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Special Thanks to: Martina Conte for making this event possible and to Amina Mohammad for her vision and hard work.

This transcript has been produced based on the Rome Dialogue X titled:

Let's Talk About Sects: The Emergence of Sectarianism in the Middle East and What it Means for Europe

held on 02 March 2017 in Helsinki, Finland.

The panel of this event consisted of:

- Alfadhel Khalifah
- Coughlin Con
- Falasca Piercamillo

The chair of the event was: Belfer Mitchell

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The Rome Dialogues

Let's Talk About Sects

The Emergence
of Sectarianism
in the Middle East
and What it Means
for Europe

The Publishing Hub
EGIC, 2017



Contents

7
Introduction to the Euro-Gulf Information Centre

12
Introduction to Rome Dialogue X

16
Part 1: The Dialogue

36
Part 2: Questions & Answers

60
Reflections



Introduction to the EGIC

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) is an initiative that aims to build social, political, strategic, cultural and economic bridges between the people of Europe and the Arabian Gulf.

While EGIC was only formed on 01 October 2015, as a legal association in Rome Italy, it draws on the expertise of a multitude of scholars, policy makers, economists and members of European and Gulf civil societies to enhance inter-regional relations.

The EGIC has tasked itself with five activities over the short, medium and long terms:

Publishing Hub—the first objective of the Centre is to act as a publishing hub on information related to the wider Arabian Gulf. This consists of an event and book series titled the Rome Dialogues, online commentaries, policy papers and newsletters. Literature is made available in several languages (Arabic, English, Italian, German, French and several of the Slavonic languages) and is done in both hard and soft copy formats. **Publications are OpenAccess.**

Seminars, Conferences and Roundtables— in order to continue to attract attention for the Centre, a series of seminars, conferences and roundtable discussions take place on a regular basis at the Centre's Rome HQ and around Europe.

Specialised Certificate, Internships and Scholarship Programmes—the EGIC has begun targeted certificate programmes for university-aged students, run as Spring Schools. Themes vary, but are all related to European-Arabian Gulf dynamics. These fall under the auspices of the **Euro-Gulf Youth Programme** (EGYP). Also, the EGIC offers three and six month internships based on the European ERASMUS Programme, the Torno Subito programme of Regione Lazio and individual University requests. This programme focuses on building the skill-set required of a socio-political organisation and includes: organisational, writing, presentation and innovative thinking skills. Also, since 2017, in partnership with Universities around Europe, the EGIC offers a specialised Master's Programme on Middle Eastern Studies. Finally, the EGIC offers monthly and annual scholarships for research on Arabian Gulf-related topics.

Cultural Events—the EGIC strives to offer a comprehensive cultural platform to expose the peoples of Europe and the Gulf to each other's cultural rites, rituals, festivals and writings. From book launches, poetry readings, talks, films and cookery, the EGIC sponsors and organises events to create cultural bridges and bring people together.

Outreach Activities—the EGIC puts a special effort in organising and coordinating a variety of outreach activities with the aim of building and sustaining people-to-people contacts and professional networks between Europe and the Arab Gulf. The EGIC runs annual Parliamentary Dialogues in both regions and facilitates strategic meetings in all phases and at all levels (business, politics, society) from which joint projects, coordination activities, partnership and cooperation are established. The EGIC offers ideas, support and its good offices to smooth dialogue and

collaboration.

The Rome Dialogues

Let's Talk About Sects

Introduction to Rome Dialogue X

Rome Dialogue X — held on 2 March 2017 — was the first EGIC event held outside Italy (in Helsinki, Finland). The event focused on the re-emergence of sectarianism in the wider Middle East region and its impacts on the Muslim communities of Europe. As our other Rome Dialogues, the event consisted in a dynamic conversation between international experts and scholars.

The panel consisted of:

Alfadhel Khalifa—*National Institution for Human Rights*, Bahrain,
Acting Secretary General

Coughlin Con—*The Daily Telegraph*, Defence Editor and Chief
Foreign Affairs Columnist

Falasca Piercamillo—*Strade Magazine*, Chief Editor

Overview

Con Coughlin commenced the event by exploring sectarianism as an instrument of foreign policy. Addressing Iran's regional politics, he provided an overview of how the Islamic Republic's regime had instrumentalised its Shia identity to build relations with non-state actors with the same sectarianian affiliation throughout the region. He addressed the various dossiers from the

conflict in Syria, Iraq and Yemen to the political balance of Lebanon.

Khalifa Alfadhel, our second speaker, presented the idea that a crippled, incomplete form of democracy imposed in the region is to be considered partly responsible for the reinforcement of power play drawn around sectarian groups. Reflecting on the concepts related to the right to democracy as a universal human right, he criticised the understanding of this in Western-crafted internal law whereby democracy is considered accomplished only when its procedural aspects (i.e. elections) are satisfied. In rejecting this approach, he argues for a more substantive idea of democracy built around the concrete needs of local civil society.

Finally, Piercamillo Falasca explored more in-depth this argument, presenting a comparison between a society built on civic identity and another built on sectarian belonging. He argued that religious affiliation is today instrumentalised for political gains and is employed as a substitute for other types of affiliations, such as national or political. By drawing extensively from the history of Europe's sectarian conflicts and terrorism, he talked about the role of bad governance and the inability of politics to provide convincing answers to major problems of social and economic inequality in pushing people towards radicalisation.

These presentation triggered a lively debate between panelists and with the public. Discussion shifted towards exploring the idea of strengthening national identities as a powerful means to bridge sectarian-based fault lines. It was also clear that globalisation has brought the Middle East and Europe even closer—in ways that directly embroil Europe in regional (Middle Eastern) events. Many questions remain open for future discussions and research on how to address one of the main socio-political challenges of our time, a key ideological threat to peace and stability: the re-emergence of sectarianism.



Part I

The Rome Dialogue

Mitchell Belfer—Ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to thank you very much for being here today. Before turning to the actual panel, I would like to explain a little bit of our background, as an organisation and our activities and goals. Today there isn't any speaker from Finland on our panel, as Finland is for us a new horizon, one that we plan on cultivating, already starting today by building stronger partnerships with Finnish individuals and organisations. It is a new horizon as the centre I founded, and of which I am President. The Euro-Gulf Information Centre, is based in Rome (Italy) and is also a relatively young institution. We were only established in 2015, so we are 18 months old, and in this time we have developed series of events and activities that essentially are trying to build synergy between the Arab Gulf countries and Europe.

Of course when we talk about the Arab Gulf is also important to think about this area as a kind of a sub-region in the wider Middle East. We try to convey the idea that it is a responsibility of people in Europe to recognise shared interests but also shared challenges with the countries of the Southern shores of the Mediterranean and the Arab world. We believe that if we try to approach and solve challenges on our own - i.e. as the European Union or as NATO - without engaging with our friends and colleagues in the Middle East and the Gulf, our chances of successfully confronting issues become quite slimmer. This is what we are trying to do as an organisation: to bring people together and create spaces of

synergy to tackle challenges together. During the first year of our activity, we focused particularly on events and projects in Rome and Italy. However, we are now increasingly trying to expand our focus in Europe, working with local communities get to know different perspectives beyond the specific cultural and historical heritage of Italy as a Mediterranean country.

The event we are about to kick-start will be structured according to our own model, that we have nicknamed the Rome Dialogue. The key idea is that the most meaningful way to address an issue is not through frontal presentations only but mostly through an open, dynamic and inclusive dialogue. That is why today the question and answer period is going to be as important as the presentations. The hope is that you will be inspired enough to ask questions, because it is the only way that we are going to get to the bottom of the major socio-religious and socio-political problem of sectarianism that I think we are facing in the Middle East and in Europe.

Indeed today's topic is about the spread of sectarianism in the wider Middle East and its reverberations on the Muslim communities in Europe. A very sensitive topic which concerns all of us. Thank you for your attention, I will now turn to my left to get the discussion rolling.

Con Coughlin—Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be here in Helsinki. My own background is that I have been writing about the Middle East for over 30 years: I worked in Lebanon during the civil war, I covered the Iraq-Iran War and I have covered many other major wars to the present day. In my time as a journalist for the London-based *Telegraph* I have seen the region transformed beyond the stability that it once enjoyed into a region that is now beset by sectarianism. My opinion on that is that, when you look at the root causes of sec-

tarianism, it is quite clear that, although not exclusively, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been a great agitator and driver of the divisions that now are so common. I think we can safely say that the Shia-Sunni divide has become the biggest challenge facing the Arab World today.

Iran, the Shia superpower, has unfortunately been much involved in encouraging and exacerbating hostilities within the Shia communities towards the Sunni segments and, in some cases, even other religious groups. How did we get here? For the benefit of this conversation I would like to put things in perspective. Sectarianism hasn't happened overnight. Looking back I think one needs to think about the start of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The form of Islamic government that was personally formulated by Ayatollah Khomeini where he forged the Constitution is very peculiar in the whole Islamic world. In particular for the fact that there is a Supreme Leader who is directly answerable to God. Of course this is why Iran is considered everywhere a very theocratic state. But surprisingly this is also why many would say it is not very Islamic. In fact many in the Shia world, particularly the Iraqi tribes in places like Najaf, always contested Khomeini's claim that one should have a political system that basically has God as its leader. Yet that is basically the model Khomeini created in Iran after the 1979 Revolution.

For the purposes of this conversation, one little known fact is that in Khomeini's Constitution, the one that was finally settled in 1980, one of the tenets was that the Islamic Revolution should be exported throughout not just the Arab world, but to the wider Muslim world. To that end, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard was established: while their initial purpose was to safeguard the Revolution in Iran, their second was to export that Revolution

abroad. I was in Beirut in the early 1980s, when Hezbollah first appeared. Initially Hezbollah appeared in Lebanon to defend the country's rather large Shiite population in the south from the Israelis, after the Israeli invasion in 1982. However, when you look at the transformation of Hezbollah from an Iranian sponsored guerrilla movement into a political party – one that now basically dominates the Lebanese political landscape — you see that this has a lot more to do with Iran extending its political footprint into the Middle East than about defending Lebanon. Iran has systematically worked to carve strongholds in Shia communities, with a view to take control of countries where the Shiite traditions have not been dominant, which was very much the case in Lebanon until the 1980s.

At the same time, Iran forged what was and remains probably its most important strategic relationship with the Syrians. Again a little known fact is about the roots of the sectarian connections between the two regimes. As, I think, most of you know the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad comes from the Alawite minority which, similarly to the Druze in the Chouf mountains. The reason the Alawite regime, despite its secular nature, was given legitimacy within Shia Islam is because an Iranian scholar named called Musa al-Sadr, who is a distant relative of Muqtada al-Sadr who led an insurgent militia in Iraq after the American invasion in 2003. Musa al-Sadr issued the equivalent of a fatwa saying that the Alawites were a legitimate Islamic sect. This statement was important because suddenly Iranians were able to deal with the Assad regime. Iranian religious scholarship has given them legitimacy and, even though the Alawites basically constitute about 10% of the Syrian population, Iran helped to establish their absolute rule. When you look at the modern day violence of the conflict in Syria, it is very much down to Shia Iran support of

the Alawite minority against the Sunni majority of Syrians. In order to really understand the Syrian conflict, and why is it going on for so long, we have to go back to these early roots of Iranian intervention. There was a stalemate in Iran's expansion through the Arab world because of the long war it had with Iraq in the late 1980s, which basically consumed all of its energy and resources. In the 1990s, when Iran was rebuilt and it started working on the nuclear program, destabilisation was confined to the Arab Gulf states.

The next significant moment was the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when the Iranians really tried to export their political model, and immediately after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Saddam of course was a Sunni, albeit not a very religious Sunni, he only started going to the Mosque towards the end of his dictatorship. When I met him in 1990 he had a big bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label on his desk, so he wasn't exactly the most observant of Muslims! I covered the first Gulf War and one of the reasons that the first Gulf War ended inclusively is because of American concerns — and concerns of other countries in the region — that if the Sunni dictatorship was removed from Baghdad, then the Shiites would move in. Looking at the history of Iraq from the British invasion in 1922, the main political aim in the Constitution of Iraq was to give the supremacy to the Sunnis at the expense of the Shiites. In fact when the Shiites caused trouble for Winston Churchill in 1922, he had all the leaders of the Shia community arrested and sent into exile in what is now Sri Lanka. Therefore it made historical sense that this community was eager to seize power and would do it at the first opportunity.

Looking at what happened in Iraq in 2003, therefore, once Saddam was gone we lost control over the country. I was in Baghdad at the time, and it was a terrible period. It was quite clear that the

Iranians had been waiting for this moment and the country, the whole of Iraq, was awash with Iranian-backed Shia militias, the most notable of these being those run by Muqtada al-Sadr, who himself has been trained in Iran and was taking orders directly from the Revolutionary Guard. Still today, if you look at what is going on in Iraq, it is evident that many are trying to re-draw the balance that was caused by the mismanagement of Saddam's overthrow, when Iran basically tried to take over the country.

In all fairness, it does look that the current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is less inclined to play Iran's games, but the former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was very much under the control of Tehran. So much, I would say, that the alienation of the already disenfranchised Sunni factions led them to turn to groups like the Islamic State and other Sunni Islamist groups in a desperate attempt to try to reclaim some of the influence they historically had in the country.

And then, beyond the critical case of Iraq, there is another issue which is very much alive today, which is Yemen. Yemen is a country that has been plagued by war since the end of the colonial period. With its geopolitical position, Yemen has for the last 50 years been regarded as a natural ally of Saudi Arabia. The rulers of Yemen always enjoyed a very close relationship with the Saudis and then, suddenly, there is a Houthi-backed rebellion against the Yemeni authorities and once again connections with the Iranian regime pop up.

Furthermore, despite the fact that Iran had a major role in provoking the conflict, it is the Saudis who are getting all the bad press for the way that they are conducting their military campaign. This week in London Amnesty International published a report I recommend you all to have a look at, even if you are not interested in the Yemen conflict. They have chapters on how the

Houthis have exploited child soldiers, using civilians as human shields. If this reading of mine sounds unbalanced, just remember that it is Iranian diplomats themselves that today boast to their Arab counterparts that they have captured four Arab capitals: Saana in Yemen, Baghdad in Iraq, Beirut in Lebanon and Damascus in Syria.

Furthermore their pledge is that they intend to capture many more Arab capitals — not least Riyadh in Saudi Arabia — an even more sinister statement if looked in the context of the missiles being fired from Yemen to places like Mecca. Indeed, the level of Iranian interference and its impacts of fuelling sectarian divides throughout the region is one of the biggest challenges we face today. I will just finish with a word on why this is important for us in Europe. You look at the map and you think Finland is a long way away from Mosul or Saana or any of the other places that are involved in these conflicts. Still the echoes of what is going on in the region will be heard loud and clear. Undeniably Iran had an easier way under the past American administration of Barack Obama: Obama's famous statement that he believed in leadership from behind created an enormous vacuum in the Arab world and the Iranians, despite all the divergent rhetoric, have taken advantage of this weakness to move into levels they haven't occupied before.

Now, no one can make any prediction about the policies of the administration of Donald Trump but I think that this administration is likely to present a push back. Particularly the people that have been appointed to key security posts, like Jim Mattis, who went eyeball to eyeball with the Revolutionary Guards in Iraq, or General McMaster, also somebody who knows very much this part of the world, will be standing up to any attempt by anyone

in Washington to carry on a full detente with the Iranians. If that happens, and Iran finds itself frustrated with its interests in the Arab world, the sectarian temperatures in the region might rise even further, and spread to the the Muslim communities that reside in Europe. This is a very underestimated threat and this is my overview on the situation.

Khalifa Alfadhel—First of all, I would like to express my gratitude: I am very happy to be here in Helsinki talking to such a distinguished audience. Con actually identified the problem well, I think, also putting it into its historical and geopolitical context. Given that I come from a human rights background, I might take the chance to talk about the broader perspective of the nature of politics in the region. So I will start talking about the Arab Spring and how the Arab Spring was indeed a failure in terms of democracy and promotion of human rights and liberal values in the region. It cannot be seen as a forth way of democratisation and the Arab people cannot celebrate the end of history in accordance to Fukuyama's analogy – as in his famous book, published in the 1990s, where he calls democracy the final step of political evolution.

According to international law there is such a thing as the right to democracy: democracy is vital to all individuals qualifying to be of a certain age to have the right to vote and the right to be elected. That was agreed on in the Declaration of Human Rights in the International Cabinet of Civil and Political Rights. However the right to democracy, as presented in international law, shows that it is based on a very narrow electoral model where democracy is only limited to free and fair elections. It is a procedural issue rather than a value that needs to be enforced by individuals

and society before government and international stakeholders. Perhaps this was the biggest problematic issue in the Arab world where democracy was used as a mean for intolerant actors to reach power in order to abolish the democratic system.

This is not unprecedented in the world: it happened before in Europe, and it is happening in the Arab world. The rise of intolerant Islamist actors was evident as a result of the Arab Spring. This is not limited to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as we have seen it in Bahrain too through the Al Wefaq society that was suspended by a judicial decision because of its intolerance and its abuse of democracy as a means to abolish the democratic system. The whole notion of a social contract as a basis for democratic legitimacy is a European concept where Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau forwarded a number of values based on an original position - the State of Nature and its theocratic foundations. The original position, or the state of society before answering the social contract and submission to democratic governance, is a state of religious dominance controlled and influenced by political intolerance.

That was indeed the situation that happened in Egypt and in Bahrain and it still is continuing in Libya, and elsewhere in the Arab world, as a result of the Arab Spring. As examples of intolerance here I would quote the Iraqi Al-Dawa party, which is based on the Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine. The Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine is a Shia doctrine where a political authority is given a mandate of a jurist. It is a theological approach that was actually created or revised in modern days by Khomeini, and perhaps it is the biggest legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini. I would like to quote Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was the theologian of the Al-Dawa party in Iraq whose ideas have been applied elsewhere in the Arab

world, including by Al Wefaq in Bahrain. He says that: ‘Absolute sovereignty belongs to God. The people who are experts in the law of Allah are entrusted with legislative and executive powers.’

The jurist — or the faqih, according to the Shia school of thought — holding religious authority represents Islam and by confirming legislative and executive actions he gives them legality. The ultimate source of authority will, therefore, never be the people, but always the jurists, the religious elites. In terms of how society needs to drive forward, or how the Arab Spring could have succeeded, or how proper democracy could be applied beyond the narrow procedural understanding, in my opinion, first society needs to have an overlapping consensus. Such overlapping consensus requires that each and every political player affirms democracy as an end not as a mean to reach power in order to abolish the democratic system and replace it with a theocracy. There needs to be a notion of political liberalism — as in the works of John Rawls — and having a contemporary social contract model and it is important that liberty can only be limited for the sake of liberty. Therefore the suspension of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, of Al-Wefaq in Bahrain and other intolerant powers, is necessary for liberty and the full application of the right to democracy beyond its limited procedural aspect.

Piercamillo Falasca—Hello, and thank you for this opportunity. I am the Editor of Strade magazine, an Italian political and economic analytical magazine but I am also a Senior Fellow of the Euro-Gulf Information Centre. Therefore, with Mitchell, I am very happy and delighted to be here in Helsinki for our first meeting outside of Italy. I will offer you two main points: first the issue of sectarianism from a European point of view, related to European history, and second an insight into the risks connect-

ed with a possible growth of Islamic sectarianism in Europe today and in the next years. Europe has been the home of wide and deep sectarian fractures in its history and many of them are still a driver of current politics and social dynamics in some regions of the continent. Historically, as you know, some Catholic countries persecuted Protestants as heretics, while on the other side in most places where Protestantism is the official religion, there have been examples of Catholics being persecuted and often accused to be loyal to a foreign power causing them to be regarded with suspicion and open discrimination.

So European history is full of dramatic and bloody episodes connected to sectarian divisions. Then we have the most recent history in Europe: after the partition of Ireland, Northern Ireland experienced intensified conflict tensions, violence between the dominant Protestant majority and the Catholic minority which in 1969 erupted in 25 years-long tensions called The Troubles. The conflict was primarily fought over the existence of Northern Ireland rather than religion, even if sectarian relations within Northern Ireland fuelled the conflict. Then we have the case of Scotland and of course that of the Balkans: in fact civil wars in the Balkans, following the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, are still today one of the most tragic examples of sectarian-fuelled religious conflicts. Croatians and Slovenians have been traditionally Catholic, Serbs and Macedonians Eastern Orthodox and Bosnians and Albanians mostly Muslim.

So what does the European history of sectarianism teach us? First of all, you realise - and this is what I think is very important - how religious affiliation serves as a marker of group identity rather than a real division based on theological belief. In Ireland, Scotland and Yugoslavia you have actually low rates of religious

practice and belief among these various groups. Hence, sectarianism is not a conflict based on religious belief: it is a political conflict based on religious affiliations. This is a lesson I think we should keep in mind when we talk about the Middle East too. Religions are used as a tool for identification, political organisations, discrimination and alienation. It operates at a social level as a form of everyday identity marker: often it is used as a football shirt rather than a theological belief. More importantly, religious affiliation also operates at a political and economic level and it becomes a tool for party recruitment and mobilisation, as we are also witnessing today in many parts of the Arab World.

However, for Europe and the Middle East we should focus on a crucial question, I think: if sectarianism is clear and it is a real phenomenon, do sects really exist? Are they real self-contained homogenous groups? Just because political parties or leaders, or even terrorists, speak in the name of a sectarian group, it does not mean that we should assume that they truly represent a group, an entire culture or a nation or even that the group exists altogether. Both in Europe and in the Middle East sectarianism has been cautiously devised and used by local political leaders and regional powers to maintain their positions of power and to access more power. What I am saying can be completely related to what the other gentleman have expressed in their speech about Sunni and Shia conflict. But let's look at Europe: the majority of European Muslims are perfect citizens, who pay taxes and according to every survey you can have they share the same concerns, needs and experiences as non-Muslims including the case for a better quality of education, housing, cleaner streets and the fight against crime and for security. Sectarianism in Europe, and not only in Europe, is a tool in the hands of partisan elites that prosper with it.

Sometimes sectarianism is also being used by ordinary people to access goods and services through systems of patronage or clientelism and also religion-biased welfare systems. Ironic that one of the big mistakes committed by policymakers is the hope of fighting sectarianism by creating religious-based welfare public services. Actually these services tend to reinforce divisions. I suggest you to read the 'Sectarianism and the Ambiguities of Welfare in Lebanon' by Melani Cammett, professor of Government at Harvard University, to see how religious-based welfare tools and systems can reinforce divisions instead of reducing them. They create a business for sectarianism rather than destroying it. So let's come to an end of my argument: as I said sectarianism is not truly connected to religious and theological belief and religious identity is just a marker for political affiliation.

That is why we should not talk about the radicalisation of Islam in Europe but actually the Islamisation of radicalism. Any religious extremism, and fundamentalism is what a French political scientist, Prof. Olivier Roy, called 'aculturation of religion,' when culture and religion part ways. Young European jihadists are not truly interested in Islam, neither strict nor moderate. They are interested in using a simplified religion as a disruptive tool. They are not expressing the radicalisation of a Muslim European population, they cannot talk for a group but they are the product of a generational revolt. So the question is why do they choose Islam? For this second generation, guys and girls, the reason is quite obvious - they elaborate an identity which in their eyes has been compromised by their parents and they truly believe to be more Muslim than other Muslims, especially their parents. All these kinds of generational rebellions have always been connected to a revolt with a previous generation: even in the 1960s and 1970s

young people in Europe, particularly in Italy or France, experienced leftist terror affiliation against the establishment, against the capitalistic system represented by their parents.

You have plenty of people — sons and daughters of important businessman or industry captains — joining political terrorist groups against their parents, against their previous generation. So if sectarianism is political the answer should be political too. We do not have to react against it creating a fertile environment for them. Islamophobia and anti-burkini rules, even anti-scarf rules, help sectarianism because they create the idea of marginalisation and reinforce markers of divisive identities. Political parties that chose an anti-Islamic agenda in Europe, and we have plenty of parties that are choosing it, are the best allies of possible future Islamist parties in the European democracies. The institutionalisation of sectarianism and a political competition based on religious affiliation would be a disaster for Europe.

Throughout history, Europe has never been fenced in land and it cannot become it now. Islam has long been part of Europe and it will continue to be part of Europe in the next years and years to come. Europe is home to about 44 million Muslims at the moment of which 20 millions live in European Union countries. Muslims represent the 8% of the population in France, 6% in Germany, 5% in Great Britain, 3% in Italy. Therefore, Europeans must come to terms with Islam and Muslims and the solution cannot be to raise sectarianism as a political agenda with the illusion of fighting it with Islamophobic instruments. Thank you.

Belfer—Thank you very much. I want to go through some other points before turning to the questions and answers session because when we look at sectarianism it is very difficult to kind of

de-contextualise yourself and be able to see universal solutions - but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try. So I think the question that I would like to lead off my conclusion with is : where do we go from here?

On one hand there are countries in the Middle East that have put a sectarian agenda into their foreign policy. The Middle East and the Gulf countries have been affected by that at different times over the past decade, with the most recent chapter being after the Arab Spring. I think it is very important to also remember that this is not confined to the Middle East but is spilling over into Europe, which has its own heritage in relation to sectarianism. Therefore trying to draw conclusions based on the European experience, but also with the realities that are being faced in the Arab world, there are some conclusions and things that we can do, ideas that we can promote. For example, it is important for us to break wrong narratives and stereotypes.

When we think about the Middle East today we very often fail to recognise that the Middle East is not a homogenous area. It is an area which has diversity of religions and diversity of culture. Some countries in the Middle East include also Christian communities and Jewish communities. A prime example is Bahrain, but even in countries like Saudi Arabia you find diversity. There is no such thing as just one big homogenous Muslim Arab world, there is a lot of diversity and that diversity should play into the way that we look and examine countries in the region.

In this way you can see that a kind of multi-faith approach is possible for dealing with the sectarianism and the horrible violence we have seen in the Middle East. I use the example of Bahrain because I know it the best — I have been there some 40 times – and they have passed a very interesting law that says that if you are a religious leader you cannot hold a public office.

This was a very important step forward in the creation of a more secular approach to dealing with politics and, I think, that this is something that needs to be further encouraged and developed. If we are to get over this hump of sectarianism, the separation of politics and religion is something that needs to be absolutely prioritised.

The second thing you see cropping up all over the Middle East is the development of civil society. I think it is important to remember that we live in an unprecedented time of history where information can actually transcend borders and there is almost nothing you can do to stop it. As a result of that, civil society groups that are repressed by the regimes find a new line in the on-line world and eventually cyber civil society groups can emerge even in a war torn place like Syria, Iraq. Even more so, civil society groups that have survived the worst of sectarian violence can give a key contribution to overcome the sectarian agenda of those who have been pushing it into the region. So I think that in addition to kind of that multi-faith approach we also have to, in some ways, look at how to encourage civil society movements and dialogue: this is why we are having an event like the one today, and I am very much looking forward to questions. The other thing to keep in mind is the idea of nation building as opposed to state building.

States in the Middle East have gone through an unbelievable process in the last century: if you can imagine that just over 100 years ago these countries didn't exist and were largely under the Ottoman Empire, you can argue that Middle Eastern countries are only roughly reaching the period of maturation now, after having gained their independence, and going through many internal and external struggles in consolidating the political leader-

ship and therefore developing the state.

This is the time to look at nation building and here the experience of the Arab Gulf, but also some of the more mature countries like Morocco or Tunisia can be very telling. Their experiences speak not only of the different degrees of importance of religion in the state but also of how the idea of national identity and unity can become central at key watershed moments. For example during the Arab Spring it was surprising to see how many the government officials were really trying to remind people that this is a nation. But then what you saw was the way others, from the outside, were pushing a different narrative, that citizens weren't seen as part of a nation first, they were firstly part of a sect.

And while in places like Bahrain it was conceivable to push the nation-first narrative, because it is a small country and everybody basically knew one another either directly or at least by one degree or two degrees of separation, in larger countries this is much more difficult. It is much more difficult to generate the narrative of nation first rather than sect. I think international allies could do more to encourage a proper nation building kind of enterprise, which in Europe we are very very familiar with. For example, the experience of Finland, only a hundred years into independence, can also be useful. And I think, even though Finns are quite far removed from what is going on in the Middle East, still the experience that Finland had of state building under the pressures of the decline of the Swedish Empire and then the rise of the Russian Empire, is a lesson that can be passed on through a wider engagement with the Middle East. In general, given Europe's recent history and experience, I think that fighting against sectarianism can and should be prioritised by all countries in Europe. Perhaps I would wrap up my speech and turn over to the audience to give them room for questions, because engaging in

an open and dynamic dialogue can be very important when dealing with this kind of issues. Ladies and gentleman, thank you for your attention.



Part II

Questions & Answers

Risto Veltheim—My name is Risto Veltheim, I am a former diplomat and I used to be a coordinator for European Union's policy in the Mediterranean. Thank you very much for excellent presentations and for coming to Finland. Welcome, I hope this is the first but not the last event. I identified clearly two main topics in the debate: one is the sectarianism as a very general wide phenomenon — which is present also in Europe — and then this Shia-Sunni rivalry which is now very much alive in many Arab countries. I would focus on the latter.

I listened very carefully to Mr Coughlin and what you said about the situation in Syria and the power play of Iran in Syria. We know what they are doing directly with Bashar al-Assad's government and through Hezbollah, but I would very sincerely ask you to give us some policy advice. What should we do in Syria? There has been a revolution going on for 6 years and the rebel movement is very weak nowadays and I understand they have never been as far from Damascus as they are now. On the other hand, there is a peace process going on which is very much supported by Russia, Iran and Turkey where an effort is made to have first a ceasefire between the military elements fighting in Syria and then maybe later on a political solution. But what should we do with the government of Bashar al-Assad? And I would call it government rather than regime. Do you agree with those who say that Bashar al-Assad has to step down first and then we start making the peace or you actually say that you want to go on fighting for another 6 years? What should we do? Should

we go to elections which are organised under the supervision of the United Nations and let the Syrian people decide what is the future of Bashar al-Assad? That is mainly the Russian claim but I would still like to present this question to you. Otherwise thank you very much for your great speeches.

Coughlin—Thank you very much for asking me the question that has no answer. To even address the question you just have to accept that Western policy in Syria has been a disaster from the start of the Arab Spring. In fact I opposed military intervention against the Assad regime: first of all because of the mess we made in Libya and, secondly, I didn't see Assad as posing a security threats to the region, despite all his problems and his alliance with Iran. In addition, I was very much against the decision to support the rebels and of course we have now seen that a lot of the groups opposing the Assad regime are very much of an Islamist kind. This is not what anybody had in mind. Anybody who knows the history of Syria would know that the biggest threat Assad senior would face was from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1982, when there was a big revolt at Hama, about ten thousand people were killed by Assad and the Sunni Islamist tendency was suppressed.

So where are we today? Well we are in a position where thanks to Russia the Assad regime is now being re-established. Don't forget the reasons the Russians intervened two years ago was that the head of the Iranian Quds Force and the leader of the Revolutionary Guards went to Moscow and told Putin that if he wanted to hang on to his military bases in Syria he better do something, because the Assad regime was about to fall. That was summer of 2015. Since then the Russian-Iranian intervention saved Assad and I think it would be very stupid and extreme — whatever we

think of the Assad regime, its brutality and its use of chemical weapons – to believe that he is our biggest problem. On the contrary, in a sense he is the least of our problems at the moment. The really big challenge now – which, to a degree, I think we have caused in the West — is the whole Islamic State which has taken control of large areas of northern Syria and Iraq. The priority must be to rollback Daesh and you cannot deal with Daesh and get rid of Assad too. So for the moment I don't think there is an easy answer.

I think the priority has to get rid of Daesh because that is a threat to people here in Finland as much as to people in Britain and America and everywhere else on the world. It is basically trying to establish itself as the global terrorist organisation that would directly attack the West: it has done it and it will continue to do so. Therefore it has to be dealt with. Once that is dealt with, if the Trump administration, whose policies are very hard to speculate on, is serious about having a dialogue with Russia and if there is a proper cooperation between Moscow and Washington, then it is possible for the Geneva process to be revived and progress could be made towards some kind of a federal system, like what we have in Lebanon. Then the question whether Assad stays or goes is left to those international bodies. My reading of Syria is that a lot of people — even Sunni Muslims — would prefer Assad to stay because it is basically perceived as a secular regime that looks after minorities. Indeed, it is a very complicated position but I think that is really what we will be looking at in the immediate future.

Maria Mekri—My name is Maria Mekri and I am the executive director of a Finnish think tank where I deal with topics on visa security. I have two main questions: first I would just like

to point out that the right to democracy is, of course, hugely contested and I think we could have a very interesting academic debate on whether there is a right to democracy. I would say I would agree against it because the human rights system — that was built in the 1940s, and then later in the 1970s — has come short of guaranteeing the human right to democracy. We have representation, we have a freedom of consciousness and so on, which are elements of democracy, but we still don't have the right to democracy, I would say. This leads me to the second question. When you talk about the democratic system, what kind of a system are you actually talking about? What kind of a democratic system are you looking at? Especially when you put things such as Hobbes and Locke together which are of course from extremely different starting points... perhaps you could give some arguments on that.

Then as the second point, I think it was the Finnish police that last year conducted a really interesting study on why Muslim youth from Finland leave to go to Daesh. They actually had questionnaires to see what are the pull factors, which is really rather interesting because when you think about Muslim youth, the second generation of Muslims in Finland, they actually have a very comfortable life. So they are leaving a comfortable life in Finland with great educational possibilities to go to places which are unpleasant to say at least. What they found was there was a combination of push and pull factors but the main pushing factor in Finland was a feeling of being an outsider, nothing to do with Islam or parents but just a feeling of not being part of the Finnish society. And then of course came the kind of pull factors that were the promises made but this feeling of belonging and the possibility of belonging somewhere actually became the top factor.

Alfadhel—First of all, I genuinely thank you for your question. Yes this really needs clarification. In my view, and I am one of the advocates that there is a right to democracy, the right to democracy we have today in international law is only procedural. Therefore, is it really a right to democracy? This is a question of judgement I suppose. Perhaps if the debate was whether it was a right to democracy or democratic entitlement; here the situation is very different. Yes, I believe that the Human Rights Committee, and its leaders like Thomas Frank, all affirm that there is a right to democracy in international law but it is so limited to two procedures: the right to vote and the right to be elected. T

he elaboration on that in the General Comment 25 of the Human Rights Committee from the ICCPR during Comment 25 clearly defines that a society that has free and fair elections is a democratic society. Of course there a lot of political considerations in the work of the Human Rights Committee and the whole UN human rights system whether it was charter or treaty based. So to answer the question: the answer is yes and no. There is a right to democracy, however it is limited to the procedural elements. There is an emerging substantive right to democracy perhaps according to the Vienna Declaration Programme of Action and other soft law instruments, but the international community at this juncture doesn't look very keen on enforcing a substantive right to democracy and making it binding on the international community. Of course it does not reflect international custom, where the right to democracy is limited to the procedural elements. In terms of the second question, regarding the philosophical foundations of the democratic society, I strongly argue that the social contract tradition clearly reflects the foundational aspects of democracy.

My use of Rousseau and Locke and Hobbes in my argument

was to emphasise that this is a European concept. It has European foundations and it was addressed in the European society. At the same time what I say also to my students is that, instead of looking at the traditional social contract, it is time to emphasise the contemporary social contract and the works of John Rawls which provide more modern and applicable notions of liberalism and democracy. This has even been reaffirmed even more in his book 'The Law of Peoples', where international law is no longer a law of nations, it is no longer a law of states as the founding fathers of international law affirmed in the beginning of the twentieth century. It is becoming a law of peoples because through democracy, electoral democracy as well, international law can regulate the law of peoples. I would go as far as saying that NGOs in the near future will become international lawmakers, on the line of what is already happening with NGOs like ICAN and the Basil Committee in Switzerland.

But the issue is — back to Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau — the state of nature before entering the social contract in the Arab world is quite different, because the original position of society, before submitting to democratic governance, is a position of religious dominance and political intolerance. Of course, as Con stated, Iran has a strong influence in that but it is also cultural. At the end of the day, law regulates behaviour and such behaviour requires a theoretical foundation that cannot be limited to the social contract tradition and the illustration of the state of nature affirmed in foundational works of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.

Falasca—Thank you for your question. Of course I was exaggerating in describing the conflict between children and parents: I was using children and parents instead of first and second generation. There is also a familiar component in that but it is not

the only one, as you observed. I think, and this is just my point of view, these young people from Finland and from all Europe choose Islamic fundamentalism because it is the best option on the market to create an identity, to a political identity. I don't think this phenomenon is very different from other phenomena we had in our history. We had thousands of people who volunteered in foreign armies, in foreign liberation wars, people who go around the world to fight, to find a purpose, to find someone to liberate.

It is just the rhetoric that is quite different but it is the same phenomenon, I think, that we had for centuries. They commit themselves to a clear objective, as in our societies they find it difficult to identify clear objectives for their life. I think this is connected to the failure of political parties as they used to be in the past. Political parties in Europe, at least in continental Europe, were strong organisations helping people to become part of the society through them. Let's think about especially the leftists. They don't have the same role anymore. You could say the same with real religious organisations, churches: they lost the capacity, the ability to compete on the market of affiliation for many people. So I think we don't have to overestimate using this argument of young jihadist to describe a religious war. It is a phenomenon we have already had in Europe for centuries and we have to deal with this new version in a new way, with new instruments, perhaps technological instruments, but we don't have to panic.

Coughlin—I would like to pick up on what you were saying about the Finnish police report, because in Britain we have done all the work on this as well and all kinds of strategies to prevent it and trying to deal with the whole issue of radicalisation. A couple of observations. We have had Muslim communities in Britain for a long time now and, when the Muslim communities first estab-

lished themselves in Britain, the policy was very much in favour of multiculturalism. People coming from foreign countries were allowed to maintain their foreign ways in significant areas of Britain — and this is also true in Europe. You have Muslim communities that are very self-contained, maybe some where people don't even learn English.

Coming back to what you were saying about Finnish Muslims being looked after, we in Britain have people who are disaffected because they don't have jobs, and feel completely outside of Britain, but I think there is a realisation in Britain that it is much of the British people's fault for allowing this dislocation to take root.

The other insight I would share, just going back to the Arab Spring and why the Arab Spring has moved from a political revolt into an Islamic menace, if you look at the roots of what happened in 2011 it was mainly driven by young people who had no economic opportunities. I think the sense of economic disaffection has fuelled Islamic State, a lot of people going there are saying they have no other hope and perhaps Islam is the answer. Recruits for jihadist groups in Egypt often come from the Nile Delta where there is a terrible unemployment and lack of education. However, in Europe this is not the case. The vast majority of Muslims living in Europe are happy to be in Europe and are law abiding, but there is this other part that is disaffected and that has to be addressed. I don't know the answers but I think once you identified the problem, then we might start working in the right direction.

Alfadhel—Just to add on Con's comments, there is indeed, in my opinion, some relationship between the Arab Spring and the rise of Daesh, and there are even philosophical connections be-

tween Daesh and the Muslim Brotherhood. In his book 'Milestones, Ma'alim fi al-Tariq' Sayyid Qutb stated on page 96: 'There is only one place on Earth which can be called the home of Islam, Dar al-Islam, and it is that place where the Islamic state is established, the Sharia is the authority and God's limits are observed and where all of the Muslims administer the affairs of the state after a mutual consultation. The rest of the world is the home of hostility, Dar al-Harb. A Muslim can have only two possible relations with the Dar al-Harb: peace with a contractual agreement or war. A country with which there is a treaty will not be considered the home of Islam.' This is one of the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood and this is applied today by Daesh and other intolerant terrorist groups.

Coughlin—And this was one of the moderate statements...

Alfadhel—Yes, this is a moderate statement indeed.

Jerry [sic.]—Hi, my name is Jerry. Mr Coughlin, you said that we have to deal with Daesh first before the Syrian regime, but I have a question here. Have we considered that there is a huge and tight relationship between the Syrian regime, Daesh and the Iranians? Indeed you know that the only reason why the regime is still in Syria is because everyone is busy with Daesh and Al-Qaeda and they are just leaving the regime doing everything they want under the title of fighting terrorism. Meanwhile Daesh attacks Istanbul, France, Germany and other locations while Damascus and Iran are much closer. Why don't they attack Damascus or Iran? Without saying more I would argue that the real danger for the world is not just Daesh or Al-Qaeda. We have to start from Iran and, if we deal with Iran and the Syrian regime, then everyone will have peace. That is what I wanted to know, if you have

any doubt that there is a huge and tight relationship between Iran, Daesh and the Syrian regime. Thank you.

Coughlin—It is a very good question and quite a challenging one. The whole relationship between the Shia terrorist infrastructure of Iran and the Sunni terrorist infrastructure started by Al-Qaeda, which has now moved into Daesh, is a very problematic one. Looking back to Iran's relationships with groups like the Taliban there is no doubt that for all this Sunni-Shia tensions the old saying that my enemy's enemy is my friend very much comes into play and I think there is a great amount of pragmatism on the part of the Revolutionary Guards when it comes to dealing with Sunni terrorist groups.

Furthermore, the establishment of Islamist terrorist groups in Syria was greatly facilitated by the releases of prisoners for which Assad is responsible at the start of the conflict but I am not sure that they are as close and linked as you are suggesting. I think they tolerate each other but I haven't seen any evidence that the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are providing arms and ammunition and directions to Daesh, right? And if you look at what is going on in Mosul for example, where Iranian-backed militias are fighting to drive Daesh out of Mosul, this is not an arrangement where Iran is controlling Daesh and saying we want Mosul back so go away.

So on one level there is a lot of enmity and connected activity, on another they do tolerate each other. My understanding of Syria today is that Iran and the Assad regime would quite like Daesh to keep its little Islamic State up by Raqqa because it legitimises the continuing presence of the Revolutionary Guards. If Daesh and the Sunni terrorists are destroyed, then they will say why

are the Revolutionary Guards still holding fort in Damascus and Southern Lebanon and Beirut? Undoubtedly, there is a very complicated game going on and I personally would not go too far to say that Daesh and the Iranians are working together. I wouldn't push it that far, that is my view.

Linda Hyokki—My name is Linda Hyokki and I am a PhD candidate from Istanbul. I'm writing my PhD thesis on Islamophobia in Finland and I find that many of these discussions that you provided us today overlap with the themes that I have to investigate myself, and I thank you for the very interesting thoughts. Now I would like to comment a little bit on what Mr. Con Coughlin said earlier. I have started a collecting material on what is going on here, in our society, in terms of Islamophobic rhetoric and discourse, and I have for example written some reports on how the current debate on constructing a Grand Mosque here in Helsinki has been conducted. I noticed that, very interestingly, it is not just only the Finnish right wing activist or populist discourse that is attacking the plan of constructing a mosque for the Muslim community here but a very loud voice is also coming up from the Shia community of our country. I was thinking maybe you could comment a little bit more on that.

Coughlin—I am afraid I'm not expert on Finnish Islamic structures but I would register a confirmation that sectarianism is poisoning the everyday of the Muslim communities. In Britain we have some very high profile Sunni Islamic groups that want to turn Britain into a caliphate. They have rallies and they say it; that is their mission — to turn Great Britain into a Muslim country. A lot of them are in jail now for their association with terrorism but they have been very forthright. You won't get Shia groups doing that, it is not their way. But what they would do is they

would work behind the scenes, they would finance groups and they would work quite effectively, but under the radar, to achieve their goals. That is how it works and I imagine that is the sort of activities that are going on around here. Let's look at the millions of refugees the Syrian conflict has created: if you went to Syria six years ago the vast majority of these people had no desire to leave their home country. They saw their future, their destiny in Syria and it is heartbreaking that we have got millions of people who have been made homeless by this.

I do not have a magic wand to solve this but if there was a right international circumstances they might have been helped. The reason why the Geneva process failed is that the Russians would not really deliver the Assad regime, but if there were the right international conditions, and particularly a working relationship between Russia and America, than it is feasible that there is some effort put in reviving the Geneva talks and that some kind of a settlement is reached. It is not going to be a happy settlement. I do not see at this point a settlement where, even if Assad himself went, the Alawites wouldn't remain in control in Syria because Iran is so powerful to really put it back on the wall. Iran is a well organised country with 60 million people. if you think Iraq was a bit of a disaster just imagine what would happen in Iran. It is incredibly difficult but the only possible solution — and that is a long way away at the moment — is some kind of a political settlement for Syria on a federal basis. That is the only way I can see it. It is the same as what happened in Lebanon: the Lebanese parties never came together and said this is the Lebanon we want after civil war.

Falasca—I have a comment, well it's more of a question. When we discuss about the Syrian refugees in Europe it seems to me

that we discuss about integration versus refuse. Either you are in favour of integration or you are a racist and it is an internal issue. We do not discuss about the future of Syria and the possible return of these people — educated people, doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists — to Syria. What kind of Syria can we have in the future if the best part of the population has just left? I think we are not having this argument in the international debate because there is a fear that raising this argument can be considered racism, that you want these people to go back. I think that they would actually be very happy to rebuild their country if they would have the possibility one day, so we should start to talk about that with a very pragmatic mind.

Alfadhel—Well Con is the expert on Iran, however I think that governments in the Middle East need to keep in serious consideration that Iran has an expressed ambition to export the Khomeini Revolution. The whole concept of the Iranian Revolution is to export it to other countries. That is what happened in Iraq through the Al-Dawa party, that is what almost happened in Bahrain with Al-Wefaq and that is what is happening in Lebanon through Hezbollah. The most problematic issue with the whole structure of the Khomeini Revolution is the doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih, the mandate of the jurist and, according to this doctrine, the religious and political authority of the absent Imam is to be delegated to a senior Shiite scholar until the reappearance of the Imam at the end of time. Today that scholar is Ayatollah Khamenei, before him was Ayatollah Khomeini, according to the Iranian interpretation of that. This is institutionalised in the Iranian constitution and they see it as a priority to be exported to other countries.

Jerry—I would like to ask this last question. The main Mufti

of Syria said about four years ago something very important: he said if anyone from Europe or America would support the revolution and what is happening in Syria, we will send from Syria and Lebanon bombers to bomb your cities. He said it clearly and publicly. Now, after four years from his speech, we found out that a lot of terrorist attacks attacked Europe and many other places. This kind of ideological connection between the Syrian regime and Daesh make me think that there is some kind of agreement or relationship between the Syrian regime, Daesh and Iran and Hezbollah. I'm not saying that they get orders to do what they want but they have agreements not to attack each other, and you can see that. I talked to someone who was fighting for Daesh and he left, he escaped because he saw that they were dealing with the Syrian regime, with the Iranians in Syria and one of Hezbollah members said to us: 'We have orders not to treat anyone from Daesh that we catch in a bad way, because there is some agreement between us.' So they just take them and release them again. There is no clashes between them in Syria. If you see how they took the cities in Iraq and how they took the cities in Syria — it is the same. Nobody fought and nobody stopped them, they just moved to the cities in easy ways. So this is the issue that I want to again and again repeat because we cannot just say that there is no connection. I think Iran and Assad are even much more dangerous than Daesh because Daesh is just playing rules and supporting these regimes to survive and to continue what they want to do.

Unknown— from Crisis Management Initiative, a Finnish NGO specialising on conflict resolution. Perhaps reflecting on some other points that the gentlemen have raised, if we look at the sectarian issue through an identity-based approach, and at sectarianism as an identity marker and a tool for mobilisation,

then we will get the nation building issue, which you mentioned, as something crucial for the Arab Gulf. What do you see as the kind of prospects for these Arab Gulf nations to become more resilient to external threats such as preventing the export of the Iranian Revolution? Because I think we can all agree that you cannot really export the Revolution if there isn't a willing population to actively take it upon them, to take it forward within their country. So what do you see as the prospects? Is there a room for political willingness, beyond declarations by the government? Are there ongoing processes to actually build these nations?

Falasca—You are right, in my opinion, when you underline that the strengthening of institutions, national identities, citizenship rights, is fundamental to become full citizens. I would add it is also crucial to expand and reinforce the economic equality of the region: I think is quite important because as long as society grows and distributes wealth among population, the raise of sectarianism tends to decline. This is quite obvious in Europe and I think it would be clear also wherever. I think first of all we should analyse what is the status of the Revolution in Iran among its population, and I think this is a question for Con. What is the status, what is going on in Iran? Because I am not so sure that the Revolution is in good shape inside the country, and maybe this is one of the reasons for the external activism of Iran. Indeed you are absolutely right that the only way to be resilient is to create a national identity, civic identity and to push economic equality of the Gulf countries and allow them to become stronger and stronger as societies. Sport is important too: I truly believe that sport is one of the best factors in creating a national identity, so they should invest a little bit more into sport.

Alfadhel—I completely agree and I think the best way for the

GCC States to be resilient against the exportation of the Khomeini Revolution is to first endorse the whole notion of reasonable citizenship. The right to democracy, like all human rights, should be universal but in reality it is limited to some citizens. Indeed, in order to be resilient against an ideological revolution that encompasses mediaeval doctrines, the best way is to enforce, or create, or support the notion of reasonable citizenship accompanied with secular morality. Secularism in itself, the morality behind it, is what the GCC states need to affirm. Society needs to comprehend that secular morality is an essential ingredient of reasonable citizenship. I think that is the best way to be effectively resilient against the Khomeini Revolution.

Coughlin—I would just add a couple of points to that. I think, to answer your question, two things need to happen in the Gulf. First of all there has to be unity of purpose, and we're seeing that more and more now with the GCC with regards to challenges from the Islamic Republic. In the past divisions within the GCC have meant that some countries have been well disposed towards Iran: we have experience of Oman, who until recently was very close with Tehran, or even Dubai and Qatar that had their own separate relationships, maybe to upset Saudis. As long as there are those divisions there, the Iranians can exploit them. I am encouraged that the GCC seems to be a far more cohesive body, but also I think the Arab states need to work harder in reconciling the Shia communities. A lot of problems the Saudis have had in Eastern provinces is that the Shia felt neglected.

In Bahrain itself the Bahraini government has acknowledged that more work needs to be done in making the Shiites feel more Bahraini. If this will actually take place the Iranians cannot move in with their groups like Al Wefaq: as you said, nobody is going to support the group and you cannot impose an ideology on people,

it has to come from the ground up.

On the Iranian Revolution, it is alive and well. You only have to look at the current Supreme Leader, he is supreme. And the reason they did the nuclear deal was that at the last election Rouhani was elected because the majority of Iranians are sick and tired of the economic sanctions. Therefore the regime has had to adjust, not change, but adjust to basically allow some kind of economic growth. The reason I think that this is a bad deal is that the sanctions for once were working. We know that the sanctions didn't work in Iraq and we ended up going to war, but the sanctions were working on Iran and we have the Iranians over a barrel but we let them off. When the deal was done the expectation was that there would be a change of behaviour but, if you look at the rhetoric of Khomeini, even since the Trump election, it hasn't changed at all. The Leader is still supreme, he directly controls the Revolutionary Guards and the Revolutionary Guards control in itself 50% of the Iranian economy. They are not going anywhere. They will give the appearance of being more moderate but the level of executions in Iran was the highest this year since the start of the Revolution and there is no easing of the political pressure, there is no easing of the regime's determination to protect and safeguard the Islamic Revolution at all cost.

Belfer—If we look at the wider context as well in terms of Iranian engagement with the rest of the region, I think the GCC now, on the military level, is in a position where it can contain Iranian elements if they try to move into the GCC. The amount of coordination you have on the security level in the GCC is phenomenal and it is going deeper as the years go on, so on the kind of intelligence and military side I think that the GCC is quite well prepared.

I would echo the rest of the panel and say that that is not enough and it has to go deeper and I think that the idea of nation building is, of course, very important but so is alliance formation. I think one of the big problems that we see in treatments of Iran recently is the fact that there is a grand illusion that Iran has a liberal economy and, therefore, Europe and the United States should not only repeal sanctions, but also start economically dealing with the Islamic Republic. The airline industry is getting a facelift, infrastructure companies are moving in there, and all of this is empowering the Revolutionary Guard because they control the economy. So, in fact, it is quite an irony that the allies of the Arab Gulf right now are also empowering the enemy of the Arab Gulf and the Islamic Republic which is trying to infiltrate those countries. I think, re-establishing in a loud and clear voice what an alliance looks like - for example between Washington and the GCC and also between Europe and the GCC - is something that needs to be really done.

Jerry—Here's a question on a little different subject: the classic Middle Eastern conflict between Israel and Palestine. How does the new sectarianism affect our possibilities to finding a solution for that problem? Now Prime Minister Netanyahu has never been as happy and smiling so widely as he is smiling now because he can do whatever he wants to do on Palestinian lands. There is very little criticism and he can go directly to the Oval Office in Washington and address President Trump, stressing that Iran is our main enemy, let's concentrate on Iran and keep it under control and increase sanctions. And when Netanyahu says that he will build 5000 more settlements on Palestinian areas, the reaction in many parts of the Arab world has been very shy. I even read somewhere that the Gulf countries have hardly even criticised this because Israel is seen more and more as a partner, as

an ally for some. I mean excuse me, if I am provocative, but this is what the impression is: that Israel is becoming more and more an important ally in fight against the main enemy which is Iran, so that the Palestinian case is practically forgotten? Is this right or wrong?

Coughlin—I lived in Jerusalem for six years and so I know these issues very well. I think the bottom line, first of all, is that the Israelis have no one to negotiate with. In Gaza there is Hamas which doesn't recognise Israel's right to exist and is very closely linked with the Revolutionary Guard and with the Muslim Brotherhood and every other Islamic group in the region, while Fatah itself is a corrupt and discredited body. Therefore the reason Netanyahu is in this position is that there is no one to talk to. Furthermore it is quite obvious from the course of this discussion that Israel now finds itself in alignment — in geopolitical terms — with a lot of the main Arab states. Only yesterday I had a talk with somebody very senior in the new Trump administration who was telling me about getting along with Netanyahu and how when him and Trump met it was all about what military action could be taken against Iran and just how much cooperation Israel could expect from countries like Saudi Arabia in terms of flyover rights and things like that. What my contact said to me is that the feeling is that the Saudis would like to cooperate all the way to guide the Israeli planes to Tehran. That is how close it is. What does it mean for Palestine? Well, I have been with the Palestinians and the Palestinian people have been awfully betrayed by their own leadership and also by the Arabs and until the Palestinians can find their way to get a united leadership which recognises Israel and actually wants to have a proper peace negotiation aimed at the two state solution and not a one state solution with no Jewish state, we are going to have this status.

Olli Ruohomaki—My name is Olli Ruohomaki, I am from the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Recently the National Intelligence Council from the US issued a very interesting report on global trends that looks at the number of issues for the next 25 years — first for the five year horizon and then a 20 years horizon — addressing issues such as climate change and the changing nature of warfare, and of course terrorism. Looking at the terrorism file, the National Intelligence Council, which used to be part of CIA but is now a separate strategic think tank, basically underlined that Salafist jihadist terrorism is here to stay for at least the next couple of decades. They actually put a timeline that it will be here at least until the 2035, given the mess in the Middle East, in particular in Iraq and Syria. They identified particularly Salafist jihadist terror as a really big challenge not only for the region but also globally and from the European perspective. What is your view? What can be done and what should be done that the Salafist jihadist terrorists would not constitute such a big issue? What keeps it going?

Coughlin—Where possible you should have a robust military counter terrorism response. I remember General David Petraeus, when he was running the campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan and he said he wanted to vacuum all policy because you deal with them in Afghanistan and then they pop up in Libya, and then they pop up in Syria. You just have to deal with it on that basis but I do think the ultimate answer to all this lies within the Islamic community. In the history of Islam — and my colleagues would know more than me about it — you had these evils. For example, in the 19th century the British Empire had to deal with Mahdi in Sudan and ultimately these issues have been resolved by the big stick. But actually this twisted ideology does

not represent the Muslim faith and you should go away and stop. But this is going to take time to go through.

Alfadhel—Well I completely agree with Con and if I may add about the Salafist approach: yes I do agree that it is a threat to international peace and security and it needs to be addressed by the strongest terms pursuant to the UN Security Council resolution 1373. It wasn't the first time the Security Council acted as a world congress where it set positive obligations on each and every state within the international community to combat terrorism and that time was really focused on — as you coined — Salafist terrorism. However here there is a very big problem. Salafism is not an organisation, Salafism is not something that you can really define. Salafism is a methodology. It is not really a political group or an organisation. I have been doing a lot of research about this whole issue of Islamist terrorism and so on and so forth for many years. I don't know if Con and rest of my colleagues would agree, the main root was traced to Sayyid Qutb. The whole philosophical foundation was traced back to Sayyid Qutb's Milestones. He was the first to talk about enforcing the faith as a way of jihadism and he is one of the founding ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood. If we look at the hierarchy of Al-Qaeda: Bin Laden was a Saudi Salafist but the remainders came from Egypt and there are accounts that he has even sat with Sayyid Qutb personally and learnt from him this ideology. I think that this is an issue that needs to be taken to serious consideration — Salafism is not a group, it cannot be controlled and it is a methodology.

Falasca—I completely agree with Con about the role of the Islamic communities in Europe. There is a lack of leadership, I fear, the same argument you were using for Palestine. Who are the leaders of the Islamic communities in Europe and Europe-

an countries and European cities? There are not religious leaders identified and clearly representative and still they are not clear organisations, social organisations and civil society organisations. Maybe this is something to think about for the future: we need a leadership process in Europe among the Islamic communities and turn the same into more organised civil society bodies.

Belfer—Maybe just a last remark before we were end this session today. I am happy to end on this note as well, because I think Con and Khalifa both pointed to something very important, Sayyid Qutb and Sudan. Sudan is the first revolutionary state even before the Islamic Republic of Iran and if you think about the rhetoric that came from Mahdi and Mahdi's army that was fighting against Britain, it is not different from today's jihadism. It was actually the the situation in Sudan that bleeds over to Egypt and it was the runaway of Mahdi and his followers that produced the school of thinking that Sayyid Qutb takes over. Now, in our contemporary time, maybe we should remind ourselves also as a final statement, extremist groups are not only ideologically driven in but also geostrategically driven and we should remember that. Therefore we have to treat sectarian actors, such as Iran, as geostrategic actors — in the case of Iran, as one that wants to create a belt of instability all around it so that it can extend its geostrategic interests. When it comes to Sunnis Muslims you don't have the same geopolitics or geopolitical drive for example in Saudi Arabia. One of the reason the extremist groups attack it, is about the governance of Mecca and Medina. It is about demonising and undermining the legitimacy of, for example, the House of Saud and their ability of governing the central places of Islam.

So I don't think that there will be any solution to the long term jihadism unless you give them what they want in that regard and you just can't. Because when I think of all their forces in the Mid-

dle East today, I think it is safe to say — I will say it as my personal opinion not representing our organisation – that they are better off under Saudi Arabia’s control than any of the revolutionary states or sub-state groups that are seeking to have the holy places in their hands, including for example whether it is Hezbollah or Al-Qaeda, or whether it is Iran itself. I think that the holy spaces of Mecca and Medina are better off in the hands of Saudi Arabia. So we won’t win this war. The only thing I believe we should be looking for is limiting it and also in terms of dealing with the attraction of radical ideologies in Europe. Not only related to Islam, we now have a spike of radicalism and right wing extremism gripping Europe too and if we look at it as two sides of the same coin and perhaps our strategies for dealing with it would be a little bit more robust as well.

Belfer—On that note, I would like to thank you on behalf of our organisation and on behalf of the panel thank you for your engagement and your very warm welcome here in Finland in Helsinki. Like I said this was our first event outside of Italy and I have to say that you made our job very easy because you are so interested and engaging and we are very happy that we were able to come together here. I would like to extend the very warm thanks to our panel for making the voyage as far away as the United Kingdom, Italy and of course Bahrain, to be here today and I very much look forward to keeping in touch and working further on things like this in the future. So thank you very much.

END

Reflections

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