

DEBATE

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Our time is very short and Saeb Erekat has generously yielded the floor for the audience to ask questions. I see a hand right here. Could you identify yourself and any affiliations?

Suresh Kumar, Chief Editor of *Africaindia.org* and *Indian Journal of African Studies*; Head and Director of the Department of African Studies, University of Delhi and of the Centre for African Studies, UGC

Thank you, Chair. I have a question for Youssef Amrani. You have spoken about Morocco's role in the Arab world and recently Morocco has shown its willingness to join the African Union. What are the Moroccan government's parameters for strengthening peace, security, and government in the North African region?

Youssef Amrani, Royal Cabinet, Morocco

Thank you very much. I would say that for Morocco, Africa is one of the major priorities for foreign policy, so we have been working for Africa for a long time at the bilateral level. We have a very unique approach towards our neighbours, partners in Africa and I am happy to see in the room Sheikh Tidiane Gadio, Senegal's former Foreign Minister. For us, we need to build up a zone of shared prosperity in the region through common projects and we are doing this. Morocco is working for peace and stability in Africa and today is the major contributor to peace operations in Africa. For us it is a priority. When it comes to joining the African Union, I think today the parameters are changing. As in the past, Morocco will continue to play its role in Africa, solving conflicts and promoting peace and stability, but there is an appeal from our partners that we should bring our contribution to the African Union. Last point: we will, of course, work with the African Union, but we also give great importance to the regional integration grouping. In this sense the experience in Africa in the original groupings like [Inaudible] and so on are a very successful tool for political dialogue and resolution of conflict, as well as a platform for economic operations. At the end of the day, what is important is how much wealth and how much growth you create.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

I feel the next panel breathing down our necks but there is a question right here.

Fathallah Oualalou, ancien ministre de l'Économie et des Finances, Maroc

Je suis un ancien ministre de l'Économie et des Finances marocain. Si vous permettez, je voudrais revenir sur l'intervention de mon ami Moratinos. Je crois que vous avez raison, cher ami, de relever l'intérêt historique de 2017. Vous avez parlé du centenaire de la déclaration de Balfour, il y a aussi les 70 ans de la première guerre arabo-israélienne et de la création d'Israël, sans oublier le 50^e anniversaire de la guerre des Six jours de 1967. Malgré l'incertitude qui prédomine aujourd'hui, il est important - et vous l'avez dit - que les Européens prennent une initiative. Aujourd'hui, il est essentiel de lutter contre le terrorisme, contre Daesh, tout faire pour qu'il n'y ait pas de dislocation des entités nationales dans le monde arabe (la Syrie, l'Irak, la Libye par exemple). Mais en même temps, il faut redonner espoir et on ne peut pas redonner espoir si on ne traite pas le cœur du problème, qui est la question palestinienne. Si on ne lie pas ce qui se passe dans ce monde au fait qu'on est en train d'oublier la question palestinienne c'est que vraiment on est à nouveau en train de commettre une grave erreur d'analyse.

**Ichiro Fujisaki, Former Ambassador of Japan to the United States**

Thank you, Jim, for giving me the floor. I am one of those who are rather concerned that the image of Muslims and Islam, has been very much affected by so called IS, ISIS, or Islamic State. Is there thinking from Islamic States, to ask the world media not to call them IS, ISIS, or Islamic State, even though they call themselves that? I think that the word 'Islam' has been very negatively affected by those groups and will continue to be for a long time. I am very concerned about it. Thank you very much.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Saeb, that echoes something that you were saying earlier. Could you briefly comment?

Saeb Erekat, Palestinian Chief Negotiator, Palestine

With all due respect to Christianity and Judaism, the teachings of our Quran and Sunna could be the basis for humanity as a whole and all aspects of life. As I said, we are supposed to go to mosques and we are supposed to worship God, and God created us and pledged to protect us. There are some thugs, today, some criminals who go to mosques and tell us that God needs protection. They take his role. I agree with you; it is not the Islamic countries; it is not the Islamic Conference; it is not the OIC; it is the Arab thinker, the Arab writer. Where are we? Where are the books showing the corruption of these people? Let us be very frank; I said that Arabs can no longer see with the eyes of their rulers, or hear through their ears, or speak through their tongues. Either we use religion to maintain a certain order or we use the blindness, the lack of transparency, the rule of law, women's rights, human rights, educational systems etc. as a way to sustain the current regimes. It is a dilemma and they have said that if we do not help ourselves, nobody else will. I do not think that the mere fact that Islam is being used gives any Christian or any Jew the right to come and smear Islam. We are not perfect. Christians are not perfect. Jews are not perfect. However, if a Jew or a Christian commits a crime, as many have done, we do not have a term calling it Jewish or Christian terrorism. If we want to go back, why is there the rise of the national right wing in the West? It could be that those thugs going Mosques have succeeded. As I said, with the short time, I do not want to elaborate much on this, but this is our job as a whole. The question of how to defeat the forces of extremism is our job as Americans, Palestinians, Jews. This extremism, employment of religion, does not confine itself to mosques. There are those who go to churches to use God and there are those who go to synagogues to use God. This should stop.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

I think we have time for two more questions.

Michel Foucher, Chair of applied Geopolitics at College of World Studies; Former Director of the policy planning staff of the French Foreign Affairs Ministry

I have a question for Itamar Rabinovich. I think you are absolutely right to express the view that an internal view of the region should be built. One historical reason is, I think, because an external vision was hegemonic. You see that in Syria, for example, any time you see a divergence between political forces, they are immediately asking for support from the outside. This is the case in Syria and it is a mess, so an internal problem is becoming an international one. If we follow your view, is it wise to always wait for what will be decided in Washington? I am not referring to Israel-Palestine, but in Syria when the real position in Washington was expressed by President Obama, 'We don't have a dog in this fight'. You do not have specific, important American national interests in Syria. Why do we not promote a regional solution, a first step between major regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran first, Turkey and maybe Israel



then? Why do we always wait for EU, Russian or American solutions, when the reality is that regional powers are more and more active in supporting political forces fighting for power?

Itamar Rabinovich, President of the Israel Institute, Distinguished Global Professor at New York University (NYU) and Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

Unfortunately, the answer to your question in the Syrian context is very clear. It is a conflict on three levels: domestic Syrian, regional, and international. The regional is very stiff; for Iran, Syria is a major investment. The future of Hezbollah in Lebanon depends on the outcome in Syria and the Iranians are prepared to go a very long way to keep Bashar al-Assad in power. Others have different views: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan. It is very difficult to overcome these differences. You have all these levels feeding one another.

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

Syria was mentioned, so we will have a brief intervention.

Riad Hijab, Former Prime Minister, Syria

I would like to clarify my opinion on what Mr Xiaosheng said, as well as regarding the question of the intervention in Syria. First and foremost, I became opposed to the Syrian regime in August 2011, while I was still Prime Minister. What happened in Syria was that the Syrian people demanded political, social and economic reforms. This started with peaceful protests calling for reform, and these protests were countered. These protests were led by millions of Syrians and included Syrians from all religious groups.

At the time, I was Governor of Latakia. The protests started on 25 March in Latakia and they included Christians, Shi'ites, Sunnis, Alawites, and people from all religious groups and professions. There was no civil war between Sunnis and Shi'ites at the time. However, these protests were countered by the Syrian regime with weapons. This compelled Syrians to defend themselves. The participation of Iran in the war, just as our colleague mentioned earlier, was through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. This led to the rise of sectarian tensions in the region.

I hope the Chinese delegate will clarify this question of intervention in the Syrian situation, because intervention started with Iran, followed by Russia. We hope that China will play a major role in this regard, in order to come up with a political solution to the Syrian crisis. We hope that China will play an exceptional role in this process. These foreign interventions were not brought upon the country by the people, but by the regime. This was particularly from Iran, due to its expansionist tendencies. It led to the exacerbation of sectarian tensions, thus undermining regional and international security and stability. As a result of these Iranian interventions, we see the rise of ISIS and extremism. This extremism is not limited to Sunni groups, but there is also Shi'ite, Christian and Jewish extremism. We see extremism in all its forms. Terrorist extremism is the result of false practises by others. I hope that this is clear. What happened in Syria was a revolution, with legitimate demands by the Syrian people. However, foreign intervention by Iran and Russia is what complicated matters and made them what they are today.

Riad Tabet, President of Berit International Holding SA

I come from Beirut and I have a question about Lebanon.

Au Liban nous avons près de deux millions de réfugiés syriens. La question des réfugiés est une source d'instabilité - ce n'est pas uniquement la guerre sur le territoire syrien ou les conflits dans la région qui sont sources d'instabilité - et elle s'étend jusqu'à l'Europe. Ma question est la suivante, M. Hijab : Ne pourrait-on pas mettre en place des zones



sûres en dehors des zones de conflit et qui pourraient être placées sous l'égide des Nations unies pour accueillir les réfugiés syriens ou du moins une grande partie qui sont actuellement dans les pays limitrophes ?

Jim Hoagland, Contributing Editor, *The Washington Post*

That is all the questions we have time for and I am going to be a bit of a maverick here. It is a great question about safe zones in Syria and I am going to ask Itamar to answer it.

Itamar Rabinovich, President of the Israel Institute, Distinguished Global Professor at New York University (NYU) and Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution

In theory, yes, one way to start resolving the issue is to have safe zones and no-fly zones, except, those who want to perpetuate the war and the status quo will not allow that to happen. In short, it is a wonderful idea whose time has not yet come. The Israeli government wants the lowest profile in the Syrian crisis and would definitely not object to that.