a text online that is either 800 or 1,500 pages on the philosophy of Jihad. One of the questions I've asked is where is the equivalent text on generosity or love or compassion? I think that we've allowed certain kinds of socio-economic factors within the Middle East as poverty, with material poverty and intellectual poverty to now be exported through certain systems. I think we can do much more. In putting forward my book, it was a small attempt to try to do that.

I think one of the things we have kind of missed in the last few years especially amongst very passionate young Muslims is that we've forgotten the connection between our documented religion and our basic humanity as human beings. In my book, I try to reconnect those two. The funny thing is, occasionally, somebody will say, no, no you can't say that, that's absolutely wrong which just shows me actually that we need to push even harder to remember that we're human beings and then we have religion.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Thank you very much.

Omar Ghobash: Pleasure.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Prince Turki, Yemen if I may for a moment. How do we end the war there? Would a greater intervention by western governments or armed forces help or would it only inflame things?

Turki Al Faisal: There is a formula for the ending of the war in Yemen which is United Nations Security Council Resolution 2216. It's very clear and it's stipulated that basically, after the military takeover of Yemen by the Houthis and the supporters of the ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh, that the situation has to go to the previous state to that military takeover. When the Houthis and Ali Abdullah Saleh basically invaded Yemen and stole the armouries of the Yemen Armed Forces and subjugated to the Yemeni people to their view of what should be the case in Yemen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its coalition allies came to the call of the legitimate president and government to help them repel this military takeover. That call has been supported by that United Nation Security Council Resolution.

So, the world community if you like, within the representation of the security council would like to go back to the status quo anti- the military occupation of Sana'a and the other towns in Northern Yemen by the Houthis and Ali Abdullah Saleh. There is a mediation effort undertaken by the United Nations



which is being supported by all the coalition members in Yemen and also by the Yemeni government.

Unfortunately, the Houthis and the supporters of the ex-President still want to impose themselves on that Resolution 2216 by acquiring a special status in any political settlement. They want to implement in Yemen the example of what is happening in Lebanon today which is a militia Hezbollah being outside the realm of a legitimate government and yet being part of that government. In Lebanon, when the prime minister or the president or the representatives in parliament want to take action, they are sometimes vetoed by one of the political parties which is Hezbollah because Hezbollah has the weapons and the military means to enforce itself. We saw in 2008 if you remember, when Hezbollah deployed its forces to besiege the elected prime minister of Lebanon in Beirut. We saw the activities of Hezbollah in capturing Israeli soldiers and taking them back into Lebanon, initiating military conflict with Israel. They did this on their own. They didn't ask the president, they didn't ask the prime minister. This is the kind of formula that the Houthis in Yemen want to impose on Yemen which is unacceptable.

The Houthis have publicly declared for example their enmity to Saudi Arabia. They have publicly declared that they want to liberate the holy places in Saudi Arabia from Saudi rule. For us to accept them as a viable entity in Yemen is not going to happen. If Resolution 2216 can be implemented, the Houthis can have a role to play within the political structure of Yemen as they did before. They were part and parcel of the national dialogue preceding their military takeover which was accepted by all Yemeni parties as making the future of Yemen to be peaceful and prosperous. Unfortunately, they prefer to go the military route.

One thing I would like to comment on Ambassador Ghobash's previous statement and your question about can Muslim leaders do more. Today, who of you has heard about for example Saudi Arabia's Council of Ministers statements on a weekly basis that come out in condemnation of terrorism, of Jihadi terrorists, of what is happening in Syria, what is happening in Iraq, et cetera and Yemen and so on? I'll bet none of you have nor have you probably heard of the commensurate Mufti of the UAE when he came out with statements denouncing Fahish and other terrorist groups and so on. Same in Egyptian head of Al Azhar or whatever leaders throughout the Muslim world from Morocco all the way to Indonesia. None of you hear about that because your media doesn't mention it.

When the terrorist attacks occurred in London and in Manchester, not only Saudi but all Muslim leaders condemned them and came out in support of the British people. The only thing you heard on the BBC or ITV or Sky News or whatever was perhaps a condemnation that came from the Pope or perhaps from Mr. Netanyahu or perhaps from President Xi of China but no mention was made of our contribution to that condemnation. That's why I go back to my point about the media. The media plays an important role in conveying



these issues to people everywhere. When it comes to the Muslim world, there seems to be a wall between what comes out to us against the terrorists and in condemnation and in what we do and what we say and so on and conveying that to western societies through their media outlets.

So please take the message to the media here. I know the Daily Telegraph is represented here. The Daily Telegraph has probably an important role to play in this. When Saudi Arabia produces a statement about terrorism and so on, just give it a two line mention. Not in page 20 in a corner somewhere on your newspaper but put it where you put the Pope's declaration for example or where the Prime Minister of France's declaration is, et cetera, et cetera. Give us equal time and equal space.

Joe Lieberman: I have a suggestion, Prince Turki, you have to convince President Trump to tweet this. That's the way to get it out.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Since President Trump chose to visit the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on his first ever visit abroad, I think you're extremely well placed to get the message across.

Turki Al Faisal: Well indeed.

Sir Peter Westmacott: We're out of time everybody. We could have carried on this conversation for quite a while but I'd like to thank His Royal Highness Prince Turki, Ambassador Ghobash, Senator Lieberman, very warmly for the openness, for the honesty with which you dealt with the questions and for the tone of encouragement in all of your remarks that actually none of this stuff is impossible if the political will, the imagination and the tolerant attitudes were there. I just wish there were more words beyond just this platform. Thank you the three of you.

Joe Lieberman: Here, here.

Sir Peter Westmacott: Thank you well done. It was great. I hope it was good.