



PANELISTS DEBATE

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Before we turn to the audience for a brief Q&A session, I wanted to ask the panel whether you have any questions, very briefly, for each other? Any comment particularly on something you have heard today or question for somebody else?

I see a hand here already.

Youssef Amrani, Royal Cabinet, Morocco

Thank you, Jim. I think today that we have raised very important questions; we are dealing with the future of the Middle East. I want to raise two points. We should not have in mind reshaping the Middle East by creating new entities. It was in the back. We need strong states; we do not need Jihad states in the region. To be able to build up a new Middle East with shared prosperity, good governance, democracy, we need strong states. We need to solve the ongoing conflict on a certain basis and that is the spirit of compromise, negotiation, political solution, but more especially the respect of the sovereignty and integrity of states. It is essential because some ideas were put forward about reshaping the Middle East. This is impossible because Jihad states will only create a vacuum, and a vacuum benefits the extremists. It is what is happening in the region. Four or five years ago, we were unable to find a solution to the Syrian crisis. At that time there was only one movement, the Jabhat al-Nusra linked to Al Qaeda and Iraq. They were not ISIS but we failed because there were some vetoes. My last point, and I benefit from the presence of my colleague from China to say today that, yes, we need China to be more active in the Security Council as well as in the region. Thank you for your insight as well as your ideas. We need China to be more proactive and we need China to play a role. Otherwise, we see that today the Security Council is paralysed, with no solutions put forward and there are always vetoes when it comes to our crisis in the Middle East. Maybe we should reshape the Security Council, maybe rethink, but not the region. Thank you.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Are there any other comments?

Abdulaziz Othman bin Sager, Chairman of the Gulf Research Center, Saudi Arabia

I was one of the Saudis who visited China in early November 1980, and my visit at that time was organised by Chase Manhattan's office in Beijing. I would like to ask our Chinese friend, our perception of China in the region is one of a buyer and seller relationship; it has not really moved to a strategic relationship with the Middle East. What we have seen so far is China following Russia on many of the issues. Do you really have an independent foreign policy when it comes to the Middle East? We have seen your position in Syria, which for us looks very strange. I would just like to verify whether there is a Chinese foreign policy towards the Middle East, one that is independent of Russia?

Xiaosheng Gong, China's Special Envoy on the Middle East issue

Yes. I should say that we have our own foreign policy, especially towards the Middle East. Sometimes we may have the same views as the Russians but, actually, I think we also have some differences. I know what you mean, especially on the Syrian issue. For the Syrian issue, I would like to say something about why China vetoed that several times. A lot of people say it is because China considers its interests in the Middle East. What is China's



interest in Syria? If we talk about energy, oil, everybody knows that we import energy, oil, especially from Saudi Arabia, compared to Syria, which is nothing at all. In 60 years of trade between China and Syria there has been almost nothing. If this is not a question of interest, then why? We strongly believe that we should not be involved in domestic affairs. This is a basic standard based on international law and also on the UN Charter, so we hope that this issue will find a solution through the people themselves, the Syrians. Not just regarding Syria but regarding other issues, we will always respect the fact that countries make their own choices. We will respect whomever they choose as leader. Everybody talks about the American election and Trump or Hilary. Personally, I do not know either of them but we should respect that it is the American election and the American people should make that decision, make their own choice. In Syria, we also believe we should respect the Syrian people's choice. There is another very important reason. Today, we have a lot of expert leaders in the region. Everybody knows we had a very tough experience over the last 30 years; there is the Iraq issue; there is Libya. We have had too many hard lessons we should have learned before the Iraq war. The experts warned political leaders that after the Iraq war there would be a lot of problems: Shiite-Sunni problems, Kurdish problems, and other terrorist issues. We should have learned from that.