



CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Transcript

# RUSSIA'S STRATEGY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2012  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

**WELCOME/MODERATOR:**

**Matthew Rojansky**

Deputy Director

Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

**SPEAKERS:**

**Marwan Muasher**

Vice President for Studies

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

**Alexey Malashenko**

Scholar-in-Residence

Carnegie Moscow Center

**Natasha Mozgovaya**

Chief U.S. Correspondent

Haaretz

**Karim Sadjadpour**

Associate

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Transcript by Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.

MATTHEW ROJANSKY: All right, let me encourage everyone to get your food, take your seats, and we'll start in about two minutes.

(Pause.)

MR. ROJANSKY: All right, we'll get started now.

My name is Matt Rojansky. I'm the deputy director of the Russia and Eurasia Program here at the Carnegie Endowment. This is obviously a relatively unusual program for us, but I think it's sort of perfect. It's well-timed, and it also is emblematic of what we aspire to do in linking many of our regional centers and our programs here in Washington that deal with different regions.

So, I'm especially pleased to be hosting this with colleagues from the Middle East program, and to take this opportunity to look at an angle of what's been in the news almost nonstop for the last year, and that is the Arab Spring and tension over Iran's nuclear program, that often gets either relatively superficial coverage or sort of secondary coverage. And so I think we can delve a little bit deeper into that. And that of course is Russia's role in all of this – Russia's interests, Russia's strategy, if it could be said to have one.

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There is a saying about allegiances in the Middle East that shift with the sands. That might be true, and you could certainly say that that is true of Russia and its relationships, and yet on the other hand we see evidence to the contrary. One example of which that I've been contemplating recently is the Assad family and its longstanding relationship with the Kremlin, which seems to be quite as firm as the walls of that ancient edifice itself.

And so I hope that some of our panelists can address this question of whether there's been consistency in Russia's policies, at least as long as it's been Russia, and perhaps even before 1991 as well. And then, of course, the emerging dynamic of Iran's – of Russia's role in the negotiations – on again, off again – with Tehran over the nuclear program we're going to try and address as well.

So we have a very broad agenda for today. Let me just remind folks: Turn off your cellphones. We are on the record. We'll try and keep it relatively tight with the panel so that we have plenty of time for discussion.

Let me just very quickly run through our panelists. I think we have a just fantastic and very distinguished panel today:

Marwan Muasher, former foreign minister and deputy prime minister of Jordan. He's vice president for studies here at the Carnegie Endowment and really one of the experts on diplomacy with this part of the world.

[00:02:46]

Then we'll go to Natasha Mozgovaya, who you can tell by her name – a correspondent for Haaretz but probably also knows something about Russia. And she is going to showcase that for us today. Also, having been a former television anchor, I think you can probably help me manage this large and distinguished panel.

Then we'll go to my colleague on my left, Karim Sadjadpour, who is an associate here, working on Iran. And you sort of can't not know Karim if you've ever turned on CNN or PBS or the BBC or – (laughter).

And then, finally, our visiting colleague from Moscow, from the Carnegie Moscow Center, Alexey Malashenko, who is truly one of Russia's leading experts on Islam, religion and society, in particular of course on the North Caucasus, Russia's "internal abroad," as we call it.

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So with that, let me turn over the floor to Marwan.

MARWAN MUASHER: Thank you very much, Matt.

The title of this seminar/workshop is "Russia's Strategy in the Middle East." And to me that suggest two things: one, that there is one, a strategy for the Middle East, and that, two, that other countries also have other strategies in the Middle East. And I just want to question both, to say that what is happening in the Middle East today is really too fast for any country to have come up with a coherent strategy of how to deal with it.

I think the romantic notion that existed, certainly in this town, which led to calling the Arab uprisings the Arab Spring last year is probably over by now and people are starting to realize that this is not a process that is going to be measured in months or even years, but in decades. And I maintain that those who want to measure it by months and years will get a lot of heartburn.

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If one wants to look at – take a wider view and look at it in the wider sense, then I think we can all be more realistic about a transition process that was bound to happen, should have happened – a lot of people ask why it did not happen before – but a process nevertheless that is going to go through many bumpy roads before it stabilizes and results in pluralistic societies.

Now, having said so, Russia's influence in particular in the Middle East has been waning, in my view, way before the Arab uprisings. I mean, if you go back to 1972 and Russia's sort of expulsion from Egypt, that was the first, maybe, time in the contemporary Middle East where Russia's influence in the region – Soviet Union then, of course – started to wane.

But the second one has certainly – the second period is the Cold War, and the end of the Cold War has been particularly bad for Russia in terms of its relationships in the Middle East. It has coincided with the start of the Middle East peace process in Madrid.

As we all remember, I mean, Gorbachev's participation in the process was more pro forma than anything else, and Russia has never played an important role in the Middle East as far as a peace process is concerned other than to serve on the quartet but in a very subsidiary manner, and a manner that was largely deferential to that of the Americans. But the Arab uprising sort of, in my view, is putting the nail in the coffin as far as Russia's influence in the Middle East is concerned.

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Russia has always been seen by the people of the Middle East – largely of course because of the peace process and the Palestinians – siding on, you know, the side of the oppressed in the region and as standing up to America and making sure that American interests are not advanced in an unquestionable way.

Well, with what is happening in the region, first in Libya and then in Syria, it is becoming sort of – it is clear to at least the people of the Middle East that Russia is not necessarily siding or, you know, standing on the side of the oppressed but rather on the side of its own interests – economic interests particularly.

That does not mean that others, like the United States, also don't have interests in mind, but it does mean that Russia for a long time in the region has been viewed as taking positions of principle when it came to Arab interests. That era is over and there is a feeling today that Russia is betting on the wrong horse.

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That's the point I want to make. I don't think Russia seems to have developed any post-Cold War strategy in the Middle East. Beyond the military interests, beyond sometimes the economic interests, we have not seen really a sustained presence or Russian influence in the region.

Whether the Russians feel that the Middle East is of lesser importance to them or not is, you know, another question that we might ask. Maybe Natasha can shed some light on this. Certainly the Russians have attempted to forge relations with Israel in recent times, and I'm sure Natasha will talk about this as well.

With the Syrians, Russia has a naval base in Tartus. This is the only sort of warm-water base in the region. But if they are sort of afraid they will lose that base, I think it's a very sort of short-term calculation. I think most if not all analysts agree that the Syrian regime will fall, and that Russia would have to recalculate its relationships with Syria if they want to maintain some long-term influence.

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So far the influence both in Libya and Syria has been limited to the Security Council – Russia’s ability to block, if you will, a resolution on Syria. That’s how it is seen, both Russia and China. And that is, frankly, as I said, contributing to the alienation of the public in the Middle East from Russia.

If you look at all the problems in the last few weeks, they will suggest that the popularity of the Assad regime has dropped not just domestically inside Syria but throughout the region, from the high three years ago when Bashar Assad was considered one of the most popular leaders in the Arab world to almost zero today.

There is no popularity for the regime. There is no legitimacy left, domestically as well as regionally. And by betting on the Syrian regime, so far Russia is really hurting its own chances for any longer-term influence in the region.

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Let me stop here and –

MR. ROJANSKY: OK, thank you, Marwan. I think you queued up at least half a dozen questions in my mind.

Natasha, I saw you writing, so I suspect you have them as well. The floor is yours.

NATASHA MOZGOVAYA: A couple of months ago I was asked, you know, following the Arab Spring, when the Russian revolution will come. So I answered then that, you know, probably for people who just recently experienced one revolution it will take some time to prepare for another one because they know that what comes then is usually chaos and crisis, and then, in terms of the governments, more of the same.

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But then, you know, we had the parliamentary elections in Russia and protests swept through the country. And Israel found itself suddenly on a spot that it didn’t necessarily look for in this context when Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman visited Moscow and, in a meeting with Vladimir Putin, the prime minister, said that based on the observations of four Israeli – four Israeli observers in the elections, the elections were fair and democratic.

So later he, you know, tried to modify his remarks a little bit and said that, you know, in every election we have some kind of violations. And in the Israeli media there were publications that actually – it was kind of conditioned for Lieberman to say that in order to meet with Vladimir Putin.

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But, anyway, this is a point, you know, just to exemplify that in the recent past it was – Israel often finds itself on the same page with Russia, not necessarily for the same reasons.

For example, both countries are quite suspicious of the Arab Spring – Russia because it doesn't want to lose its position in the Middle East, that are waning, as it was said earlier, and Israel of course is wary of the rise of the Islamists, and, you know, because their security – security reasons on that part.

And I think that in the past three years the tensions between Washington and Jerusalem were somewhat beneficial to Russia because in Israel we hear more and more voices talking about – you know, questioning whether it's smart to keep exclusive relations with Washington, or should Israel develop and strengthen other partnerships? For example, they were eyeing Latin America and so on, not only Russia.

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I think that, you know, it's kind of a long shot, but if you try hard enough you can find even some parallels in relative isolation of the two countries. Russia is not terribly popular for its gas wars, for example, or following its war with Georgia.

And it was interesting to see that when Russia planned its big celebrations of, you know, 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II victory, the leaders of the allies – you know, America, Britain, France – they didn't come, and Israeli presidents did come and praised Russia at length, you know, for its role in defeating Nazism.

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So, you know, putting it a bit in historical context, it always has been a very complicated and, you know, somewhat contradictory relationship. It was, let's say, in '47 the Soviet Union supported the partition plan. It was among the first countries to recognize Israel.

Israel fought its first war with Soviet weapons, but then of course relations deteriorated quickly: '53 we had the first standard diplomatic relations severed. Later that year they were restored after Stalin's death. But then, you know, in '67 the relations were severed for almost 25 years.

Having said that, I think that since 1991, after the relations were restored, they started improving with many, many reservations and deep gaps on several important topics. We'll get to it shortly.

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But, you know, there was many political, economic, scientific, diplomatic reasons for this relationship to improve, and I think there was – you know, many agreements were signed. There was the cooperation.

Economic cooperation is getting closer also. I think Russia just, a couple of months ago, announced it will open branch of Skolkovo, it's the Russian Silicon Valley in Israel, for example. It's already bought some Israeli spy drones. So, there is a cooperation going on, and it's growing.

And, you know, look, since Russia made very clear not only in the Middle East but in its foreign policy in general that it won't build, you know, an empire based on values and ideology anymore but it will pursue its interests, Israel shouldn't expect Russia speeches – you know, U.S.-style speeches of common values and unbreakable bonds and so on.

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But, having said that, if we look at some points, like, for example, the cancellation of visa regime, it's quite unprecedented actually for Russia because they didn't have the same success with Europe. But with Israel, despite the warnings of the Israeli police – you know, that Russians will flood Israel with criminal elements and mafia and so on – the visa regime was cancelled.

And in 2010 I think there were more Russian tourists in Israel than from any other country. I think it was about half a million or – 560,000 Russian tourists. So, you know, it is strengthening.

Now we have four ministers in the Israeli government that were born in the – in the former Soviet Union – then it was the Soviet Union, of course – all of them dealing directly or indirectly with foreign relations of the country. Of course it has an influence on the foreign relations of Israel, among other things with Russia.

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There was this WikiLeaks published cable sent from the U.S. embassy in Moscow, talking about, you know, the way Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli foreign minister, was received in Moscow. He was defined as – you know, they received him as one of their own.

Look, I think the credibility that Lieberman enjoys in Moscow is slightly overestimated, although it helps that he speaks Russian and knows the culture. He doesn't have a monopoly, I think, over the relations with Moscow.

And I think that there was an incident, maybe you remember, when the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Israel was cancelled because of the strike in the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the ministry of Avigdor Lieberman. It was an embarrassment for Israel, you know, when Russian presidents came to visit Jordan and Ramallah and didn't – you know, didn't come to Israel.

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For me it's important to mention also that there was a misperception, I think, in both countries – mutual misperception, for example, in Israel for many years. Although it wasn't an official position, of course, Russia was perceived to be in a very troubled spot, almost – you know, almost as a third world country, despite its nuclear might.

But, you know, many immigrants were coming to Israel, not because of their willingness to come to Zion but because of the pushing factors of poverty, lack of

prospectives (ph), constant crisis and so on. And of course in Russia – in Russia Israel was perceived for many years as a small country that causes lots of troubles. I think it is changing.

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Well, of course, you know, we can mention some symbolic gestures in the recent years between the countries: for example, Russia sending aid when there were wildfires in Israel and Israel returning to Russia after almost 20 years of talks; very symbolical – you know, major real estate in Jerusalem, the Sergei Courtyard that even John McCain I think protested it and said, you know, it's not time for such gifts. The decision was made in 2008 and I think they handed the keys only last year.

But having, you know, said that, with all these positive things and countries coming closer, of course we have several points of – you know, of contention between the two countries.

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The first one of course I think now is Syria, because Israel of course hopes for the demise of their current regime because Israel sees an opportunity to – you know, to put an end to this marriage between Tehran, Damascus and Hezbollah. It hopes to weaken Hezbollah this way, not knowing of course what will come next, but anyway.

And Russia of course holds to its alliance with Syria, and it raises eyebrows, I think, among many Arab diplomats saying that Russia just lost touch with, you know, reality in the Middle East.

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So, the second point of course is the arms sales, because each time there is a major arms sales deal, Israeli leaders, you can see them rushing to Moscow or calling the Russian leaders, trying to prevent this deal. Russia of course then saying that, you know, it's defensive weapons with tight supervision and so on; it will never reach Hezbollah, et cetera, et cetera.

But, for example, summer 2006, the Second Lebanese War, the Israeli prime minister is calling Russian leaders saying that, you know, we found – we have – we found Russian weapons at Hezbollah during one of the raids. And then Putin says, well, prove it. And then Israel is sending a delegation to Moscow with proof. And then Russia still denies it. So it's a complicated relationship, as I said.

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And, well, with Iran I think we will hear about it more later. I think the tensions between Russia and Israel and Iran were slightly mitigated after we all discovered that the most problematic spot wasn't the Bushehr nuclear facility, the Bushehr reactor that Russia helped to built, but the secret Natanz nuclear facility.



But anyway, I mean, Russians are adamant, you know, against a preventive military strike or even strengthening sanctions, which is of course, you know, anathema to the Israeli position.

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And the last point, the peace process. Well, it's not really an official position, but I think Israel is not super interested in an active Russia role in the Middle East peace process because it's less pro-Israeli, of course, than Washington – if it can be called pro-Israeli at all.

And, you know, Israel is very unhappy that Russia not only not included Hamas and Hezbollah on the list of the terrorist organizations, but also, you know, two Hamas delegations, with Khaled Mashal, visited Moscow. And I think last year it was the first official Hezbollah delegation. And then when the Russian president went to Damascus and met with Mashal once again. So it's – you know, it's something that Israel protests.

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But, just to sum up, I think Russia and Israel, in the past 20 years, found ways, with a crisis here and there, to circumvent those topics and to cooperate on many other issues.

MR. ROJANSKY: OK. Natasha, thank you very much.

Karim?

KARIM SADJADPOUR: Thank you all for coming. Thanks, Matt, for inviting me.

Marwan used the word “popular alienation” to describe Arab sentiments vis-à-vis Russia, and I'm afraid that's going to be a common theme in my presentation as well, about popular Iranian alienation vis-à-vis Russia.

There's a quote from Henry Kissinger which comes to mind when I think about Iranian-Russian relations. Kissinger was talking about U.S.-Iran relations, and he said, quote, “There are few nations in the world with whom the United States has more common interest and less reason to quarrel than Iran.”

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And when I apply that quote to Iran-Russia, I would turn it on its head and say there are few nations in the world with whom Iran has less common interests and more reason to quarrel than Russia. But the relationship that you see right now, the strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia, and the strategic enmity between Iran and the United States I would argue is an historic anomaly which, I would argue, is going to be unsustainable in the coming years.

And I'm going to touch on four points, the historic context of Russian-Iranian relations, briefly. Matt gave me a look. I'll be brief in talking about the historic context, and

then talk about how the Islamic Republic of Iran sees Russia, how the Iranian population sees Russia. And then if I could step on Alexei's toes very briefly and talk about how Russia sees Iran, or an Iranian perspective on how Russia sees Iran – (laughter) – or an Iranian-American perspective on how Russia sees Iran.

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But, you know, historic context: There's a tremendous amount of historic baggage between Russia and Iran. I will start in 1828, the Treaty of Turkmenchay, in which Iran abdicated a huge part of its territory – we're talking about modern-day Azerbaijan, modern-day Armenia and parts of modern-day Turkmenistan.

And if you think 1828 is too long ago in the Iranian historic memory, you should remember that Iranian Shiites, on almost a weekly basis, celebrate various indignities which they were subjected to by Sunnis in the seventh century. So 1828 is not that long ago from the Iranian perspective. (Laughter.)

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More recently, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1946 the Soviet Union tried to annex a big chunk of Iranian territory – Iranian Azerbaijan. And, interestingly enough, it's something which I think has oftentimes fallen through the cracks of history books, but it was the United States, under President Harry Truman, which intervened and came to the defense of Iran's territorial integrity.

So we hear so much about Iran's – or America's role in the 1953 coup against Mosaddegh but we hear very little about America's role in restoring Iran's territorial integrity vis-à-vis Russia.

More recently, in 1979 – some of you know when Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005, there were several hostages that were taken at the U.S. Embassy in 1979 who alleged that Ahmadinejad had been one of their captors. He had jumped over the walls of the U.S. Embassy and was one of their captors.

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And it was later revealed that Ahmadinejad at that time – you know, I think he was probably a 22-year-old student in 1979 – he had actually advocated taking over the Soviet Embassy in Tehran and taking Soviet diplomats hostage.

So you see that, you know, that historic antipathy is shared by folks like Ahmadinejad, kind of the more religious types and more secular types as well. So there's a great deal of historic baggage between the two sides.

Now, how does the Islamic Republic of Iran see Russia, and what is the basis for the strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia? And there is a tremendous amount of strategic cooperation, at least from the vantage point of Iran's leadership.

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And there's a great quote which I found from the current Foreign Minister Salehi, and he was talking to – Russia has an Arabic television station, apparently, which I wasn't aware of, or an Arabic media outlet.

So Salehi was giving this interview to a Russian-Arabic media outlet. And I'll read it for you because I think it pretty much sums up the way that Iran perceives its relationship with Russia and the way that Iran, in a way, markets itself to Russians' leadership in terms of Iran's utility for Russia.

So he said, quote, "The United States is trying to expand its global hegemony. Therefore it must restrict or defeat its sole military rival, Russia. This is why NATO is expanding towards Russia and desires to encircle Russia. In this context, Iran is the sole remaining impediment to this encirclement."

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He goes on to say that the West tries gain hegemony over Iran in order to complete the encirclement of Russia. What would happen if Iran returns to the Western sphere of influence? Russia would be encircled by NATO. This is why I'm saying that Iran has a vital dimension for Russia, and the reverse is also true. In my opinion, Iran and Russia need each other.

Of course, Russia is concerned that Iran returns to the bosom of the West, but we tell the Russians that this will not happen. I'm very optimistic about the future of Iran-Russia relations.

And I'm going to talk a little bit more at the end about this concern that the Iranians play on – the perceived concern that the Russians have which the Iranians play on, that Russia is worried that Iran goes back to the "Western sphere of influence," to the American sphere of influence.

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So on one hand, Iran kind of plays to Russia's fears and Iran markets itself as having this anti-American alliance with Russia and with China. And there's virtually – there's very little economic cooperation between Iran and Russia. China, Russia and Iran are oftentimes mentioned in the same category, but in reality they – China and Russia have very different strategic interests vis-à-vis Iran. China needs energy; Iran has energy. That, in a simplistic way, is the basis of their relationship.

But for Iran and Russia, in addition to kind of this notion of being mutual adversaries or competitors with the United States, from Iran's vantage point there's important military, nuclear and intelligence cooperation. A former senior Iranian official told me that, aside from Syria, there is perhaps no country in the world with which Iran has better intelligence cooperation than Russia.

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All that said, there still is quite a lot of mistrust and discontent vis-à-vis Russia, even at the official level in Iran. Quite frequently in Iranian newspapers you read about criticism of Russia's, quote, unquote, "delay" tactics in completing the Bushehr reactor. Iran actually filed a lawsuit against Russia, arbitration lawsuit, for failing to deliver this S-300 missile system.

So even at an official level, despite this cooperation, despite the fact that Iran in many ways feels like it needs Russia to compete against the United States, this historic baggage, this mistrust and discontent very much remains.

Let me shift now to talking about how Russia is perceived in Iran on a popular level. And, to be honest, I think there are few nations in the world that are less popular than Iran in terms of, you know, how the body politic feels about Russia.

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There was tremendous influence, tremendous Russian soft power and tremendous Russian influence in Iran before the 1979 revolution, because Iran had a very strong communist party called the Tudeh Party. And the Tudeh Party in some ways were seen as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Soviet Union.

So, in many ways Russia did wield a lot of influence before the revolution. But I recall something someone once said to me in Tehran, which I think is felt by many Iranians. He said, well, the United States and Britain also had imperial ambitions in Iran but they also gave back something to Iranians. And Russia just took – they had imperial ambitions and they just took but they didn't give anything back.

And if you ask people, kind of, what do you associate now with Russia on a soft-power level, I think they will tell you these Tupolev airplanes that keep falling out of the sky, and I think they will tell you that there's a sentiment, widespread, among many Iranians, especially the younger generation, and I would imagine it's the same sentiment held among young Syrians, that it's Russia which is helping to keep this regime in power. Somehow Russia benefits from keeping the Islamic Republic in power.

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And in the 2009 uprisings in Tehran, in the aftermath of the contested elections, one of the slogans you heard on the streets was at Friday prayers – and the Friday prayer leader was trying to encourage people to shout, "Death to America; death to Israel," which is this kind of weekly chant of the Friday prayers of the last three decades in Iran. And the crowds responded with "Death to China; death to Russia."

And you can find this on YouTube. There was kind of thundering slogans of "Death to China; death to Russia." So I would say on a popular level that alienation which if felt in many parts of the Arab world, particularly Syria, is very much felt in Iran.

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Let me close on the last section, which, again, I apologize for stepping on Alexey's toes here, but it's the perspective of how Russia sees Iran or, again, an Iranian perspective on how Russia sees Iran.

And I think it's somewhat simple in that there's a perception that for Russia, Iran is a useful thorn in the side of the United States, this conflict between the United States and Iran, and Iran's self-inflicted isolation. It is expedient for Russia in that it inhibits Iran, which has the second-largest reserves of natural gas after Russia, from competing in European gas markets. Iran has not been able to exploit its gas resources.

It inhibits Iran from being able to wield influence in Central Asia, especially in countries which have been under Iran's historic sphere of influence, like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan. Iran has done a woeful job wielding influence there that's beneficial to Russia.

Iran doesn't speak out about the Chechen issue. You know, they speak nonstop about the suffering of the Palestinians. They don't raise a peep about the Chechen issue for fear of alienating the Russians.

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And what I find interesting in all of this – and this will conclude, Matt – is that in a way when we talk about – again, going back to this issue of China – Chinese interests and Russian interests vis-à-vis Iran – I don't think that China – Chinese officials necessarily go to bed at night worrying about a nuclear-armed Iran. That's probably not high on their list of priorities.

But, by all accounts, this is a concern for Russian officials for Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and yet it still seems that what's more of a concern for Russian officials is competing with the United States rather than averting the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran.

So let me leave it there. Thank you.

[00:36:05]

MR. ROJANSKY: OK, Karim, thank you very much – a tour de force.

Alexey, bring us home.

ALEXEY MALASHENKO: Thank you very much. And I will even double, I think, because practically anything about Russia's politics in Middle East was said. So I have to agree, I have to generalize a little bit, and I have to add something.

So, how Russia – how Russia does perceive itself vis-à-vis Muslim world – it's the first question – and vis-à-vis of course Middle East. And it seems that Russia has no adequate picture. But since the beginning of 2000s, since Putin came to power, indeed the

Kremlin and Moscow began to think about how to work in Middle East and in Muslim world in generally. Will it be Iran, Afghanistan, well, and so on?

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So, 2004, '5, '6, Putin made several trips to Arab countries, to Muslim countries, and he attempted to understand what Russia is able to do, and how could relations between Arab countries, Muslim countries and Moscow and Russia could be constructed.

When he came back to Moscow, he didn't bring something new. I thought at that time that he understood – that he didn't understand – that he didn't understand how Russia is able to work. He signed several contracts in Libya, in Saudi Arabia, in Algeria. He signed a contract with Egypt but it led to nothing, practically. So I think that that was a first step of Russian government – of post-Soviet Russian government because Soviet Union had a very strong position there.

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To understand what could be done, what is the ideology of some Russian-Arab-Muslim relationship? And I think it's very important because since Putin came to power and this – (inaudible) – there was an idea that Russia must, or is able to, occupy a special niche, special political niche a little bit closer to Muslims, to Muslimhood. Because of Eurasianism and because of some character of Russian society, Russia maybe is able to perform a role of bridge. It's a stupidity in my opinion, but anyway it was declared.

What does mean a bridge? It means a possibility of becoming mediator. If you ask me, mediator between whom and whom, I don't know, but practically it was a semi-official declaration. Russia is able to mediate between West and the rest: between Iran and the West, between Libya and other countries, and so on.

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And indeed – indeed Moscow Foreign Ministry, the presidential administration, they attempt to do something. If you followed at that time the events as far as relations between Arab world and Muslim world and Russia is concerned, indeed there was a number of delegations in Moscow, outside Moscow and so on.

It led to nothing. Russia practically failed as far as its position of a mediator is concerned in the situation in Iran. Iran failed also in Middle East in the conflict between Israel and Palestinians. Then was the case of Libya, when indeed maybe that could be the only one chance when Mikhail Margelov attempted to talk to Gadhafi, and he did his best but he failed.

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At the moment we observe how it's going with Syria. I think that you agree with me if I say that it will lead to nothing. Of course Russia is able to show some of its activity. Of

course Russian newspapers and electronical mass media are full with some information of Russian activity.

But in fact, even in Moscow itself they understand very well that Russia is important. They can talk, they can describe, they can admit some declaration, but everybody knows that regime of Bashar al-Assad will disappear, even if Russia dares to send several ships. Well, it means nothing.

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More, if we look at what Russia is doing, practically Russia prefers to deal with charismatic, authoritarian dictatorship. Well, you can call it the post-Soviet tradition or Soviet tradition. (Laughter.) OK, I agree. But look at the map: The regimes who are closer to Russia, indeed before they had final relations with Moscow, even in the time of Brezhnev, and now there is a heritage. The line of such kind of friendship continues. To what it extent it will lead, let's see.

Just I don't want to talk a lot about Russian material interests. If somebody is able to tell me how many wells – I mean oil wells – Russia kept in Middle East, in Libya, in Iraq, I don't know, and nobody knows. I think that a number of wells is minimal.

[00:43:11]

About arms trades – some that you know – about planes, about aircraft and so on. But this is a very old material and everybody, including in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan dreams how to replace it. And if I were Putin or Medvedev, I would think more not about trade with Syria, Libya and so on, but what to do with China and India, because from that point Moscow is losing its opposition in these two countries, key countries for Russian military production.

Well, before I spoke about Russian dreams, about Russian ideology, about so-called Russian interest and so on, but at the moment, what Russia is able to do – what I am able to do as President Putin since March.

Is Russia able to protect Iran? No. Is Russia able to keep some regime of Assad? No. If Russia is able to – well, to make – to make Bashar to evaluate, to be more normal? No. (Laughter.) I remember the time of the Soviet Union in '70s and '80s. At that time I lived in Egypt and Libya and Algeria. These countries, these lands were full of shoravi (ph), of Soviets – full with. And of course these countries were full of some Russian military assistance, yeah? At the moment when we have nothing, it disappears. It disappears.

[00:45:22]

Russia is losing its alliances, like Gadhafi, like Bashar and so on. Who will come instead? Nobody knows, but I am sure of it: Russia is unable to recalculate – it's not my expression – recalculate its ties, its links, its position with those who will come. What do you think? If somebody in Moscow is able to talk to Muslim Brothers – in the time when

Primakov was foreign minister, I think it was possible. At the moment, I don't know. Maybe, perhaps, but I am not sure.

So Russia, well, isn't ready to deal with new, new, new, new, new, new political and religious elites everywhere, because I'm not sure that Iran, Ahmadinejad, slogans of Khomeini, it's forever. In 20 years, in dozen of years, somebody will come, and what they actually will do?

[00:46:32]

It means that indeed Russia has no strategic political – some line for the future. And I don't know people who is able to elaborate. Is somebody from those – who is coming. In Egypt – well, in Libya, somewhere else, in Yemen maybe, are they interested to improve relations with Russia? I think not because they have choice; they have options between America, Europe, China maybe, and somebody else.

So I think that while – excuse me to be so pessimist, but anyway, I think that Russia is a force, is a country, is a power who is disappearing. Of course it will occupy a niche. Of course it will occupy a certain place. But I think that it's disappearing. It's strategic disappearing. It's forever.

[00:47:50]

Its conclusion – if I have one minute, a short appendix, because sometimes I am asked about the impact of Arab Spring and “Islamic Winter” on Russian Muslimhood.

Well, when it began in February, in March and so on, indeed that was a democratic spring. And I'm responsible for my words. Nobody was interested in Caucasus, inside Russian Muslim community. Nobody was interested while it was going in Egypt, while in Libya and so on.

Since the moment they saw how Islamic activity is raising and what political parties and movements are coming – are moving to power – the interest jumps up. And in Dagestan, the biggest republic of North Caucasus, sometimes they begin to say if it's permitted to do such things in Cairo, in Libya, why not here?

[00:49:08]

And as I know, the same – the same, the same, what the same – the same ideas began to emerge in Uzbekistan, in Tajikistan and even more. But I repeat: It's only appendix. If there are some questions, I attempt to answer. I thank you very much.

MR. ROJANSKY: Thank you very much, Alexey.

You know, listening to each of these presentations, I kind of distilled two basic points about Russia in the Middle East. One is that it's a loyal realist. It's a faithful realist, except it's an incompetent faithful realist. And so the results are as Alexey described them, and the strategy looks as bleak as it does.



And the second thing is that Russia's relationships, to the extent that the Kremlin's relationships with governments in the region can be described in relatively pure terms, it's the enemy of my enemy, that type of scenario. The problem appears to be – and this is true on both sides – that, increasingly, the enemy that matters more is the internal enemy.

[00:50:11]

And so, what I wonder – and maybe we're too early to have this conversation; certainly I would suggest we are on the Russian side – what happens when the relationship that matters is between a body politic and a body politic and no longer between Vladimir Putin and Bashar Assad, or Ahmadinejad or any of these others?

But I'll just leave that out there, and I want to open the floor because I'm sure we have questions. Just make sure – wait for the microphone and give us your name and affiliation. And, also, I can't see pretty much anything down the middle because of the cleave (ph) light, so keep your hand really high up.

Right here and then – we'll go here and then I think I see a hand back there after.

Q: This question is open, but I want to know, following, you know, the Department of State and all the discussions that are now going on in the United Nations where the U.S. –

[00:51:02]

MR. ROJANSKY: Name?

Q: Sorry?

MR. ROJANSKY: Name?

Q: My name is Ande Jute (ph) from Argentina Perfil newspaper.

I am seeing that there is a lot of pressure from the U.S. to Russia, especially the United Nations, in order to make Russia urgently move towards help when the human rights are really in danger. And I see that in the case of Venezuela, for example, where Russia has a lot of exchanges with the government of Chavez.

I feel that the Russians feel much better there and they show – and there is a much more public appearance, almost more trips from Russia to Latin America to these countries because we don't see this kind of human rights violation that we are seeing in other countries.

[00:51:47]

And this is the question: I want to know that there is a limit in the Russia politics when they see that there is massive human rights problems, and when there is really what we call diatribe. I think that the Russians go more for diatribe, but when we see these kind of

human rights problems, that Russia tries to turn and the situation gets in a different mood, right? This is my question.

MR. ROJANSKY: So, how cynical are they?

And then let's take that second question and then we'll go to the panel. Ann, can you –

Q: Intels Parti (ph), and I am a doctoral student at the George Washington University.

It was a very informative and wonderful discussion, but I was also expecting that the panel would touch on Afghanistan also because Afghanistan – I'm not sure I should place it in Central Asia or South Asia or Middle East, but Afghanistan occupies a pivotal position at the moment, and Russia's strategic interests are connected to it.

What type of regime Russia would like to have in Afghanistan in near future vis-à-vis its strategic interests with America?

[00:53:02]

MR. ROJANSKY: OK, great. So, we've got the question about human rights in the U.N. international context and then what are Russia's interests in Afghanistan.

MR. MALASHENKO: Human rights; it's not our topic.

MS. MOZGOVAYA: That's Russia's usual –

(Cross talk, laughter.)

MR. MALASHENKO: Well, yes, it's very interesting, and I don't know how to respond. You know that human rights, it's a big Russian problem. It's a problem which irritates, and Putin, and even Medvedev, by the way.

So just I don't know even how to answer your question because I think that after four months something will change. And I think that the changes would be rather negative because, at the moment, while we have manifestations and demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg, of course administration feels that it can encounter some problems.

[00:54:05]

But after Putin will be elected, and no doubt it will be so, let's see. Let's see I'm right that the problem of human relations will deteriorate. I don't want to predict yeah, but anyway in Russia – in Russia because I came from Russia two weeks ago, we discussed this problem and we fear.

About Afghanistan – about Afghanistan, well, maybe you will disagree with me, but it seems that Afghanistan is not a key problem for Russia. Of course they talk about it, but

practically Russia did nothing for some peaceful solution. They say they promise, but they do nothing.

And besides the Afghan situation, the situation in that country – Islamic radicalism, Talibs and so on – is a very good pretext for Moscow to tell to Central Asia and countries, well, you live under the threat of Talibs, of Islamic extremists, so you have to be closer to Russia.

[00:55:15]

From that point of view I think that – maybe it sounds paradoxical, but the conflict inside Afghanistan gives Russia an opportunity to – well, to impact on Central Asia.

MR. ROJANSKY: Yeah, I just would add – and then I think we can go back to questions – that I think Russia would love any kind of government in Kabul that stops the drug trade. That's really Russia's main interest –

MR. MALASHENKO: Sure.

MR. ROJANSKY: – across the border. And that, by the way, historically was – the Taliban government was effective at that, so that's fine.

OK, a question here.

Q: Yeah, my name is Alexei Grigoriev. I'm working for Voice of America Russian Service. Can I ask a reverse question, what we can say about Arabic and Iranian influence inside Russia? How big, you know, this influence? And what strategy, Arabic country and Tehran, towards Russia? Thank you.

[00:56:15]

MR. ROJANSKY: Great. And let's take the second one right there.

Q: Thank you. Mike Kraft. I'm a counterterrorism specialist, but in an earlier career I served on the United Press International Middle East Desk in London during the '67 war. And I'm wondering if what we're seeing with Russia involved in the Middle East isn't really a throwback to the '60s.

The Russians played a major role at precipitating the '67 war by putting out reports that the Israelis were massing on the border. They were sending a large quantity of arms. And the interpretation of many of the British commentators at the time was that Russia had several goals: A, access to a port, Syrian ports; customers for its arms sales; and probably most important, as somebody alluded to, was countering the American, and to a large extent, British influence.

[00:57:12]

It seems to me these elements still exist, especially with Putin basically, you know, holding power for the last few years, with maybe the added dimension of the economics that they referred to. It's in Russia's interests to keep the pot stirring to keep oil prices high and keep the Iranians out of the gas markets. So I'm just wondering what your view of that is.

MR. ROJANSKY: Great. You know, Mike, just as an aside – and I mentioned this to Karim earlier – Ronen Bergman's long piece in the New York Times magazine has just been pre-posted. And you're not the only one thinking that it looks like 1967. The problem is, no one is addressing the Russian dimension of that, whether Russia is playing it the same way that they did. And I think you make an interesting case.

So, do you want to take that and –

[00:57:59]

MS. MOZGOVAYA: I will take part of it. (Chuckles.) If anything, my colleagues can continue.

So, about the interests, I think, of Russia in – you know, in a conflict, let's say, with Iran, I think that Russia is – you know, its economy is based on – basically on the exports of the oil, so they are interested to some point in a great conflict to keep the oil prices high enough, but they're not interested at all, say, you know, regional war or things going out of control.

Talking about the influence of, I think, the Arab countries and Iran and inside Russia, I think Russia was, for many years, concerned of the influence of the extreme Islam in its soft belly, you know, in Central Asia countries, and it treated very aggressively any attempts of, you know, foreign Wahhabis, you know, to come and preach in its mosques.

[00:58:58]

It was – well, in Chechnya and in Dagestan and so on you have tons of mosques. You can barely find, I think, serious foreign influence, although the attempts I think were very widespread – widespread. And I think that, you know, of course Russia's dealing with Chechnya didn't add to popularity in many neighborhoods in the Middle East.

I think the point that we kind of missed in the discussion was – and it is something that we can add to this Russian pragmatism, pursuing its interests and so on – Russia also wants, you know, to prove its standing against NATO, and the nationalism in Russia makes sometimes statements and takes stands that are not pragmatic at all.

[00:59:53]

Even with Syria you can say that arms sales are a financial interest, but, you know, Syria does not always return its debts. So I am not sure financially it's such a smart decision. So it's more like to stay player in the only place that's still – that is ready to cooperate.

MR. ROJANSKY: Marwan?

MR. MUASHER: Just a word on Russia's position vis-à-vis the conflict and whether it's different from the '60s – I think it's very different from, you know, the era of the '60s in that it is amazing how quickly Russia dropped out of the picture after the end of the Cold War, vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict.

[01:00:43]

So for Russia it was less, I think, an ideological position and more of a Cold War issue. When the Cold War ended, Russia's interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict seemed to have ended as well. After the Madrid peace conference, I mean, Russia's efforts regarding the conflict were minimal, if not existing.

Russia in the, you know, few years ago appointed, for example, a Middle East envoy to look at the Arab-Israeli conflict. That was really more – again, mostly pro forma than anything else. Can anybody of you even name who that envoy is? I dealt with him personally and I can't even name him. (Laughter.)

So in all seriousness, I mean, for Russia it seems – and for the people of the Middle East, this is becoming clear that Russia's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict stemmed mostly of out a, you know, Cold War confrontation than a genuine position.

When you talk about the United States, at least you can tell what the interests of the United States are in the region, vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. You know, Israel, oil, stability, et cetera. When it comes to Russia, if these are Russia's interests, they certainly did not pursue them after the end of the –

MS. MOZGOVAYA: They hosted a peace conference in Moscow, though.

[01:02:18]

MR. MUASHER: Yeah, you know, that was the end of it, which was in '92 – January of '92 and that was the end of it. China, at least, you know, does not claim maybe – does not claim to have a lot of political influence. But China shows its interest in the region with money. Russia does not show any interest with money, even if they have – you know, even if they have it. So I just wanted to make that point.

MR. SADJAPOUR: I thought that Natasha captured well the Russian position on conflict with Iran in that it's expedient for them to have this continued cold conflict. But they've been very outspoken in opposition to any type of military attack or hot conflict, which I find interesting because in some ways I would see it in Russia's interest if there were to be a military attack on Iran, for a few reasons.

One, obviously oil prices skyrocket which benefits Iran – benefits Russia economically. And by the way, China would be the big loser. Again, when we lump Russia and China together and their interests toward Iran, I think these countries actually have very different interests. China would be the huge loser in a military attack on Iran.

In my opinion, Russia would benefit economically. It would likely – in my opinion, a military attack on Iran – further entrench the Islamic Republic, alienate the Iranian public vis-à-vis the United States and keep Iran in some ways under Russia's sphere of influence.

[01:03:51]

So I personally see that they will actually benefit from a military attack on Iran. What I find interesting is that, you know, we may kind of cynically dismiss what Russian officials say publically about that topic. But even privately when I looked at some of the Wikileaks cables, even privately in our meetings with U.S. diplomats, they were very concerned about the prospect of a military attack on Iran.

Let me just talk briefly about Iran's role in Russia. And I think there's – it's too negligible to speak of Iran's role within Russia. What I think is more interesting is Iran's role in the former Soviet Union.

And this is a source of criticism that many Iranians have of the Islamic Republic and that the Islamic Republic has taken great pains and invested literally billions of dollars in courting Arabs in South Lebanon and in Palestine and they have virtually neglected places like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, especially Samarkand and Bukhara which are famed cities in the Persian Empire.

They've neglected these areas which have historically been under Iran's sphere of influence and places where oftentimes the folks are looking for some type of a greater Iranian role, especially in Tajikistan. So I think, going to Matt's question about, you know, how might things change if you have a representative government in Iran.

[01:05:36]

I would say that being one of the changes that you would see in Iranian foreign policy, that less courting of the Palestinians and the Lebanese Shiites and more focus on Iran's neighbors and, again, kind of cultural cousins in places like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

MR. ROJANSKY: Great, OK. Back there?

Q: Yes, thanks. I'm Dave Pollock from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Thank you very much for really interesting presentations. I want to focus back on the issue of Syria and Russian policy there right now. And I guess this question is directed toward Mr. Malashenko, the Russian speaker.

Do you think that the Russian leadership today agrees with you that Assad's regime is doomed or do they still think, maybe wrongly in your personal opinion, but do they still think that he can be saved somehow? And if they do agree with you privately, let's say deep down in their hearts, would they be willing, do you think, to make some kind of a deal for a transition that would remove Assad from power somehow and still try to preserve Russian influence in the country? Thank you.

MR. ROJANSKY: OK, and we'll take another one here.

Q: My name is Jafar Jafari with – (inaudible) – Television. I'm having trouble actually reconciling the general theme that's coming from the panelists that Russia's influence in the Middle East is eroding, and some even termed it failure.

And I take a look at that with Russia's exercise of the veto power at the U.N. which was unprecedented for the Soviet Union at the time. And this was really the first time ever that a member of the Security Council actually has exercised the veto power on behalf of an Arab cause.

[01:07:48]

Not only that, but also China as well – China has never had an open policy regarding the Arab World. Now, having said that, the premise that some of the panelists were talking about that Russia has historical baggage as well as resentment among the Arab population, and that may be true. And that's true with every superpower worldwide throughout history.

But on the other hand, isn't this position that Russia has exercised at the U.N. supporting its renewed influence in the region?

MR. ROJANSKY: OK. Alexey, I guess will you take the first one?

MR. MALASHENKO: Just the question about Assad and so on – wow. (Laughter.) I think – it's my private opinion – that in Moscow are tired of Bashar because indeed they did their best and sometimes – this is an opinion – but indeed he is a little bit abnormal because – well, practically everything was done.

But even now, just – I forgot; maybe it was last week. Once again, Moscow proposed to come to Russian capital and to talk once again. But just it's unbelievably difficult to imagine how – to imagine how it could go, such kind of negotiations.

So I think that there is an opinion that the pressure – the possibility to impact on Bashar is a little bit exhaustive, yeah? I think if somebody doesn't kill him – I mean, in Damascus – finally he will come to Moscow. How it will happen, I don't know. Maybe it will be a top mystery.

[01:10:09]

But I think that at the moment it is the only one place where he can continue to work as a dentist – oh no – (laughter).

MS. MOZGOVAYA: Psychologist.

MR. MALASHENKO: I'm sorry, yes. By the way, like Askar Akayev, who came to Moscow and who now works at Moscow University. Just I'm not sure. I'm not sure that I'm right. But I think that this history with 60 – 36 aircrafts, it is destined for the future and not for Assad. It's a very interesting tactic because these aircrafts could come – could arrive to Syria only since 2013 and everybody's sure that in 2013 it will not be Assad.

MR. ROJANSKY: Can I just inject, I think you may be giving the Russian leadership too much credit for thinking objectively right now. I think they're under a lot of psychological pressure not to think about regime change, period – no, quite seriously. I don't know that they're drawing a direct analogy but it's not a comfortable line of thought if you're sitting in the Kremlin right now. Marwan?

[01:11:37]

MR. MUASHER: I think the notion that because Russia can cast a veto in the Security Council is a suggestion that its influence is not eroding in the Middle East is – I mean, I disagree with that notion completely.

First of all, the Russian veto in the U.N. is not in disagreement today with the Western world. It is in disagreement with the majority view of the Arab League itself; that is, the region does not agree with Russia. And this is a situation where, you know, you can't be more Catholic than the pope, basically.

The Syrian public itself – most of the publics of the region are in disagreement with this view. And if you look at the countries who have been sort of the minority view in the Arab League regarding Syria, it is Lebanon for obvious reasons, it is Iraq and it is Algeria. These are the countries that are – all the other countries of the Arab League disagree with the Syrian position today. Russia is not going to be able to maintain its position in the Security Council indefinitely.

There will come a time when the killings in the country will demand that something happens. And the excuses that Russia gives today for why it is standing in the Security Council cannot hold forever when you killed, you know, 40, 50 people every single day as it is happening today.

[01:13:19]

Today, I mean, as we speak there is a new Security Council resolution in the making. And maybe Russia will veto that one too. But there will be another one and another one. And I think at some point in time Russia is not going to be able to withstand the tide that is coming its way.

Syria is the last Arab country that is an ally of Russia. And when Syria falls, Russia is going to be left with no friends in the Arab world. And I think I would agree with Alexey that, in my own view, we are witnessing a strategic disappearance, as you call it, forever of Russian influence in the region.

MR. ROJANSKY: OK. We had a couple over here. Yeah, right here?

Q: My name is Nic Wondra. I'm a student at SAIS. First, I'm like to challenge Karim to defend your logic how any military action or war in Iran could possibly benefit Russia. Besides in oil price, I don't see any military action on an immediate border of any great power being beneficial to that great power. And second, I would like anyone on the



panel to elaborate how Russian policymakers perceive regime change versus the integrity of a state.

Right now, it seems to me that the regime in Syria is a direct parallel of territorial integrity, which is something that concerns the Russian establishment very much, particularly regarding NATO and missions in many places around the world.

Is this a concern as you see it and is there space for Russian policy to change from this being one and the same to being a separation between the regime in Syria and the state of Syria?

MR. ROJANSKY: OK, and there was another right here.

[01:15:27]

Q: Cathy Cosman. This is a question to Alexey. You mentioned that you would be willing to elaborate a little bit further about the possible effect of Muslim Brotherhood, et cetera, in certain governments or societies in Central Asia and also I was wondering whether anyone could address an important but tangential player in all of this and that's Turkey, how Russia – how Russia interacts with Turkey.

MR. ROJANSKY: Whoa, OK. So we have a lot of questions here. So Karim, maybe you can start with just on the benefit, if any of – I think what you said was benefit of cold confrontation, right?

MR. SADJAPOUR: No, I said that that's what – Natasha said that's what Russian officials publicly articulate. I agreed with her that that's what Russian officials publicly articulate and I went further to say that I see it could be expedient for Russia to have a U.S. military attack on Iran.

We're not talking about an Iraq-style regime change where you have 130,000 troops. We're talking about limited military strikes on Iran's nuclear installations, in addition to the risk premium oil prices skyrocketing, which is useful for Russia.

As I mentioned with that quote from the Foreign Minister Salehi, the concerns – the Russian concerns, which the Iranians very much play upon, that Iran falls back under the sphere of influence of the West.

In my opinion, a military attack on Iran – a U.S. military attack on Iran further entrenches the Islamic Republic and it further entrenches Iran under the sphere of influence of Russia and it alienates the Iran body politic. It soils the oasis of goodwill in Iran at a popular level which exists vis-à-vis the United States.

[01:17:18]

So for those reasons, I see a limited military strike on Iran – a limited U.S. military strike on Iran as a net benefit for Russia. And by the way, no one has ever said that of all the various scenarios you look at in terms of how Iran would retaliate – and I've taken part

in many of these crisis simulations – Iran lobbing missiles into the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, Iran unleashing Hezbollah, Hamas, none of the scenarios call for Iran to do anything in Chechnya or in places of Russia's sphere of influence. So again, I see the costs for Russia somewhat negligible and the benefits, you know, what I just mentioned.

MR. ROJANSKY: And I think I can dispense with your question about this divergence between regime stability and intervention and that's exactly the point. I think Russia draws a red line at what NATO did in Libya.

But the Syrian regime, as Alexey suggests, can be brittle and can fall apart entirely without NATO intervention on a concrete, you know, military level. And the second, I want to turn to Alexey on the second basket of questions about Muslim Brotherhood in Central Asia. But I also have to add a question.

[01:18:25]

MR. MALASHENKO: About Turkey, yes?

MR. ROJANSKY: And Turkey, yeah.

MR. MALASHENKO: About Turkey.

MR. ROJANSKY: And I want to get Natasha in as well. But Alexey, can I add a question for you to consider too, and maybe Marwan as well. Does it matter that Muslim Brotherhood-aligned parties are also now – that essentially their attention is being more widely spread to also legitimate opportunities to win power, that they don't have to do it?

In Central Asia, clearly it would be – it would have to be under the table. But now they have opportunities sort of all over the place. So does it matter in terms of their willingness to go in that direction?

MR. MALASHENKO: I don't know. (Laughter.) I don't know indeed because nobody knows. But let's imagine the situation where while semiofficial penetration of Muslim Brothers took place in Caucasus. What kind of reaction it will have? I think that will be a typical double reaction.

And in any case – in any case some members, I would say, of Russian political establishment began to – not to renew but maybe construct their relations with Muslim Brothers. Don't forget that in Russian Duma, in Russian parliament there is a special Islamic committee who deals with them unofficially. So let's see. But it will go.

[01:19:50]

And about Turkey, yes, if it's possible. It's a very interesting question. Sometimes they say in Russian Federation that we observe now a second or reemergence of Turkish influence but under Turkic slogans like it was in '90s.

Now, maybe they will be more successful because in '90s it was a decline in Russia and in Central Asia. But they bring – they say that they bring with them a moderate Islam. But I wonder, this is – so this is a moderate Islam which comes from a Turkish moderate Islamism who support Muslim Brothers in Egypt, yes?

MR. ROJANKSY: Natasha?

MS. MOZGOVAYA: Wow, let me start with Turkey. I think it's once again quite ironic that Israel, for example, finds itself, you know, wary of Turkey, you know, along with Russia but for diametrically, you know, opposite reasons because Israel's – you know, relationship between Ankara and Jerusalem deteriorated on the basis of its being, you know, too pro-Islamic and supporting flotilla and so on.

[01:21:13]

And in Russia it's quite the opposite because they don't like Turkey now because of their, you know, pro-Western orientation, their membership in NATO, their acceptance of the anti-missile shield and so on. So, and they don't like Turkish intervention in Syria. I think the point is that Russia doesn't like now any idea of interventions any way – interventions, sanctions, anything that can be emulated or at some point maybe even applied to Russia itself.

So I think that – I think both of you mentioned it before, that dealing with preoccupied now very much with the domestic problems, Russia actually sees in all those interventions the ghosts or possible demise of its own regime. I would say that it doesn't look like anything like 1970 and it's more likely maybe 1905 protest. But still, it's not pleasant for the current regime.

And the last thing, I think, why do the Russian regime sticks with Syria now, although there is no apparent reason to do it. I think it's just inertia for some – you know, for some part because unlike cooperation with Iran, with Syria it was historic Soviet cooperation and they don't really want to look bad.

It will be a serious embarrassment, especially after the American president, you know, called on Bashar al-Assad to step down, what, like the Russian president will do it. You know, it's unthinkable.

MR. ROJANSKY: Too bad they didn't go first, right? Marwan?

MR. MUASHER: I want to say a word about the Muslim Brotherhood. I mean, I'll make a prediction here which is that I don't think foreign policy under the Muslim Brotherhood in any Arab country where they will have a major influence is going to change much. And this might come as a surprise to some of you.

But we are dealing, I think, with a Muslim Brotherhood that is pragmatic, that will follow positions that are less ideological and more, you know, more pragmatic. They understand that they have severe economic challenges facing their countries. It is absolutely the wrong policy to isolate yourself and not deal with the outside world.

[01:23:37]

And I maintain that even applies to the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, that you might not find many, if any, Egyptian officials meeting with Israeli officials in the near future. Frankly, Israeli officials are having a hard time meeting with any Arabs these days, not Muslim Brotherhood or otherwise. So I don't think that Russia is going to find a hard time dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood, if it wants to. But it's not – I don't think that there will be a resistance on part of Muslim Brotherhood, let governments in the Middle East, to deal with Russia or anybody else for that matter.

MR. ROJANSKY: Alexey?

[01:24:22]

MR. MALASHENKO: A very short remark concerning Muslim Brother. Muslim Brother was the first organization who penetrate from abroad to north Caucasus. It was '89, in the Soviet times, and that was a branch from Syria or maybe from Jordan.

MR. ROJANSKY: OK, I think we have time for one more question, if there is one. No? Anything final from the panel? No? OK, all right, thank you all.

MR. MUASHER: Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)