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**“REVISITING ARAB-U.S. STRATEGIC RELATIONS:
GEO-POLITICAL, ENERGY, DEFENSE COOPERATION,
AND DEVELOPMENTAL DYNAMICS”**

9:20-10:30: “GEO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS (I): LEBANON AND SYRIA”

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JOHN DUKE ANTHONY: Could we have Michael Hudson and the Lebanon-Syria panel please?

(Pause.)

I'd like to introduce the chair for this panel session, Dr. Michael C. Hudson. He's also a household name amongst Arabists and specialists not just nationwide and in the nation's capital but worldwide. He has been the longest serving director of the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at the Foreign Service School of Georgetown University, and this is a center unlike any other in North America or western side of the Atlantic and arguably in Europe and elsewhere as well. So this is a major builder and a visionary and a strategist who has been intimately and extensively involved in training America's emerging leaders of tomorrow.

If you look in the program booklet, which we will have shortly, there you will see that his publications reflect a wide range of research and writing interests that really cover pretty comprehensively most of the issues that won't go away in terms of his books on political legitimacy and credibility, efforts at democratization in the Arab world, the United States playing the role of the hegemon, his works on the United States in the Middle East in the Oxford publication of international relations, and focusing on issue of institutionalization of political dynamics and stability, and America's relationship with this region for well on now approaching 40 years.

Dr. Michael C. Hudson.

MICHAEL HUDSON: John, thank you very much. It's really very nice to be here and to be in this very distinguished audience with these distinguished panelists. And if you see me taking notes in a few minutes, it's because I will be listening carefully to our speakers who will be dealing with the subject of the graduate seminar that I plan to give at Georgetown next semester on politics in Lebanon and Syria.

John Duke Anthony is no stranger to Georgetown, and he currently has been giving a very successful course at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies on politics and development in the Gulf. And I appreciate the introduction and the acknowledgement that we are in fact educating a very impressive group of future academics, leaders, and business people with a strong knowledge of the Arab world and the larger Middle East, and the Islamic World.

Just two days ago, we inaugurated the Clovis and Hala Salaam Maksoud Chair – the unendowed chair in Arab Studies devoted to the field of development, and that's a very big step forward for us as we try to expand our already quite comprehensive program.

I've been asked to chair this panel on this rather complicated subject. By way of introduction, one of the many interesting comments that General Clark made struck me particularly as I've just come back from a visit to the West Bank and Jordan, and that is that the

view of people in the region about the nature of things and what ought to be done is indeed very, very much at variance with the prevailing view of this administration here in Washington, and that is something that I think it is important to continue to focus on.

Without further ado, and I won't take further time to introduce the distinguished panelists, I would like in order to ask Dr. Daoud Khairallah to begin and he's going to be talking, I understand, particularly about the Lebanese perspectives on the immediate situation and the larger strategic picture. And then, His Excellency, Dr. Imad Moustapha, representative of one of the states that apparently is on the list for regime change. Well, before that happens he will – (laughter) – give us perhaps a Syrian perspective. So without further ado, let me ask Dr. Khairallah to speak.

DAOUD KHAIRALLAH: Thank you, Professor Hudson. I would like to talk about the U.S. and the ongoing Lebanese political crisis. Civil wars and political crises characterize the modern history of Lebanon. The origins of such crises and wars are both internal and external. The root cause of internal fragmentation and the primary facilitator of foreign intervention is the sectarian culture generated by the Lebanese political system. This dysfunctional sectarian system, which is a primary impediment to social cohesion, has made Lebanon particularly vulnerable to foreign interference and to destabilization.

Geographic location has proved to be another source of instability. Lebanon has a neighbor state to the south whose rulers believe that its establishment and survivability require driving a large portion of indigenous Palestinians into neighboring countries. Lebanon is the recipient of a large number of those Palestinians. For the last 60 years this has been a source of serious turmoil for Lebanon and of a dilemma.

The elements of the dilemma are threefold. Palestinian refugees who insist on exercising a U.N.-recognized right of return to their land and adamant refusal by Israel to accommodate the Palestinian claims, and a very delicate sectarian balance among Lebanese communities which triggers unsettling sensitivity any time the issue of a permanent settlement of the Palestinian in Lebanon is raised. If one considers the military activities of the PLO on Lebanese territory and the role it played at the outbreak of the civil war on the one hand, and the so-called retaliatory bombing, destruction, and occupation by Israel on the other, one would acquire a convincing proof of the role of geography plays in the difficulty Lebanon has been facing.

A third cause of instability is the absence of a national military power that can effectively maintain law and order inside the country and be a credible deterrence against foreign aggression. Such a military power could have prevented outbreak of the civil war. It would have prevented the formation or operation of paramilitary organizations with transnational objectives and affiliations such as the PLO and later Fatah al-Islam. Such a national military power would also have been the primary vehicle for the defense of the country and its people. In the case of foreign military occupation, any need for the formation of groups who carry out guerilla activities or asymmetrical warfare operations would have been met under its auspices and involved the participation of all social groups within the nation.

These three elements of instability – a dysfunctional sectarian system, geography, and an ineffective national military – played and continue to play a major role in Lebanon's political unrest in recent history all through the ongoing crisis. For about a year now the deepening divide between pro- and anti-government forces has generated strikes and clashes with sectarian overtone and a series of assassinations and car bombs that have brought the nation close to a total breakdown. State institutions are virtually paralyzed and the government barely governs.

Internal unity has always been a precious commodity in Lebanese politics. At this time, the Lebanese need it more than any time before lest their country face a total breakdown with unpredictable political and security consequences for Lebanon and other countries in the region. Now, let us look at the U.S. role. The U.S. has always had an influential role in the degree of stability or instability Lebanon has experienced in recent history. If one thinks of U.S. interests in economic, political, and military terms, then Lebanon presents no significant strategic interest. At best, Lebanon will serve as a listening post where ideas, aspirations, and frustrations expressed by major groups in the Arab world are echoed. It is also a place where the reasons for anger, frustration, and mistrust of the U.S. policy in the Middle East are articulated.

This does not explain, however, the high degree of interest U.S. officials have expressed, and actions they have taken as regards internal Lebanese political developments, especially by the current Bush administration. The dominant belief in Lebanon is that motivation for the U.S. involvement and the stand it has taken from respective parties and issues reflect more an Israeli interest than either an American or Lebanese interest. The Lebanese society remains, statistically at least, the least hostile to the U.S. and its policy in the Arab world. But any existing good will seems to be rapidly eroding. Because of time constraint, I will limit myself to a few recent examples that explain this accelerating erosion of goodwill and trust.

During the last civil war, '75 to 1990, and Israeli occupation that lasted until the year 2000, the U.S. was perceived as taking the side of Israel even when the numerous Israeli attacks and invasions were condemned by the international community. The U.S. exercised its veto power at the U.N. Security Council numerous times to shield Israel from complying with the will of the international community, and the Security Council resolution 425 of 1978. The resolution ordered Israel to cease-fire and to promptly withdraw from Lebanese territories. The Israeli occupation lasted 22 years.

Many Lebanese consider the U.S. responsible for the Syrian military intervention in Lebanon that lasted 15 years. Those who complain to Syrian officials about the prolonged Syrian hegemony at the time still recall those officials' response that the Syrians are elements of stability in Lebanon. Last summer, during the Israeli war on Lebanon, the Lebanese, along with the rest of the world, watched the U.S., practically alone among all members of the U.N. Security Council, block a council decision to promptly stop the death and destruction Lebanon endured over 33 days. Such stands remain in the collective memory of people and cannot but deepen the sense of alienation between the U.S. and Lebanon and also other parts of the Arab world.

In the present ongoing crisis, the U.S. is perceived as intervening in Lebanon's internal affairs and taking sides among the conflicting parties in a manner that widens the divide within

the nation and prolongs the life of the crisis. Instead of acting to unite a divided society, the U.S. is perceived as encouraging a rift among its members

Disarming Hezbollah and putting an end to it as a resistance movement is, beyond doubt, the main objective of all U.S. efforts in Lebanon. To bring legitimacy to this endeavor, the U.S. declared Hezbollah a terrorist organization and acted as the main generator of U.N. Security Council resolutions purporting to achieve that objective. The declared concern by the U.S. official about Lebanon's freedoms and democracy don't sound convincing.

Most Lebanese consider Hezbollah a resistance movement and credit it with liberating their country from Israeli occupation. At the same time, the majority of the Lebanese, even those who credit Hezbollah with the liberation of Lebanon concede that in a nation-state, the monopoly of the use of force and the holding of weapons is the exclusive right of the state institutions responsible for the internal security and for defending the nation and its people. This is the aspiration of practically all Lebanese citizens.

Many of them, however, realize that the exclusive right of the state to hold on and to resort to the use of force is based on the assumption that the state and those manning its institutions are willing and able to defend the country and its people. The main weakness of the present Lebanese government is that it is perceived as not meeting either condition. The experience of the Lebanese, especially the inhabitants of the south, long before the outbreak of the civil war and the 22 years of death, destruction, and occupation, has made them very conscious of their vulnerability to Israeli attack.

Neither their government nor the international community provided them protection or justice. Liberation of the remaining Lebanese territory and detainees in the Israeli prisons, and providing Lebanese – especially those living in the south – with effective protection from Israeli incursions and attacks would go a long way in settling the weapons Hezbollah issue. Regardless of how urgent or desirable it is to see Hezbollah disarm, this is an objective that is more likely achieved by effort of internal parties perceived as trusted friends and respected nationalists than by politically discredit adversaries.

I believe that national leaders with credible commitment to sovereign states and effective national security institutions like General Michel Suleiman are infinitely more effective in obtaining serious concessions from the Hezbollah leadership than any other parties, internal or external. The U.S. can play a very important role in bringing Lebanese together and putting an end to the ongoing crisis. A government of national unity in Lebanon cannot be against the U.S. strategic interests in the area.

U.S. officials, prevailing on their Lebanese friends who have become frequent visitors to Washington for guidance and supports, to agree on electing a president in conformity with the constitutional requirement, and uninterrupted precedence, a president who has the trust of all major Lebanese communities, would not weaken the U.S. stand in Lebanon or the rest of the Arab world. The official pronouncements of passive neutrality are neither convincing nor helpful. An active role on the part of the U.S. officials visibly supportive of national unity in

Lebanon and an end to the ongoing crisis would serve both Lebanese and U.S. interests. Thank you.

(Applause.)

DR. HUDSON: Mr. Ambassador – (off mike).

AMBASSADOR H.E. DR. IMAD MOUSTAPHA: Well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. As you have seen, Dr. Daoud Khairallah has presented the Syrian-Lebanese dimension. I think that this does not leave a lot for me to talk, but let me tell you a few things and probably we'll have a Q&A session afterwards. Yeah? Yeah, we will try.

Let me start by telling you this story. A couple of years ago, I was invited by The Washington Post editorial board for an ambassadorial lunch with a number of – a dozen ambassadors. And I remember very well that one of those attending was the Ambassador of Mexico who made a short presentation telling his hosts, believe me it's not easy for any country in the world to be a neighbor to the United States of America. He had his certain list of troubles, of course. And I reflected on this.

Today, we in Syria, unfortunately, are neighbors of the United States of America. You have come to our region uninvited, but now it's a matter of you are in Iraq; you are also predominantly in Lebanon. Today the United States has an unprecedented influence on the governing party in Lebanon and they interfere on daily basis with everything that goes on in Lebanon. Add to this – (inaudible) – that because of the United States policy in our region, a part of Syria is occupied today, the Golan, and it's this incredible, flagrant, blind support that the United States offers Israel so that Israel can continue its policies of occupying the Golan. Also, we are affected by the United States towards our southern borders and here we are caught between the hammer and the hard place.

The region is a very difficult region. I don't want to go back to the days of when Mr. Sykes and Monsieur. Picot of France and England decided that they wanted to divide the historical region known as either the Levant or Greater Syria into two smaller entities [the Sykes-Picot Agreement 1916, establishing presumed spheres of influence for France and Britain, as well as Russia, in West Asia following the break-up of the Ottoman Empire] and then after a while Lord Balfour decided that he wants to offer as a present a land that he does not own to people who were persecuted by fellow Europeans [the Balfour Declaration 1917, issued by the British government supporting Zionist plans for a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine without prejudicing the rights of existing communities there.] We are still paying the prices for such decisions made thousands of miles from our region, either in London or in Washington, D.C.

However, we are realists and as Ms. Kessler has said, we recognize the realities and the limitations faced – that are facing us - and the challenges around us and it is very clear that Syria

has a very clear policy today about almost everything. Let me start with Israel briefly, but then I will move to Lebanon because I think this is the issue that I was invited to discuss.

Syria has time and again invited Israel to reengage in a peace process that will eventually lead to us regaining our occupied territory and Israelis – of course, having sorted their other sets of occupations, of the Lebanese territories, of the Palestinian territories – will be able to have normalized relations with all Arab countries based on the pan-Arab initiative that was time and again offered to Israel and repeatedly rejected by Israel. This initiative was embraced by all Arab countries, not a single exception, including my own Syria. [EDITOR: Most recently the League of Arab States has adopted the so-called “Riyadh Declaration” (March 29, 2007) under the terms of which the twenty-two member states agree to recognize Israel and guarantee its security in exchange for Israel’s withdrawal to its pre-1967 borders, the creation of a Palestinian state, and a “just solution” for Palestinians displaced in 1948.]

Of course, you are thinking now of the peace conference or the so-called peace conference [the proposed Annapolis Conference] that will take place in the United States very soon. Let me be honest with you. We almost know nothing about this peace conference. We have not heard anything about it; we only read about it in the Israeli media. I think this is also the position of all Arab politicians and leaders across the region. It’s something that is being discussed right now between Israel and the United States and when they will agree on what they want to do [in Annapolis], I think they will decide who are the good Arabs that might attend and who are the baddies who will not be invited.

This morning, I heard a statement by Secretary Rice saying the true reason for this peace conference is to further separate the good Arabs from the bad Arabs. She did not use the word good and bad; she said – she used the word of moderates and extremists. Now, guess my country belongs to which category.

Okay, so that’s really the true purpose of the forthcoming peace conference: creating yet another wedge among the Arabs. Actually, this should not be a surprise to you. This is actually what is happening right now today in Lebanon. Today there is a national debate in Lebanon verging on the national crisis about, as you all know, the forthcoming Lebanese presidential elections. As you all know, Syria is totally and absolutely outside of Lebanon today. It’s not participating even in discussions about this. Thus, we are watching what is happening in Lebanon. But let me be honest with you and tell you where our interest lies as regarding the forthcoming presidential elections.

While Syria has made a strategic decision not to interfere whatsoever, not even to discuss, not even to consult with the Lebanese on what will take place in Lebanon very soon, it is very clear that it serves our national interest if the Lebanese would agree among each other and elect a president that all Lebanese parties and factions, regardless of their positions, whether they were our erstwhile allies who became suddenly our enemies or our friends today in Lebanon would approve of. And this president will have good relations with all parties and factions in Lebanon, with all the neighboring countries of Lebanon, particularly Syria that totally and completely surrounds Lebanon.

And, of course, if he wants to have excellent relations with United States of America or the rest of the world, good for him. We in Syria would like to have good relations with United States of America and the rest of the world as well, so we have no problem with this. This is the Syrian position. As long as a Lebanese president will be agreed upon among the Lebanese and will have as his vision and his strategy a political forum that he will have and maintain good relations with everybody, including Syria, of course, because we don't want Lebanon to be used as a spearhead against Syria by the United States or Israel or any other country in the world, then that's good for us. This is exactly what we want.

What are we doing about this? We're not doing anything for a simple reason. We are time and again accused by the world's unique superpower that we are interfering in Lebanon. We are not even discussing this with the Lebanese and we are accused of this. So imagine if we engaged them proactively and politically within the ongoing discussions that are taking place today in Lebanon. Imagine what will happen and what sort of accusations will take place.

While we are doing this, we are fully supporting the European initiatives and the pan-Arab initiatives, trying to convince the Lebanese that the only word – the only path forward for Lebanon and for the Lebanese is a solution based on national consensus and on agreeing upon a president and on all parties in Lebanon believing that they have not emerged victorious or defeated by this forthcoming important political process that will take place very soon in Lebanon. [EDITOR: Lebanon's president is chosen indirectly by vote of the Lebanese parliament. The election of a new president scheduled for Fall 2007 has been repeatedly postponed in October and November 2007.]

We have said time and again that we fully support the European efforts trying to reconcile all the Lebanese and all the Arab efforts trying to reconcile all the Lebanese including that led by the Arab League and its secretary general, Amr Moussa. On the other hand, the United States of America has taken a very unique position. Go and verify this. It is the only country in the world that is not supporting a national consensus among the Lebanese and actually it is instigating one part of the Lebanese against another part and one part of the Lebanese against its sisterly neighbor, Syria.

In recent visits by top Lebanese politicians who have allied themselves with the United States, it was very clear what sort of a message they got. They were told by top U.S. officials that, go ahead, elect the president you want, don't listen to the other side of the Lebanese, and we will fully support you, we will support you by all means possible. The United States' administration doesn't give a damn about what might happen in Lebanon if this happens. Every other country in the world – all the Europeans, all the Arabs, the Syrians, everybody understands that this will lead to further turmoil and conflict in Lebanon, more and more destabilization of Lebanon.

But the United States doesn't care. Probably it serves their interests, ulterior motives; probably they really want to see Lebanese factions once again fighting against each other. Probably they would – they are dreaming of pulling Hezbollah into another civilian – civil war in Lebanon, I mean, and probably that would be the dream scenario of this administration. Having said this, it is contrary to the national interests of Syria that further destabilization be introduced

into Lebanon. We are already living in a troubled region thanks mainly to the U.S. policies in our region.

On the issue of refugees. Let me just remind you of this one aspect of the multifaceted crisis that we are living today in the Middle East. Today in Syria we have 1.6 million Iraqi refugees, an incredible, incredible burden on our infrastructure, our schools, our medical services, our economy. We also have half a million Palestinian refugees. We also have a quarter of a million Syrian refugees who dream of going back to their villages, towns and houses in occupied Golan. Add to this, thanks to the U.S. policies in the Middle East, last summer, the one before it, when Israel was destroying Lebanon, we ended up with 625,000 Lebanese refugees who influxed Syria within a very short period of time while the United States was on one hand expressing its support for the forces of democracy in Lebanon, on the other hand it actually precipitated the dispatch of intelligent bombs ["smart bombs"] to Israel so that Israel can further destroy and kill in Lebanon.

After the war was over between – after the war – the Israeli war on Lebanon was over [the "July War" or the "Second Lebanon War", July-August 2006], the United States decided that it needs to provide Israel with what it calls bunker busters so that when next time Israel will launch its next tour in Lebanon, they can go deep, deep into the Lebanese shelters and fortified havens.

I'm not here today to say, look, we are the good ones and the United States is the bad one. I'm here today to say the following: It is in our own national interest in Syria, pure national interest, first to help stabilize the situation in Lebanon, second to help the Lebanese find a national consensus so that they will elect, without any interference from any country in the world, a president they approve of. As far as we are concerned, the only thing we want from this president is to believe in the importance of good relations between Lebanon and Syria, in particular, and Lebanon and the rest of the world in general.

I will stop here. I know this was even shorter than you wanted from me, but I hope we can have more questions. Thank you. (Applause.)

DR. HUDSON: Thank you very much, Ambassador, and thanks to both speakers for their excellent presentations. On instructions from our – (inaudible) – we are allowed about 15 minutes for your questions and comments. And the system requires you to write your question down on a little piece of paper that should be at your seat. It will somehow be transported up here; I will read it to the appropriate person and hopefully we can have some exchange of views. So the floor is open.

Okay. Here's a question for Ambassador Moustapha. Is there a pan-Arab alternative to U.S. occupation of Iraq? And would Syria participate?

AMB. MOUSTAPHA: This is a theoretical question. Right now, I don't think the United States would allow any alternative, whether it's pan-Arab or United Nations-based or collective international effort to take place. In our meeting with the Iraqi president I think three

weeks ago, he was very clear in saying that right now in Iraq there is no political process. He actually said that the political process in Iraq today is even worse than it used to be a year ago.

Right now, the United States is still obsessed with its military solution in Iraq. They still believe that eventually they will prevail. You might be amazed about this, but this is the reality. They have isolated themselves in a bubble and they still believe, they still believe that eventually they will prevail in Iraq and after that their dreamed-of enterprise or project in Iraq will kick start.

So of course if there would be any other charter, whether it's pan-Arab, international, on any level, Syria will support because it's also in our national interest. Actually, it's a paramount interest for Syria to preserve the territorial integrity of Iraq and to stop this ongoing factional and ethnic strife in Iraq and, most importantly, to end the American occupation of Iraq.

DR. HUDSON: Thank you. Here's a question: To what extent is the Alalwite Shi'a leadership of Damascus a factor in the sectarian struggles of the region? That is, although the majority of the population in Syria is Sunni, where does the Syrian man on the street stand on Iraqi sectarian issues: Sunni or Shi'a? That's one question and there's another question that comes after that, but I'll try to work on this one first.

AMB. MOUSTAPHA: May I? This is a flabbergasting question. It's really a purely American question. You insist here on regarding our problems based on a sectarian and ethnic paradigm. Now, let me say this and I will as succinct as possible. I can talk about the Syrian people because I belong to Syria, but I assure you that this would be also across the Arab region. We don't regard the conflicts and the crisis in our region on sectarian basis. We don't believe that it is an Islamic-Jewish conflict in the Palestinian territories. Do remember that many Palestinians are also Christian.

And when we look at Iraq or at Lebanon, for God's sake, what sort of an approach is this? What sort of an approach is this? We support the Lebanese resistance. The Lebanese resistance against the Israeli occupation is, of course, multifaceted, but it's mainly – I hate to use this word, this is a purely American context – but it's mainly a Shi'ite resistance against the United States-backed Israeli occupation.

We look at Iraq and we also believe that the resistance in Iraq and the insurgency is multifaceted. I'm not talking about terrorists in Iraq; I'm talking about legitimate resistance or insurgency. And they're also – they don't happen to be in what might be described as someone in the Shi'ite triangle; they are mostly Sunnis in Iraq. I also hate to use this word, but I am trying to address the American perspective of how they like to divide us into Kurds, Arabs, Sunnis, Shi'ites, Alawites – (inaudible) – all those groups.

My challenge to this gentleman or lady who has posed this question is the following. Islam has been in Iraq for the past 1,450 years, throughout the history of Iraq. There has never ever been a single civil war between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Isn't that extraordinary? Stop reading the editorials in your newspapers about those peoples cannot live with each other; 1,450 years and not a single civil war between Sunnis and Shi'ites in Iraq and today the United States

introduces democracy and prosperity in Iraq and look at the situation in Iraq. Thank you. (Applause.)

DR. HUDSON: Okay, thank you. Here is a question for Dr. Khairallah, and possibly also for Ambassador Moustapha. And the question is this: Why is the Shebaa Farms issue not resolved? [Shebaa Farms is a contested piece of territory where the borders of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel meet. Its nationality has been repeatedly open to dispute, and the issue has become an emotionally sensitive symbol of the on-going conflict between Israel, Lebanon, and the Hezbollah movement.] Would resolving it allow Hezbollah to disarm and become a normal political party?

DR. KHAIRALLAH: The Shebaa issue, and the detainees in Israeli jails are components of an overall problem. The real problem is self-defense. There is a history for the people of south Lebanon. Over the past 50 years, they have lived fear of constant incursions and attacks, and they have suffered from these attacks. Neither their government nor the international community was helpful.

So self-defense is called a natural right not because – only because it's reasonable, because it accompanied man and the state of nature before there was a state and its laws. A man has the right to defend himself, and it will be infinitely more realistic to have an institution, local, national institution that would assume the responsibility of defending the country and involving every community, not necessarily one community, for this defense. And it will be important for all of the issues, national issues, the liberation of the Shebaa Farms, liberation of those who are detained in the Israeli jails. This would definitely contribute to solving the Hezbollah weapons issue because this is basically what I believe is at the center of the concern of the U.S., the Israelis, and by attachment, the rest of the world.

But we have to focus on what is behind this weapon. We know that there is support from neighboring countries, but basically there was a need before there was – before the Israeli occupation, there was nothing called Hezbollah. Hezbollah came into existence as a name in '85. The Israeli invasion was in '82. So we have to go to the root cause of the problems and try to deal with them, and this would help us solve the problem for Lebanon and for the rest of the world.

DR. HUDSON: Let me move onto another question, if I may. This is for Ambassador Moustapha. Considering the role Syria is believed to have played in the assassination of Mr. Hariri, why should we in this forum believe that Syria will not interfere in the Lebanese political process for its own gain in the upcoming election? [EDITOR: Former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Bahaeddin Al-Hariri was assassinated in a bomb attack on his motorcade in February 2005. Outrage over this attack and alleged Syrian complicity in it led to Lebanon's "Cedar Revolution" and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Subsequently the United Nations Security Council agreed the creation of UNIIC – the United Nations International Independent Investigative Commission – charged with investigating the circumstances the Hariri's death and other bombing incidents in Lebanon.]

AMB. MOUSTAPHA: Well, first I suggest that we leave the answer about who committed the horrible assassination, the horrible crime to the investigation that is taking place actually right now by a huge investigative team headed by Serge Brammertz. And I advise those who are not privy to the details of this investigation, at least from the outside, to go and read the latest three reports submitted by Serge Brammertz to the United Nations Security Council. They are available online; just go and Google them in his latest three reports. He actually praises the Syrian cooperation with his team, investigating the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. [EDITOR: Former Belgian prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, currently heads the UNIIC and its investigations into the Hariri assassination. On May 30, 2007 the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1757, which creates a United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon, a mixed tribunal that will include Lebanese, and international judges, to hear the evidence developed the UNIIC during its extensive investigations. The special tribunal will meet in the Netherlands beginning sometime in 2008.]

While this is happening, of course many political circles here in the United States, particularly among the hardliners and the neoconservatives, are happy to insist – despite the reports on behalf of the investigative team, that they know exactly who killed Rafik al Hariri, I suggest that they provide whatever intelligence and information they have to this investigation team.

Now, back to the question. You have to understand, look – even if you think that Syria is your enemy, which is untrue; Syria is not an enemy to the United States; it's our strategic objective to improve relations with the United States, you need sometimes empathize with the enemy. What would we win – what would Syria win and what would Syria lose if, God forbids, Lebanon is further destabilized and another civil war would erupt in Lebanon? Let me be honest with you; we look at Hezbollah and we consider it, regardless of whether you like Hezbollah or not, as a national resistance movement that has successfully fought against the Israelis, and we look at them as a deterrent force that will make Israel think twice before embarking on yet a third or a fourth invasion into Lebanon.

If Hezbollah is dragged into a civil war in Lebanon, we would consider this a detriment to our own strategic interests. This is why we need a stable political system in Lebanon so that Hezbollah will be protected by the Lebanese political system and by national consensus so that Hezbollah will not be diverted from its main objective.

On the other hand, think of the other camp, the camp that does not like Syria. I'm not going to hint at that camp. Imagine the scenario in which Lebanon, God forbids, erupts into civil war and Hezbollah is dragged into the quagmire of a civil war fighting against other Lebanese, the United States and Israel happily providing the other sides with more arms and resources, and it's yet another diabolic vicious circle in which Lebanon is destroyed for the third time in its contemporary history.

I think you exactly can understand what would Syria gain from this and what would those who doesn't like Syria would gain from this. And I would say any thoughtful person would understand that it would be the interest of Israel and its allies and supporters that Lebanon erupts into yet another civil war so that Hezbollah will be dragged into a quagmire, and will not be a

force that Israel will have to confront in any other major clan or any other conflict in the future in the Middle East.

DR. HUDSON: Thank you. The clock is ticking. I think I can squeeze in one more question and then we will have to adjourn for the next activities. But this is also for Ambassador Imad Moustapha. Can you comment on the recent Israeli attack on Syria? How do you account for such a muted international response? [EDITOR: The Israeli Air Force carried out a strike deep inside Syrian territory on September 6, 2007 that destroyed what the Syrian government described as a site “related to the military” but “not used.” Intelligence analysts in Israel and the United States judged the facility to be a partially constructed nuclear reactor of a type similar to that used by North Korea to create weapons-grade nuclear fuel. The attack was confirmed only several weeks later and the precise nature of the facility hit remains in question.]

AMB. MOUSTAPHA: Well, look. Guys, get real. That was an air raid against a minor target of no considerable strategic interest, and you are surprised about the muted world response to it. Israel has committed massacres against Lebanon and against the Palestinians, and you ended up with even more muted international reactions. I’m talking about – (inaudible) – I’m talking about the bombardment of Lebanon a year ago. And now you are surprised because Israel has – Israeli jet fighters have penetrated the Syrian airspace and hit a target of minor importance there. I think probably you have to remember we do not live in a fair world. This is, from the moral viewpoint, from the actual viewpoint, there are facts that I need to list in front of you as briefly as possible because of the time constraints.

First, do remember that while this was an unprovoked attack on Syria, it’s not a major incident in the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It will be just another footnote to the series of wars, battles, and conflicts that have taken place in our Middle East. I’m not saying that – I’m not trivializing this incident. I believe that it will have its repercussions. Every action in the world creates a reaction, but let’s not serve the hardliners and the neoconservatives here who are trying to create out of this incident something that is totally, totally out of context.

I’m referring of course to the stories that are being fed to the American media in a very sinister way, in an extraordinarily amazing way about the so-called alleged Syrian-North Korean nuclear cooperation. Syria has not tried in the past to acquire nuclear technology. It is not trying to do this in the present day, and we have no plans to acquire nuclear technology in Syria in the foreseeable future, neither for military, nor for civilian application. So this is the policy of Syria, regardless of what, of what you read and here in the United States.

No, the extraordinary thing that I personally cannot believe is the following. I tell myself, is it possible that the New York Times, as an example, is being Judith Miller-ed for the second time in five-years? [EDITOR: Judith Miller was a New York Times reporter who retired from the paper in 2005 after spending 85 days in jail for her refusal to reveal confidential sources inside the U.S. government to federal prosecutors investigating the disclosure that Valerie Plame was an deep cover CIA-operative. Miller has been widely criticized for a series of stories reporting on Saddam Hussein’s alleged development of WMDs that helped generate public support for the decision to invade Iraq but were subsequently proven to be false. Upon investigation her primary sources proved to be inside the Iraqi exile community led by Ahmed

Chalabi or officials of the Bush administration.] Can the American public opinion be so gullible? Doesn't that ring a bell? Can't you remember, can't you see the resemblance with the sort of stories that the U.S. used to fabricate and circulate about the Iraqi WMDs and the connection between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda prior to the war on Iraq and during the run up for the war on Iraq?

I'm not claiming that now they are planning to attack Syria; I'm reminding you of facts. Most probably our explanation for these stories, extraordinarily amazing stories that we are absolutely sure that those who are actually publishing those stories don't believe them – and I can, if you want at a later stage further elaborate on this.

What we believe is the following: Once the United States has signed this agreement or reached this agreement with North Korea leading to the North Koreans decommissioning their nuclear program, angry voices here in the United States, particularly among neo-conservative circles went berserk. They went online. They appeared on TV programs. They wrote editorials saying that the United States has made the moral mistake; we should not have negotiated with North Korea. The United States of America does not negotiate with rogue states.

The implication is that they bombard rogue states, and they demanded that the U.S. administration revoke this agreement. In a way, they are trying to use this Israeli raid to say, look, the North Koreans are trafficking their nuclear technology to Syria so stop; kill this agreement immediately and let's go back to our policies of belligerent attitudes toward North Korea.

In a way, I believe those stories that are being fabricated here in the United States about the Syrian nuclear program have to do more with their attitudes towards North Korea than with what is actually happening in the ground in the Middle East.

Thank you. I'll stop here.

DR. HUDSON: Thank you. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

I would like to apologize to those of you that submitted questions that we did just not have time, but the clock must be observed. And I would also like to thank of course our distinguished panelists for their excellent presentations. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

DR. ANTHONY: We will break now till 11:15.

(End of session.)