



**2017 Halifax International Security Forum
Plenary 7 Transcript
Rebuilding the Middle East: From Civil War to Civil Society**

SPEAKERS:

H.E. Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of Foreign Relations Department,
Kurdistan Regional Government

Minister Tzipi Livni, Former Minister of Justice, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs
and Member, Head of Hatnua Party, Co-leader, Zionist Union Party; Member,
20th Knesset

MODERATOR:

Mr. Abderrahim Foukara, Washington, DC Bureau Chief, Al Jazeera

Abderrahim Foukara: The Arab Spring is part of the long march of human history in search of dignity and as we all know the march of history in search of dignity is full of the wreckage of dreams and hopes that have nonetheless culminated in wonderful things like this one before country we're in right now, Canada, with its great diversity and ongoing political dialogue.

My name is Abderrahim Foukara. I run Al Jazeera Media Network in North and South America and it gives me enormous pleasure to be here today to moderate this very, very, very important panel. And I would like at the outset to say thank you to the organizers of the Halifax International Security Forum on behalf on myself, on behalf of my colleagues in all of the Al Jazeera bureaux and on behalf of all my colleagues at the headquarters of Al Jazeera in Doha, the capital of the State of Qatar for having extended this invitation to me to moderate this panel.

Et comme je suis originaire du Maroc, je suis dans un pays de très grande diversité, un pays francophone comme le Canada. Remercier des organisations du forum et dire un grand bonjour et un grand merci au grand peuple du Canada, ce pays de très grande diversité. Ça fait la troisième, la quatrième peut-être la cinquième fois que je rends visite au Canada.

Just so that you know this is running live on one of the channels of Al Jazeera, Jazeera Mobachet (ph) and if you'll allow me 15 seconds to just greet the viewers that are watching us throughout the Middle East in Arabic I'll be really grateful.

(Arabic – no interpreter)

Welcome to all of you again. It gives me great pleasure to introduce the panelists. I find it a little bit of an irony that we started off with the Arab – the Arab Spring in terms of the panelists. We don't have an Arab. We have a Kurd and Israeli. I am an Arab but I'm not a panelist. I'm just here to be your GPS. You will drive this conversation so I will be your GPS in guiding you between now and the end of the session which will be promptly at eleven o'clock. I would like to for those who are already tweeting about the conference, but also following this conversation, just to remind them that the Halifax with a handle is hsfforum and the hashtag is #hsf2017.

Let me begin with a quick lay of the land. As I said, I'll be the GPS but I'll ask at the outset each one of the two panelists to say a few things two to three minutes as introductory remarks. And after that I will come to you for questions and comments. Please be generous otherwise if you're not generous with your comments and questions, you will force me to stop being the GPS and to start being the driver, but I want you to be the driver whether you're here with us in the room or outside following us through social media.

And it gives me great pleasure to introduce Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir. I will not go into the details of everything that he's done because you have that as part of his bio in the link that you received but also in the various literature that was distributed by the Forum, but I will just say that he was appointed Head of Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG – KRG, I apologize, Department of Foreign Relations. He administers the KRG's foreign policy and tries to bolster (ph) its relations with various communities outside Kurdistan.

We have Ms. Tzipi Livni, who you'll know she's the Head of Hatnua Party in Israel. She's a member of the 20th Israeli Knesset. She's a former Israeli Foreign Minister and the list goes on. You can check it yourselves all what she's done in the past at this particular moment.

I'll start with you for two or three minutes and then we'll take two or three minutes from Ms. Livni and then we'll see where the conversation goes. If you'll allow me, just a quick reminder. The title and the parameters of this panel "Rebuilding the Middle East from Civil War to Civil Society". We have a Kurd as I said and Israeli it does not mean that the conversation is going to focus solely on Israel or solely on Kurdistan. They can talk about various other issues happening in the region and elsewhere, but I'll come to you also for that for questions and commentary. Please.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Thank you, Abderrahim, I think I'm tented after the English, French and Arabic to speak in Kurdish but I will keep to English. I will

start by thanking Peter and the entire team of Halifax International Security Forum for inviting us and giving us the platform. Also I'd like to thank the Minister of National Defence for hosting us and thank you all for being at this panel.

As a non-Arab, I would like to say that the Kurdish Spring started back in 1991 – 1991 after the first Gulf War, people of Kurdistan rose against the former regime of Saddam Hussein. But we were able to succeed in that uprising because we had a leadership, a vision and the commitment. These were the important criteria behind the success of the uprising while there was at the same time an uprising in the southern part of Iraq that did not succeed.

But we went ahead. We benefitted from the protection that was provided by the US-led coalition at the time, Operation Northern Watch, and also the safe haven that was established for us to start our journey to build a democracy. Although it is an ongoing process and indeed we went to elections, 19th of May (inaudible) until we started our first ever free and fair elections in Kurdistan. At that time the same as it happened on the 25th of September this year, the whole world told us don't go for elections, don't do it. We still and don't understand why you preach us and teach us democracy and elections, why when it comes to us it's not good for us or it's not a good time.

We did the elections. We succeeded. We elected our Parliament. We formed our government and we started the journey to build a civil society. We were a revolutionary movement in the mountain fighting for our rights. All of us had found ourselves to be in charge of administering a civil administration. It was not an easy journey. We did not have experience. We did not have support. The neighbourhood that we live in is not that friendly. Access to the region is not easy. We don't have access to the sea.

We do not have a country that does not have Kurdish population in, i.e. the geography is our number one adversary. But still we manage because we had the will. We had the determination. We have the people with us. So therefore when we talk about the Middle East from Civil War to Civil Society I don't know whether it is a continued cycle or it's from civil society to civil war, because both are civil but two different concepts, two different settings.

What we need is that the right to self-determination is an important principle. It's in the UN Charter, one of the basic human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but at the same time it's handcuffed with the principle of sovereignty. We have been suffering under Saddam Hussein. We suffer chemical gas, genocidal campaign and file (ph) campaign, mass destruction and mass killing. When we were asking for help we were told this is an internal matter for a sovereign State which is a legitimate State represented at the UN. And this still continues.

We do ask you, where are you in these principles? On the 25th of September this year, the people of Kurdistan region of Iraq went to the ballot boxes to exercise a very basic peaceful democratic right, yet we were told that was not good and we were collectively punished. I will stop there.

Abderrahim Foukara: I was going to say even in a democratic country like Canada someone has to put a foot down or has to put a foot down and just ask you to wrap up. Ms. Livni.

Tzipi Livni: Thank you. Yes, Israel is not an Arab State. It's a Jewish State but yet we live in the Middle East and the Arab Spring that turned into an Islamic Winter in some places affects Israel as well and we are all like you, human beings, and to see the horrific pictures coming from the region is something that touches our heart and I believe that what we are doing here and talking about and putting it on the table is something that is very important.

This is almost the closing – the closing gate session and I thought by watching these wonderful video not only before this panel but during all – all the conference, there is a huge clash between the music and the pictures. And I feel that while we are sitting here with suit (ph), well, almost – excuse me, I'm on my way to the airport – but we are talking about interest, about security, about States and we're less talking or listening to the peoples.

And it was very clear to me when I heard this really brave woman from Yemen talking about her States, not about – it was not about Iran. It was not about the Saudis. It was about the people as well as I hear now my Kurdish friend.

A few words about civil war and civil – and civil society in the region. Firstly, in most of the places I'm not sure that we can call it civil war. It's not only a war between different civilians of the same State about the various of the State or the future of the State, in most of the places we have involvement of other powers, other States, terrorist organizations and this is something that sometimes they affect and even force some of the civilians to be part of something that they didn't want to be in the first place. This is one.

Secondly, and this is in a way bad news, and let's speak about the day after, about civil society. The Middle East was formed – the borders were formed by human beings, by human beings in the last century. And sometimes you have in the same State, it's not nation State, it's different tribes, different religions with the hate (ph) and the difficult relations amongst them and the day after it would be the same. But there is one thing which is very important to have any hope. And this is a condition. It's not the only one. It's necessary but it's not the only one.

The day after we cannot afford the situation in which the day after would live in one these States, terrorist organization. It is a not-militia political party or involvement of third party in this State. Because, you know, I heard here the Turkish Chief of Staff and he was talking about that (ph), about terrorist organization and I'm very impressed with manner (ph). He was talking about the terrorist organization that is (ph) Turkey. He was not talking about the terrorist organization towards (ph) us like Hezbollah (ph) and Hamas more than that sometimes support Hamas.

And others are talking about their problems and we need to have, to use these forums and the international community to set some rules that applies to everyone. Nobody can support terror. There is no justice for terror. It does not represent any interest of the international community and the idea of having a terrorist organization, one branch is a terrorist organization, and the other political party should be unacceptable. I mean there is no State in the world or no constitution in the world in which you can have – can be both.

In Israel, our Supreme Court denied the right of the Racist Party to participate in election. In Spain, the party that supported the Basque in a violent manner was denied an election and the Supreme Court accepted it. Well, I don't think that this is something that represent an Israeli interest, a Vanesian (ph) interest or other interest. This is something that we need to understand, the only way to have civil society or to have real civil society is if the day after we have democracies, real democracies and we don't have the control of third parties inside the States, and we don't have those organizations playing their role with Iran (ph) militia because they are not free societies.

And these places we would not have real civil society. And at the beginning to start with – I didn't mention names of States of terrorist organizations but almost because I want all of us to understand that this is a common interest. One day, it applies in one place and the next day you'll find it at your home. So let's me united on this at first.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay, thank you. Thank you both. We have exactly 38 minutes and 26 seconds for your questions and commentary. We're going to float microphones. Please identify yourself, your affiliation and ask your question or make your comment. And tell us who exactly your question or comment is addressed to from the two panelists. Please.

Question: Thank you. Kerry Buck, Canada's Ambassador to NATO. In some ways the Persian Spring happened too early and was brutally crushed. So my question is, is there a chance for revolution or evolution inside Iran? And what impact would that have in the region? It's a big question, but where do you see Iran post-Supreme Leader going? Is there a chance?

Abderrahim Foukara: Ambassador, do you want a Kurdish perspective or an Israeli perspective? Or both?

Question: Both. We can have both.

Abderrahim Foukara: All right. So how about we start with you, Ms. Livni.

Tzipi Livni: Okay. Maybe the war is an opportunity but they think that the fact that the international community legitimizing Iran these days and opening Iran for foreign investments and giving legitimacy to things that are, from my perspective, unacceptable this in a way can postpone any ideas of internal interest inside. Where the Supreme Leader is heading he represents an ideological extremist ideology, religious ideology. And we need to understand when they represent this religious ideology there is no hope for peace or understanding. They're acting against all of us whether it's moderate Islam or Jews or Christians because of who we are, because of our values.

We're trying to achieve a nuclear weapon while stopping (ph) terror to a world and as I said before it could be Yemen (ph). It could be Hamas, Hezbollah and they're getting stronger. And the world focus on the nuclear program that now is – is the threshold or the demands of the world are so low that as long as you don't have a nuclear weapon you can do whatever you want. You can support Euro (ph). You can finance still. No.

So now it's time to deal with Iran in connection to what they are doing in the region. Hezbollah is a designated terrorist organization. Hamas is a terrorist designated organization and according to US – United Nation Security Council Resolution 1559-1701 there is arms embargo and a resolution to dismantle them. But simultaneously the world now decide according to an agreement that we felt just to the nuclear staff to legitimize Iran. And therefore I'm not optimist. I've become very pessimistic because Iran is getting stronger now.

We have Iran. We have its influence in Iraq and this may be something that you would refer to. We have them in Syria – ideas of staying in Syria not just you know acting now but staying in Syria and of course Hezbollah and Lebanon. And we need to address it. It's not only in Israel interest. It should be the interest of the entire international community of the free world.

Abderrahim Foukara: Mr. Bakir.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Well, as far as we are concerned, we have a love bond over Iran. Iran wants a role to play and Iran wants to be the region of super power. And Iran is the most influential country in Iraq today. The only part that Iran does not have that influence is Kurdistan region but if the situation today continues then that would be also their arena of activities.

So therefore from the international – this is from our perspective. We have to deal with them on daily basis. They have the capability to harm us and they have already done that. After their affront (ph) they closed the borders. They help the Iraqis to attack us. Iranian backed-militias are attacking Kurdistan region where we are still asking the international community to interfere, to impose a ceasefire, a permanent ceasefire.

That's why the international community has to sort it out: do you want Iran to be the region or super power to deal with? Or do you want us to sort it out with them? Because that only nuclear issue is something that there is a lot of things – there are a lot of things that are going on there to be dealt with. Therefore it is important for us that the problem between the international community and Iran not to be at our expense. Because we're a small player, have a long border. We have to deal with Iran on daily basis.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay. I just would like to remind everyone that we are here to talk about anything you want to talk about, but we are here to talk about something that the Forum wants to talk about which is from civil war to civil society. I almost forgot that – I was going to make a – use a soccer metaphor and then I remembered that we are in a country known for hockey and not soccer. So anyway, I'll go from that wing to this wing.

Question: Thank you. Bessma Momani (ph) for the University of Waterloo, CGM Brookings (ph). With all due respect and I'm very happy to see both Israeli and Kurdish who are really important parts of the fabric of the Middle East. But seeing that 80% of the population is Arabic it's a bit of an oversight, if I may, that there is no Arab sitting on the panel. The one question I want to also mention, if I may, is that and I'm also saddened, Minister Livni, you know, you're a Jewish State, with all due respect, but 20% of your population is Arab and these are citizens of Israel. And so I think that's something that needs to be acknowledged.

I do want to go to the question of civil society, because civil society is really the only way to rebuild the region. And I'd love to know more about – give us best practices as two prominent leaders in your countries, give us two best practice or the best practices about what to do about getting civil society? And can there be something to be learned and taken to other parts of the Middle East? Thank you.

Abderrahim Foukara: Mr. Bakir, do you want to take a stab at that?

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Yes, but the absence of – the absence of an Araba member on the panel is not our fault but it seems that because of the

sensitivities some people refused to be sitting here at the table, on the panel. So, this is not our fault. I don't think it's the organizers' fault.

And that is the nature and the mentality in the Middle East, of course. You have to address it to learn to accept each other. Okay, you are different nationality. You are different ethnicity but accept to sit down next to your neighbour. As far as we are concerned in Kurdistan region, we have already suffered in the last three years of ISIS.

But before the military operations, we said that we have to have a political plan for the day after. Nobody in Baghdad was interested in that and still they are not interested. They still do not have a political plan to deal with the aftermath and with the opposed ISIS era especially in the Sunni Arab areas because of the Shia-Sunni power struggle. They are not interested. Sunni areas are destroyed, infrastructure devastated, Sunni populations displaced and that makes Baghdad happy.

So therefore the problem is that now they want to destroy Kurdistan to dismantle the KRG as an entity. But we're having encouraged women participation. We have encouraged youth participation, civil society, free media, all the democratic values and principles in order to live. And Kurdistan has been from 1991 until today safe, secure, stable compared with all the instability in the rest of Iraq. That's why if there is will, there is way. We have valid Iraq can do it if they accept the roles, if they accept the Constitution that over 80% of the people in Iraq voted for it.

But unfortunately, 55 violations of the Constitution have (sic) taken place. That's why. You reach an agreement with them but there is no implementation for that agreement. We have voted for a Constitution. The Constitution has been violated. That's why we decided to go to the referendum because we thought we have no future in Iraq. We wanted a future for our own and also to live together in peace and fraternity.

Abderrahim Foukara: Obviously, if we had somebody from the Iraqi government, they would – it goes without saying – have a different perspective, but you've –

Tzipi Livni: I would like to answer in comment on the Jewish State, but I will take it as a question, if I may. And to explain what this means when they Israeli and Jewish State. Israel is a Jewish Democratic State. It's the nation State of the Jewish people in accordance also to United Nation's Resolution from 1947. When I say Jewish Democratic State, it means that we are living with values of Israel also as a Jewish but also as a Democratic State and the meaning is in one sentence, nation State of the Jewish people with equal rights to all its citizens. And therefore all the Arab citizens who live in Israel are equal right citizens.

And this is part of our Jewish values. I mean “love thy neighbour” is not written in the American Constitution in spite of our history and part of our values. And this is also the meaning of Israel as being a democracy. Now, unfortunately, we have a national conflict with the Palestinians, you see. Mr. Bakuti (ph) left but we have a national conflict with the Palestinians. What the Jewish people did since – not since the creation of the State of Israel but even before in each and every time that the wars – resolution on the table that represent our interest but also was against the other with accepted it.

In 1947, the United Nations’ Resolution it was a petition plan saying – supporting the creation of a Jewish State and an Arab State. The Jewish leaders accepted it even though it was on the entire ancient land of our forefathers. Because we were focused on building our own State and according, as I said, to our values as part of the installing the (inaudible) of the State of Israel, all the citizens have equal rights without any discrimination.

Now, unfortunately, the Arabs were not ready to accept this resolution and since then we are still focused on the idea – especially me, if I may say as a representative of Israel – on the idea of two States for two peoples, each State gives an answer to national aspiration of different people since we’re Jewish people and the future Palestinian State to the Palestinians. And I would not accept those that are preaching for the creation of a Palestinian State without recognizing the rights of the Jewish people first State of our own.

This is the problem. This is the conflict. This is the solution. We accepted it. I hope that this panel or some representative of the Arab world to speak about it.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay. And incidentally, if there are any people, Palestinian or otherwise who hold a different view and they want to express it, this is an open forum. Please let me know and I’ll give you the opportunity to raise it. Please, Madam.

Question: Thank you. My name is Nancy Lindborg (ph) with United States Institute of Peace. And I want to really thank the organizers for this topic and force starting the video with Tunisia which is of course one of the only countries that has withstood the Arab Spring and not gone into chaos, including the Nobel Peace Prize for their Civil Society Quartet. So it’s a key issue.

I’ve two questions, the first one for Minister Bakir and that is – I was in Iraq about a year ago where there were street demonstrations in cities throughout Iraq, not so much in Kurdistan. But they were young people who were demonstrating not on the basis of sectarian desires, but in demands for better government. And we’ve seen the flowering of civil society throughout Iraq, throughout Kurdistan. I attended a big conference about a year ago there. What

do you see the possibility and the potential of that civil society and that set of young actors eager for a better government to play in the elections that are coming up? And in moving forward in a post-ISIS world?

And for both of you I have the question of how do you see the role of religious actors who have such extraordinary influence both personally and institutionally with civil society throughout the region? Thank you.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Well, as for the first part of the question, in fact our fear and our worries is that Iraq is not going to be the federal democratic pluralistic State that we were promised by the Coalition and the Constitution. Iraq is more and more becoming Islamic. And the fact that last week in the Iraqi Parliament a personal State was discussed or deliberated allowing a nine-year old girl to be married just puts a lot of things – and last year when the Iraqi Parliament while we were in the height of the fighting against Islamic State, they were discussing banning, consuming and trading alcohol. So, that's why we were worried about our future.

Is it a diverse country because we have Muslims, non-Muslims, Arabs, non-Arabas living together? Federalism for us meant power sharing and wealth sharing. This is not happening therefore democracy is not only about having elections or time (ph). I think people in Baghdad today they think that by having the elections on time that's democracy. That's only the beginning of the process. Therefore civil society has to be more vocal, has to be given opportunity and they have to be actively engaged.

In Kurdistan region where there was a quota for women. The quota in Iraq was 25% for women and age was 30 years. We changed that. We made the women quote 30% and we lowered the age 25. It was a win-win, and it was both in support of youth and women, and we have a higher percentage of women. We have women in government as ministers, in Parliament, female pershmergas fighting for our rights. And this is exactly – even in 1325 (inaudible) because of our resolution on women, peace and security Kurdistan led the national action plan for Iraq because we are ready to work with Iraqis in areas that is – that are for the benefit of both, but Iraq is not ready with us.

That's why today we have a real problem in the country. We are at risk of another civil war and another war. We are at brink of war if the international community does not get seriously engaged because there is more and more pressure on daily basis on the Iranian-backed Shia militias and Iraqi army to come over to Kurdistan to destroy the entity which is recognized in the Constitution. That's why if that happens three main areas will be affected. First, it will provide an opportunity –

Abderrahim Foukara: Briefly, please, briefly.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: — for extremism and terrorism. Second, it will create another wave of asylum seekers to Europe because we already have 1.6 million refugees arrived in Kurdistan. But then people in Kurdistan would start to flee; and third, there would be destruction in the energy supply.

Abderrahim Foukara: Ms. Livni, do you want to chime in?

Tzipi Livni: Yes. Well, I completely agree that democracy is more than elections. It's a set of values. And the set of values must apply on parties, on governments and civil society. Basically, what the civil society needs to do – it implemented in the space that the government is living where their responsibility is still on the shoulders of government.

You asked about religion in this story and I would say in other words it's not about religion. It is more about how some religious leaders are taking their religion to the extreme. Because I believe frankly as – whether it's about Judaism or Islam or Christianity, I believe that all these religions is about love and harmony and not about hating the other.

But there are those leaders, religious leaders that are taking it to the extreme and this is what I say also in Israel because when you have whether it's the leader of the Islamic movement in Israel calling and trying to ignite the region for the wrong – whether it's political or religious needs (ph), calling you know (inaudible) something that can ignite the region in the moment or whether without any comparison (ph) to the political staff the way also – Judaism is being expressed by some political parties in Israel or religious leaders. And what I say here in English I say in Hebrew.

Let's have this understanding that the control of the varying (ph) of the State is not in the hands of religious leaders because if this would be the situation we will have a clash between the values – we were talking here of power agreement, about equal rights unfortunately sometimes and as I said before it's all over the region and not only in the region. There are those that for them we are not – according to their understanding or the day they'll express their religion women are not entitled to (cross talk).

Abderrahim Foukara: Religions.

Tzipi Livni: In all the religions.

Abderrahim Foukara: In all religions, okay.

Tzipi Livni: As I said, it's not the religious – it's not the religions. It's the religious leaders whether it's imam or others that are taking it to these places. So – and

therefore I think that having the shared set of values whether in the States or those believing in this in different States we should united once and the liberals (ph) of the world unite. Let's fight for these values against those that are trying to transcend the thing to something which is unacceptable.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay. We have 19 minutes so I need a condensed comment from you before I go to somebody else.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: We in Kurdistan we believe in the separation of religion and State. As the clerics in Kurdistan region play an important role in world in civil society with women organizations, with the government, with the Parliament because they are a force for moderation and they have played the role – an important role even in the fight against ISIS.

Abderrahim Foukara: Unless I get a frontal question, so to speak, I'm going to go to the gentleman over there. Can you bear with me a second just while I get one from this wing. We've already got a question from that side. Please go ahead and then I'll come to the gentleman over there.

Question: Thanks very much. Gary Keller, Former Chief of Staff to Foreign Minister John Baird. Minister from Kurdistan, it's great to see you here. In one of your answers earlier you talked about having a political plan for the day after. Obviously the referendum took place a few months ago and you would have known what to expect from the international communities' general reaction. So, I guess my question is a simple one: what's the political plan for the next 12 to 18 months?

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Well, thank you for that because it's a good question. In fact, our expectation from the international community was to be neutral. We knew that they don't support us. But we asked them please don't oppose us, don't be against us. But day after day, statement after statement was issued: it's illegal. It's unconstitutional. It's unlawful. It's non-binding. Why all ills and ireds? Why?

People went to the ballot boxes to exercise a democratic right. Is there more legitimacy than people when they go to the ballot boxes? You told us that! You, democratic societies, you're civilized as well, you told us democracy and going back to the people. When we went back to our people you told (sic) us it's illegal and illegitimate. It's not fair. That's why our political plan for the day after is that we want Baghdad to start a comprehensive, constructive dialogue on the basis of the Constitution to ensure power sharing and wealth sharing, not before then. We need to have a withdrawal of all these Iranian-backed Shia and militias to have a joint security (ph) mechanism, peshmarga, Iraqi army and coalition joint administration for the disputed areas and preparing the ground for the elections.

We want to do that peacefully. We want to sort out our problems with Baghdad through dialogue and peaceful means, but Baghdad is not ready to talk to Kurdistan region. Baghdad's position is that now they are victorious. Winner takes all. They destroy Kurdistan and they would be rested (ph). That's the not the right thing to do.

Abderrahim Foukara: The gentleman over there, please?

Question: Thank you. Ayman Mhanna (ph) from Lebanon. My question is actually to everyone in Halifax here. I am a member of the Civil Society. I run a freedom of expression organization, but I also want to be pragmatic. Should we completely forget the idea that democracy is an ingredient of free building the Middle East because looking at the situation, there is a very strong preference from strong men who can keep – who can make stability great again in our region? So, this attachment to stability and peace given that the chaos that followed 2011 didn't please anyone, as active members of Civil Society we're not seeing not any single proof that democracy is anywhere close to being on the agenda.

I'm talking about funding cycles, about – mainly from donor communities. I'm talking about specific programs. And I'm also talking about huge support for authoritarian regimes whose actions, whose repression, whose work in prisons (ph) is actually in my opinion creating the ISIS 3.0 for the future. But today, they're keeping the situation stable and it seems to be good for everybody. Should I keep that pragmatism? Or can you give me a different perspective and showing me one example that democracy is still an ingredient for rebuilding the Middle East?

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Well, I think I answered you. We were taught democratic principles and values and we fell (sic) for that. When we come to practise it, borders are very sacred. Nobody has to touch it. These are man-made borders – man-made borders. These borders will change but if not today, tomorrow. But we have to be realistic. We have to live how to be tolerant, how to accept peaceful coexistence and respect each other. This is what we ask for.

We have tried to build democracy. We're still on coming on that but we have come a long way. But the point is not only bringing democracy, a meaningful democracy that could be applied.

Tzipi Livni: I believe that the civil society can flourish just in real democracies. I believe that this is something that we all share or need to share. And I truly hope that we see in the region real democracies talking about – as I said before, the situation of an armed militia which is also a political party is not part of the (inaudible) of democracy the way I see. But it's not a decision that you make on

your street. It is something that we all – those supporting democracies understanding that this is a set of values.

I believe that we should not work toward this and – excuse me, but going back to the question that you asked about religion, I refer to civil societies to things that are happening inside some of the States in the region, but we need to refer to all these terrorist organizations that are taking a religion to places of hatred, of cutting heads off. And for me it's not important whether it is Shia or Sunni, it is the same and I hope that they would not abuse and exploit the misery of people that we have now in the region, you know, to get more support in doing this horrific stuff that they're doing in the region.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Education has to go together with democracy. Education and cultural exchange building, trust, and building bridges, because democracy alone is not enough. You have to build bridges between communities. You have to invest in education, in educating people the right thing. We, in Kurdistan, have started that journey by educating people, religious education, not only Islamic education, to tell them that there is more than one religion and to tell them about diversity so then we grow up accepting each other.

Tzipi Livni: And, excuse me, saying something not only about the (inaudible) but about democracies. And I think that you are right, not connecting only to the region. Listen my friends, and this is a very important thing to understand. All over the world we see erosion of the values of democracy. We see more popularism. We see more hatred. We see more homophobia. We see abuse of fear by leaders. And this is something that affects almost all the democracies in the world. And I think that by turning a blind eye to this we are in a way cooperating with these trends and we must stop it.

And I believe that those that are not willing to accept it and live with the outcome need to fight for it together. And sometimes it's not easy and sometimes – it's not easy especially when those that are fighting more democracy and some of the States are isolated and being portrayed as something else. So we need to be united on this.

Abderrahim Foukara: On your behalf I will remind deeply (ph) about your question was addressed to everyone, not just the panelists. So please feel to chime in if you feel like doing so. Let me just give you a quick roadmap of where I'm going with the next three questions. So I'm going to the lady in the back, then the gentleman there and then the gentleman with the beard right in front of you. Please.

Question: I'm Smadar Perry (ph). I'm a Middle East Editor in the (inaudible) North which is the largest daily in Israel. My question is addressed to both panelists or anyone who would like to answer. We are all witnessing these days

the huge dramatic drama in Saudi Arabia. It's a huge storm. And my question is, is it for the benefit for the civil society in Saudi Arabia while the conference is promising to turn Saudi Arabia into a State of Modern Islam? Or is it endangering and shaking the stability of certain countries in the Middle East? Thank you.

Abderrahim Foukara: Who do you want to start with? Okay, how about we'll start with you.

Falah Mustafa Bakir: Well, I have not that much engagement with that issue in Saudi Arabia. We hope that the Middle East in its entirety would change towards the right direction. There are too many struggles in the Middle East: Iran-Saudi Arabia, Iran-Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others. We need to address these issues and also the international community to be serious about addressing these issues. This is what I can say, but we need a change in the entire Middle East so that the population would feel that there is a change towards the better.

Tzipi Livni: Given the sensitivity that you know between – on the relations between Israel and the Saudis, I would try to be cautious in a way. You know, two years ago it was another, excuse me, another security conference as well competitive (ph). And it was the new Saudi Foreign Minister talking about the changes, implement changes in Saudi talking about empowering women and hey, women can drive in Saudi now.

And when at first I saw the resignation of Frariri (ph) I thought that maybe this can be a message about the complexity of the situation of on one hand militia the other legitimate partnering in the government. But I think that it's too early to know where we are heading when it comes to the decisions that are being made in Saudi these days.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay, the gentleman over there.

Question: Chuck Change (ph) from Washington, speaking on behalf of Washington. I'm going to read a quote from a former foreign minister or secretary of State. "For 60 years my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here and the Middle East and we achieved neither." We achieved neither stability nor democracy. How are we doing now?

Falah Mustafa Bakir: We are paying the price. We, in Kurdistan, at least this is our view that we are paying a price of that stability and one Iraq policy. We have suffered a great deal of one Iraq policy. It has failed. Unity has to be voluntary. You cannot impose from Washington unity on Iraq. While the peoples of Iraq are not united, you can't have it. You will have instability instead. We need realism, pragmatism in dealing with the problems of the Middle East. Leave it to them.

We have suffered. A regime that has bombarded us with chemical gas, carried out the notorious FAD (ph) operations, mass killings and mass murders, mass destruction. Yet, we were expecting in the new Iraq, the new government who came to power to apologize for the people of Kurdistan and to compensate them. But now we are seeing Iraqi army facing Kurdistan. The same cycle is repeating. It will not be stable. Be realistic. Change this one Iraq policy. You will see stability.

Tzipi Livni: You know the choices in the Middle East is usually between bad options. And I do remember one of my meetings with President Barak of Egypt and it was after President Bush left the room. And he was sitting here saying to him democratization, democratization. What does he want? He doesn't understand the region. It's more complicated than that and we know what happened later. So I believe that —

Abderrahim Foukara: This is when you were Foreign Minister?

Tzipi Livni: When I was a Foreign Minister, yes. And I think that in an understand, as I said at the beginning, that also the day after we have States that we have this internal tension between different factions or the society which is very deep with the religious or even historical tribes and therefore it's not going to be easy and I'm not optimistic that the day after, you know, ending the civil war, starting civil society and who would live all of us, we live happily ever after. This is not the situation.

But I do believe that in understanding that democracies also set of values and without – he was talking about imposing. I'm not talking about imposing. But if you want to be part of the free world and most of the States in the region they want to be part of the free world. They want the connection. They want investments. They want to be economically part of this small village who is now the world.

So if you want to be part of something, you need to apply to certain rules, certain parameters that basically represent the nature of democracy. We can have, you know, some rules that would apply. It's your choice whether you want it after or not. But if you're not – if you are not going to, don't expect us to support you, to invest or to do certain things.

I think that this would easily with the tension of you are forcing me to do something, but if you want to get, if you want be part of my part (ph) of the free world do it.

Abderrahim Foukara: Can I – before you go there, I just want to exercise my very limited privilege as a panelist with the right to ask questions. You – when

you talked about the two State solutions earlier, do you see now that we're talking about democracy, does a single democratic State has a chance ever between the Israelis and the Palestinians? One State democratic.

Tzipi Livni: You are talking about one State between Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea instead of two States for two people?

Abderrahim Foukara: One. Instead of two States, one State for everyone but a democratic State. We've been doing it in Canada. We can do it in the US. Can you do it in —

Tzipi Livni: No, it's not what you're doing in Canada and the US. It's what — there was those trying to do it Yugoslavia or in other places in which you have different nationalities that couldn't live together and the — you know, the — since — because of the horrific pictures for this region, we all tend to forget what we saw there.

I think it's going to be a lose-lose. I mean us as part of the Jewish people we had and we have our national situation as peoples and being a Jew is not a religious thing. It's being one people with a shared history, shared values and shared future in the State of Israel hopefully. And the Palestinians, they have their own national aspiration. And therefore the idea — and I respect it, as long as our security will be kept. So the idea is — I didn't say two States. I said two States for two peoples because although the idea is not just to create another State in the region or fail (ph) State in the region or terrorist State in the region. We have enough of those, thank you.

The one idea is to have two States for two people, each State represent a national aspiration of different peoples because if we are not going to do it, both our people will face an ongoing conflict in one State that I don't know what it will be. But all the conflicts that we are talking now about will be in this obviously tiny place.

Abderrahim Foukara: We are exactly three minutes away from the end. I apologize, Minister. Let me just take one more maybe from the gentleman over there and then we'll wrap it up. Those are my instructions, to wrap up at exactly 11:00 o'clock.

Question: Yes, David Smolansky (ph), I am a Mayor of El Hatillo Municipality (ph), Venezuela, recently in exile. I was removed by the regime. This year in Venezuela we have had 120 days consecutive protests. Regime killed 132 people, more than 10,000 wounded. We have an inflation of more than 1,000 and almost 300,000 children have malnutrition. I'm saying these because the regime in Venezuela as 19 years has very close ties in the past with Saddam Hussein. One of the last State visits was Vuvu Chavez (ph) in Iraq with

(inaudible) one of the last visit I had was in Venezuela and also with Bashar al-Assad in Syria. My house was attacked because I have Jewish ancestors. There is an anti-Semitism (sic) in Venezuela.

So my question is how us dictators close the relations to maintain power? How can we both – how can we build the democrat spaces?

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay. I give you one minute and I give you one minute.

Tzipi Livni: It's more a statement than a question.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay. Do you want to take this?

Falah Mustafa Bakir: No. In fact, I want to go to the other question. We want the United States to be heavily engaged, to have the hands of policy and also work out workable solutions with the people in Iraq. This is from our perspective.

Abderrahim Foukara: Okay. And with that I have to conclude this panel. Thank you very much to the two panelists, Mr. Bakir and Ms. Livni. Thank you all very much. I want again to thank the organizers for having invited me as an al Jazeera person to moderate this panel. Thank you from all my colleagues throughout the world and in our quarters in Doha. Thank you all very much.