



**2016 Halifax International Security Forum
Plenary 8 Transcript
Return of the Nation State**

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MODERATOR:

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Kathleen Koch: Good afternoon. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, remember those heady times. Anything seemed possible, didn't it? We envisioned a new era of peace and unity where countries would cooperate. We'd come together to solve the problems of the world, the intractable problems that we could not solve alone.

The European Union was created, the World Trade Organization, we had such high hopes but then someone began challenging that new world order. They didn't want to play by the new rules and wanted to pursue their own nationalistic ambitions. Now we're seeing a toxic combination of factors from economic stagnation to anti-immigrant sentiments to actual contempt for ruling elites that has sparked this explosion in nationalist sentiments around the globe.

What we want to do today is talk about how worried we should be about countries turning away from the rest of the world and putting national self-interest ahead of all else and what if anything can we do about that? I have a wonderful plan here today to discuss this. I'd like to say we saved the best for last. I would like to introduce everyone starting closest to me, Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of the Foreign Relations Department of the Kurdistan Regional Government, welcome.

Eliot Cohen, the Robert E. Osgood Professor of Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and next to him we have Kasyanov, the former Prime Minister of Russia, Political Leader of the People's Freedom Party, the brave opposition in Russia and then finally Moshe Ya'alon, the former Minister of Defense in Israel. Welcome gentlemen.

I'd like to start by posing a question to the audience with this talk that we've heard all weekend about nationalism and our subject this afternoon, the rise of the nation state, could we have a show of hands? How many of you agree about this increase in nationalism? Okay. I'd say that's a pretty good number. I'd like to ask some of you, nationalism in which country and why are you most worried.

Question: (Off microphone)

Kathleen Koch: Nationalism in China. Anyone concerned about another country that we might discuss this morning?

Question: Probably in general in the Middle East where this is rising more and more in more than one country.

Kathleen Koch: So no one particular country, just the overall trend?

Question: I think it's elementary whether it's in Yemen, whether it's in Libya, whether it's in Syria, whether it's in Iraq. There is a diversity of countries that are suffering from this.

Kathleen Koch: Over to this side. I don't want to neglect any side of the room. Any thoughts here? What are you most concerned about?

Question: I think also subnational identities and the proliferation of them in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Kathleen Koch: Thank you. Why don't we start with Russia?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: We could spend three days talking about Russia. I'm happy to hear but not happy of the (unintelligible).

Kathleen Koch: Your president of Vladimir Putin has for some time stoked nationalist sentiments to boost his popularity at home and used them to justify his invasion in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea. How do you gauge currently nationalist sentiments in your country and in particular Vladimir Putin's philosophy of Russkiy mir that wherever there are Russian speakers that he wants to defend them?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: Definitely Russia is a nation state but I would suggest that where the nation state in Russia based not on nationalism, more like identity. Mr. Putin tries to build up people's identity on the basis of common language and artificially in wrong manner interpreted history. That's why Russkiy mir that is built up on an artificially created fear and the feelings Mr. Putin enforcing in the minds of people of Russia.

Russia continues to be a (unintelligible) country. 50% of population continue to get the only source of information centrally controlled in authority by Mr. Putin.

Kathleen Koch: Despite the problems in your country, economic and others, is nationalism on the rise, as strong as it ever was or is on the wane?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: I would say it's not nationalism but chauvinism. Creating some kind of feeling of guilt by foreign politicians, western politicians. Mr. Putin created a few stories about that we were promised but promises not delivered especially in terms of enlargement of NATO. He continues to say that we were promised that NATO was not enlarged which is absolutely created story by him.

I talked to old president, President Gorbachev and President Yeltsin and Putin with whom I worked for four years and none of them could confirm that the west promised to Russia not to enlarge NATO. Moreover I would emphasize when we had very good relations after the tragedy of 9/11 United States, we had very good relations with the west.

At that time, me being Prime Minister of my country I often would say I dream my country would be soon a full-fledged member of NATO. At that time we already built up a special committee, NATO Russian committee and we increased in that direction. We were part of international coalition of fighting Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and I signed all those agreements for logistic support. We were not boots on the ground there because of our previous intervention there but we provided all necessary logistics, was integral part of those coalitions.

Mr. Putin at that time in a softer way but also said I don't exclude that Russia could be a member of NATO but what happened afterwards, four years after? Mr. Putin came to Munich Security Conference and explained the new vision that Russia is surrounded by enemies and we have a different policy. Why it happened? Simply because of the reason that Putin wants you the west would accept him as it is, just I would say violating human rights and thinking about that everything in this world could be purchased.

Kathleen Koch: Transactional.

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: Transactional, yes. He doesn't understand the value we all – I mean, Russian and the west, we are all devoted to some values we cannot depart on and cannot compromise. Mr. Putin doesn't believe. Because of his mentality as a KGB person, he cannot understand that. He is always looking for the price. He wants to have a transaction and you cannot offer him a right transaction. Right now we come into another stage when President Elect would step in.

Kathleen Koch: I'll cut you off there because we'll be coming back to that. I want to turn to different parts of the world but we'll get back to our president-elect. Let's go to the region of the world, the question here regarding the Middle East. Do you mind if I call you Bogey? What are your thoughts when you look at this question of the rise of the nation state in the Middle East?

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: When I first time read the title of the session I thought to believe it was a mistake because in the Middle East we witness a collapse of nation states like Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya but looking at it in depth actually the collapse of the official nation states going back to the old loyalties, in Libya the tribal loyalties.

After toppling tyrannical regimes people went back to the tribal conflicts in Iraq as well as in Syria and Yemen going back to the sectarian differences Shia versus Sunni, Kurds, Alawites in Syria and so forth. First of all we have to learn the lesson of history to my mind because I believe that the whole idea to impose the nation state in the Middle East which we have to go back to the end of World War I, Sykes-Picot, World War II, post-colonial era was a western idea. Taking the example from Europe –

Kathleen Koch: It cannot work in the Middle East?

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: It depends. Egypt is a nation state but Syria, it was an artificial nation state. Now the lesson of history to myself is that western likeminded leaders at that time decided to impose this system in a very patronized way on the Middle East. We, the westerners, we know what's good for the Middle East. We were just about to make such a mistake by going to the new idea to be imposed in the Middle East, democratisation.

I'm a strong believer in democracy, wish to have more democracies around us. You can't make democracy just by toppling tyrannical regimes and having elections. It's a long way of education, values, human rights, women's rights. In certain places in the Middle East human lives are not appreciated. How can you talk about – it's a very long process. We should offer this idea. You can't impose it by election.

Kathleen Koch: What is the better solution?

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: I'm not looking for solutions. I'm looking for first of all managing the situation in the chaotic Middle East which is part of it because of western ideas. We know what's good for you. We are going to topple the dictators. We are going to have democracy everywhere by elections. We had this experience in the Gaza Strip vis-à-vis Hamas. They won the elections using democratic rules of the game.

One person, one vote, once – no second chance for any proposition. It didn't work this way. If you want to propose to offer by education it's a very long process but you know as western likeminded people in the generation of instant we are looking for instant solutions. That's a very significant lesson to myself.

Talking about nationalism it seems we are talking about it in a bad manner. It's more evil than good. Israel is a nation state, a unique one because you know we have a history of being Jewish people for almost 4,000 years, a combination of religion, peoplehood, nationality. It's not good, it's not a bad thing.

But when it comes to our neighbouring countries, again looking for solutions we should have got used to the idea that as an example Syria and I heard American administration officials talking about unification. Forget about it. You are going to see Syrian Nalawistan (ph), Syrian Duzistan (ph) which will join any stronger party in it might be a confederation. The problem is with Sunnis which is a long story.

Kathleen Koch: You're saying that a huge sort of resorting of ethnicities could be a resorting of ethnicities could be one way forward, a Sunni-stan, a Shia-stan, a Kurdistan.

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: In Iraq you have the Shia population. You have the Sunni sector. You have the Kurdish sector. In a way in both, in Iraq and Syria, the Kurds enjoy autonomy, why not? Why shouldn't they enjoy independence? The other places looking in the long run it might be confederation, for meanwhile no doubt that homogenic democratic enclaves.

Kathleen Koch: That brings us to your situation. Yours is described as the largest nation without a state. What do you see as the future possibilities of a Kurdish state?

H.E. Minister Bakir: First I would like to thank Halifax for giving me this opportunity and for giving the emerging democracies in the heart of the Middle East to be present here to share our experience but also aspirations. It is true that we are the largest nation in the world, that we are denied a state of our own. History has betrayed us.

Hearing the argument here, I see a double standard. On the one hand you want to respect the will of the people. On the other you want to reimpose on other people your own will. That's why we want the will of the people of Kurdistan, the Kurdish people to be respected. When we talk about unity it has to be voluntary. There is no coercive unity because coercive unities have not succeeded and will not succeed.

Kathleen Koch: What would a Kurdish state look like? How big would it be? Who would it include?

H.E. Minister Bakir: Kurdistan will be the area that the majority populated areas which are Kurds but in Kurdistan we are proud of this culture of diversity and tolerance. Anybody who has visited Kurdistan would see that nature. It's a characteristic that we're proud of. We have Kurds and non-Kurds. We have Muslims, non-Muslims living together in peace and harmony. Even with the rise of radicalization around us Kurdistan kept that nature.

This is why we believe we have been resilient. We have been able to work together with other nations around us. It's not easy to be in Kurdistani region of Iraq and you have Kurds in Turkey, Kurds in Iran and Syria and we have to deal with the governments of these countries.

Therefore we were clear that we wanted to have good neighbourly relations based on respect, understanding and mutual benefit to have a common ground, not to interfere in the internal affairs of these countries but at the same time to support the rights of the Kurdish people in these countries and encouraging them for peaceful solutions and settlements with the governments of these countries.

Kathleen Koch: Can you maintain this neighbourly relationship if you become a state?

H.E. Minister Bakir: What would be the price? The point is that when an independent Kurdistan emerges in Iraq, that would send a message that we are there for peaceful coexistence, that we stand for peace, but that process has to start with Baghdad first. We already started that process.

My Prime Minister went to Baghdad end of August this year to discuss with Prime Minister Abadi and the Shia alliance in Baghdad the priorities of this stage. First, fighting terrorism and fighting ISIS which is a top priority for us and for Baghdad and also for the international community.

We started working together on that. Second, to deal with the humanitarian crisis that has emerged as a result of ISIS in Iraq and Syria but also as the result of the Muslim operations. Third, the future relationship and the nature of

relationship between Erbil and Baghdad because what we had, failed. The experience that we have seen, it has failed.

From the day the Iraqi state was established we were promised partnership. We never felt it. We never seen it and after the fall of the regime and after the liberation of Iraq we heavily were engaged in the political process. My leaders were in Baghdad in order to engage in the political process to build a pluralistic federal democratic country.

But it was not built because the world partners do not believe in that. They want to control the power.

Kathleen Koch: Do you see any kind of timeframe?

H.E. Minister Bakir: Timeframe? After the Muslim operations this process will start because the first visit the Prime Minister was followed by the visit of President Barzani end of September, again the same meetings with Prime Minister Abadi and the Iraqi National Alliance in order to start the negotiation process to discuss independence.

We may end up somewhere else at another stage but the point is that the will of the people of Kurdistan, we have suffered a lot. We have seen chemical gassing. We have seen genocidal campaigns. We have seen destruction of our villages. We have given enough sacrifices. Only in the fight against ISIS we have given 1,600 martyrs and 10,000 wounded Peshmerga. I believe it's enough for us to suffer like this.

Therefore it depends on which side you are standing on. If you are in this part of the world you think about stability and security but stability and security have to come from within. We have to accept the system of governance that we have. We fully believe in federalism. We wanted to share the power and wealth with Baghdad. We couldn't because they did not want it.

The government in Baghdad cut our budget since February 2014 and it's still cut. That's why we have the resilience. We have shown an utmost degree of resilience in keeping Kurdistan safe and secure with no budget from Baghdad, with 1,050 km frontline with ISIS, with 2 million refugees and IDP's and we are not a sovereign independent nation, with the low oil prices.

Kathleen Koch: Thank you. Let me go on to Eliot. I'd like to get to the United States. You have heard what everyone has been expressing concern about here all weekend, this new nationalism in the United States, this concern about what does America First mean. Is the world's remaining super power really going to begin focusing more on nation building than abroad.

You have perhaps had the most recent contact with the incoming Trump administration. If you would, share with us your take on what you've heard over the weekend including the call from the panelists yesterday morning for you to change your mind on your willingness to work in some way, shape or form with the incoming administration.

Dr. Eliot Cohen: Thank you for that question and in the spirit of Mike Rogers I'm not going to answer it.

(Laughter)

On the administration I've said what I'm going to say. For those of you who are curious I've got an op ed in the Washington Post. I have a different kind of article in the Wall Street Journal on Saturday and that's it. For the rest I'm going to wait and watch and evaluate. If it seems sensible to do so, change my mind. If it seems sensible to do so, not change my mind but I really don't want to go down that road.

But I will talk about your question. I've got some thoughts about nationalism in general but let me talk about the United States. What I'd like to do is being a professor I'm going to quote other professors. I'd like to draw on a very important distinction made by John Lukacs who's a great historian who became an American as a refugee from Hungary.

It's the distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is love of your own. It's love of your country. It's love of many different aspects of it, whether it's the landscape or the literature. Nationalism is something that looks outward, I think and that is at least in the American context is usually competitive and not particularly friendly. I'd say a second thing.

What does it mean to be an American patriot? What makes the United States different from most countries, maybe all countries, I don't know is as another political scientist (unintelligible) once said, to say that I'm a Frenchman is a statement of fact. To say that I'm an American is a statement of an ideal. What makes me an American is the Constitution. What makes me an American is the Bill of Rights. What makes me an American is our political culture.

If those somehow went away – they're not going away but if ever they went away the United States would not exist. Whereas France is France under the Fifth Republic, under Vichy, under monarchy, it's still France. That's what makes the United States different and for me the magic of that and it's a patriotic magic is I can and I have taken kids to Gettysburg whose parents were born in Guatemala or in India or in Poland.

And they may be Catholic, they may be atheist, they may be Hindus and at the end of the day when you read the Gettysburg Address they all own a piece of Abraham Lincoln. They own a piece of Abraham Lincoln as much as anybody whose ancestors were there at the time. That for me is what American patriotism is about and I'm not really that interested in hearing about American nationalism.

Kathleen Koch: Mikhail, now we're on the topic of our president elect. He had a phone conversation on Monday with President Putin. I'd like to read what Moscow said they discussed. They had a dialogue based on "principles of equality, mutual respect and non-interference. That was what they agreed on."

What do you think that means and how do you see this potential US Russian rapprochement affecting Vladimir Putin? Also the statements somewhat contradictory that our president-elect has made regarding NATO, the initial criticism but then we were told yesterday in this phone call with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg the two men apparently agreed on the enduring importance of the NATO alliance. Will Vladimir Putin feel less threatened or will he see this as division, as weakness and then exploit it?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: I think just Vladimir Putin and his team, they didn't expect such a result, such an outcome of elections. They were already prepared just to continue the same course just what the previous administration pursued and for them right now just some kind of illusion that there would be a possibility to have another result.

Any administration of course wants that with building up pieces of policy and different aspects and Russia in particular. That's why I think they believe that Donald Trump would start finding the way how to implement some promises especially those which are within his authority, not necessarily with the consent of Congress. That's why some kind of lifting of personal sanctions or maybe just even economic sectoral sanctions, that would be the priority number one for Mr. Putin.

Kathleen Koch: Does that worry you?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: He is prepared for trading.

Kathleen Koch: Does that worry you?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: Absolutely, absolutely the case. That's why I think just everyone feels unpredictable situation, how it would be. I don't think Mr. Trump could get something important from Mr. Putin. Talking about Syria for instance, for Mr. Putin the most important thing his recognition that Bashar Assad is the legitimate president, that's issue number one.

The whole story about Syria in Russia, it's right after when Russian people already got tired about all stories about Ukrainian fascism and all the things and American intervention in Ukraine etc. etc. People were already fed up with all that and then Syrian story appeared. There Mr. Putin publicly announced and described to population what the reason for this military operation in Syria.

First of all he said we came there just to support the legitimate president and then second purpose is there are some Russian Muslims there which could come back and then create problems here in Russia. That was explained publicly and in an intense manner. In fact we can say about the aggression about Ukraine, Mr. Putin quite advanced in pursuing his arguments to people.

As I said 50% of the population continue to get their information from one source central television and he's forcefully infiltrating just these ideas and his reasons, that Russia is surrounded by enemies, those Americans are eager to deprive Russians of sovereignty and all these different things.

Kathleen Koch: What happens when you don't have the bogey man of the United States anymore, if they're your buddies? Where does that leave Putin?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: I think there, there could not be transaction because of the simple reason Putin cannot deliver anything. He wants from Mr. Trump, he wants 100% victory. I guess Mr. Trump also is a man of such a character. He also wants victory. There could not be compromise because for Mr. Putin any compromise is a demonstration of weakness.

I cannot believe that the new US administration could recognize and give up on Bashar Assad and recognize him as the legitimate president. I cannot believe that the new administration could recognize annexation of Crimea as a legal act. What Mr. Putin could deliver for that but for Mr. Putin victory is absolutely unnecessary because he lost his legitimacy inside Russia.

He cannot produce anything, any positive route in Russia. Russian GDP is shrinking, last year -5%, this year -2%. Russia's portion in building up world GDP reduced dramatically. Last year we were 3.5% of the world's GDP. This year already 2.5%.

Kathleen Koch: Is there an opening for you?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: Perhaps the United States is 25% of the world GDP, Russia now 2.5%. If you take just other NATO nations, European Union, another 25% of the world GDP, 50% and 2.5%.

Kathleen Koch: Again, shouldn't the opposition then, why can't you exploit this?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: We do this but we just pressed automatically, I won't go in details but the only thing I can tell you, my political partner and my personal friend Mr. Boris (unintelligible) was killed, murdered just in front of Kremlin, 50 metres from the Kremlin Wall. I was followed for a year with different things, even with physical attacks on me.

Although Mr. Putin decided last parliamentary elections to demonstrate that there is some kind of implementation of law and I was allowed for the first time to appear on central television within a period of 12 years and people were shocked a little bit because I started with the very beginning that Russia fed up of Mr. Putin and Putin should depart immediately.

That was my little maybe ten minutes only, two minutes just five days but people saw it. But just we go under pressure. Again when I go to the regions special teams like Kazaki followed me with the attempt to make a physical attack on me etc. etc. I won't go into the details.

Kathleen Koch: The new developments in the United States don't make your life any easier, do they?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: I think just what we need, we need just the principle policy, value based policy and I believe that the United States and European countries would continue to pursue the same policy. We all Russian democrats who are devoted to those principles, we believe that values are not tradable and none of administrations here in Canada and the United States or in Europe would compromise those principles.

Otherwise we will be just like refugees and we will be just like people absolutely without any basis because now just announced and identified me in Russia is American spy. They always show me and front door of my office just they have some kind of demonstrations with American flags etc. But that was a debate that Putin's guys just came up to me, just gave me an American flag, said just go out to your country where you protect the interests here in Russia.

The only thing we do, we'd like to be a normal European civilized country but Mr. Putin as I said building up in an artificial manner just chauvinistic states, like some kind of exclusivity of Russians.

Kathleen Koch: Thank you. I'd like to go to Bogey. Your Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has described Donald Trump as a true friend of Israel. I'm wondering what you see as the impact on your country of a United States that has decided it's perhaps not its role anymore to promote democracy, to defend human rights around the world and just recently an advisor to President-elect Trump said that they don't see settlements in disputed territories as any obstacle to peace. Where does that leave the two states of Israel?

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: Let's consider on the issue of nationalism first of all because listening to my friend in the panel, you can't compare between the United States which is admired phenomenon to have immigrants coming from all over but led by its constitution, you have to agree and to live according to its constitution, not to compare it to Russia, its background very different or to my country which is a nation state relatively homogeneous with minorities of course, with Arabs living but sharing and enjoying civil life but it's true.

This is the nation state of the Jewish people or the situation in Iraq or other countries in the Middle East in which we try to have a nation state without any national identity. What is the Iraqi national identity or Syrian national identity when you have this distinction between Alawites in Syria and Kurds and so forth. In general I think it's quite a tremendous mistake.

The bad matter of nationalism which I think it was mentioned by Vladimir Putin and others is mobilizing the people against someone else and then creating any kind of mobilization to keep the people together. We saw it yesterday in the video clips of Sputnik blaming the United States, blaming other enemies, generating hatred. That is very dangerous.

You have to distinguish between positive nationalism and negative elements going to fascism, racism. Islamophobia is an example as the result of the current developments in the region. That should be I believe very clear. It's now difficult because we are used to generalize the issue.

Going back to your answer which I am glad that in a conference in Halifax the Israeli Palestinian conflict is not mentioned too much but the main problem if I had to put it in a very clear way in a sentence, this conflict which we try to settle from the very beginning of Zionism is not about what it seems to be with all these misconceptions regarding the international political discourse.

It's not about occupation. It's about their reluctance, in this case even those who are considered moderates like the PLO led by Mahmoud Abbas today to recognize Israel's right to exist as a nation state of the Jewish people. This is the case. It brings me back to nation state but this is the conflict, not occupation since 67.

H.E. Minister Bakir: May I come in here? For example we ask ourselves this question, what is the alternative? The international community wanted order and peace and stability. They could not achieve that. In the Middle East we had dictatorial authoritarian regimes, denied other people's identity. Saddam Hussein was a Sunni dictator, ruled over Iraq denying the Kurds and the Shia Arabs their identity.

They wanted to Arabize the state so in denying us our identity and the others. There are some Arab countries, their name is the Arab Republic of this or this Arab Republic which means there is no place for non-Arabs. That's why, why not to try a different model? Why should we repeat and insist on one Iraq policy or territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq?

We are sick and tired of this statehood because integrity and sovereignty has to come from within, people to live in peace and harmony, to accept each other. Kurdistan presents itself as a partner. We are not begging. We are rich in the fighting force, the Peshmerga which we are proud of. We are rich in natural resources and we have shown the rest of the world that we can govern. With all the challenges around us we have remained resistant. Therefore our question is, what are the values that would entitle us to have a state of our own.

Kathleen Koch: How do you think the Trump administration is going to view your efforts?

H.E. Minister Bakir: Of course we are friends and allies of the United States. We are proud of the partnership that we have developed. We want to have a good understanding with the new administration. We have sacrificed a lot. We are proud of the relationship that we have developed in 1991 when the Americans came to provide protection we have built the democratic experience thanks to the American protection.

In 2003 they came to liberate Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. In August 2014 if it were not for the American intervention we would have been in a different scenario. Therefore we hope that this partnership can develop in something meaningful to bring stability into that area.

Kathleen Koch: Do you have any concerns though that if the United States does pull back somewhat from the region that US allies like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt might begin to project their own power or even seek nuclear weapons?

H.E. Minister Bakir: The point is that we live in the Middle East. There is this power rivalry. The Iran Turkey power rivalry is there. Shia Sunni rivalry is there and also other regional powers, they want to have a sphere of influence. If the United States does not continue to lead in the Middle East there will be others who fill in the vacuum.

Therefore we need the United States engagement. Otherwise there would be regional – neighbouring players and regional players to come fill in. The point is that we stand for democracy, rule of law and good governance. We want partners with us in order to build respect of these institutions because that

would send the right message to other people who want to build democracies in that area.

Kathleen Koch: Thank you. Eliot, I think that takes me to you. You were saying someone can come in and fill that vacuum. That's what we saw after World War I when the United States turned inward and the sound bite from President Obama that was played earlier, it was interesting.

It's from Tuesday, I believe in Greece, but the President at that point went on to say we know what happens when Europeans start dividing themselves up. The 20th century was a bloodbath. Do you think the world has learned from our negative experiences with nationalism? Will the impact be different this time? What can we do to make sure history does not repeat itself?

Dr. Eliot Cohen: We're commemorating the centenary of the First World War which is the origin I would argue of just about all of the ills of the 20th century, some of the effects of which still linger with us. That very complicated conflict with a lot of causes but I do think you have to say that hyper nationalism had some role to play in that event.

I'm going to quote one last professor, Ernest Gellner (ph) who was a great student of nationalism, who points out and I think this is a very important thing we have to remember. I'll disagree a little bit with Bogey. Nationalism is always somewhat artificially constructed. Even Israel, Hebrew had to be born again as a useful language and that was a self-conscious kind of act.

It doesn't mean there isn't really an Israeli nation. There is but it's to some extent constructed. Even under different circumstances I could have imagined Syria persisting for quite some time as a functioning state. I think we have to be careful about the assumption that there are these things which have always existed called nations.

We also have to be very careful about the assumption that every nation should have its own state. I'm not going to pass any judgment on Kurdistan but let's take a country I know a lot better, the United Kingdom. Do I think Great Britain would be better off if there was an independent Scotland and an independent Wales and an independent England? I don't really think so.

Finally I'll just say in terms of American policy I mentioned the Constitution. I mentioned the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence is not about nations. It's about individual liberty and in terms of providing some guidance for American foreign policy, obviously we're going to pursue our interests in the way other countries pursue our interests but in terms of our values, our values are more in the direction of promoting individual liberty, rule of law, representative government, religious liberty, those kinds of things. I

would not say it's a value that should inform American policy necessarily that we're interested in promoting the existence of nation states. I would say it all depends.

Kathleen Koch: I'd like to now go to our audience with questions for my wonderful panelists. I have a mic here.

Question: Thank you. Ayman Mhanna (ph) from Lebanon. If we understand that people who share a certain culture that is different from the dominant culture of the state and the government that governs them are entitled to their statehood, let's consider this for the Palestinians. Let's start with this.

The other warning I have with the idea of giving each identity, each subgroup the right to statehood is to overlook the very important aspect related to governance within the group. We are not solving the problems in the Middle East if we replace dictatorships with many mini dictators in homogeneous regions or within homogeneous sects.

Creating a Sunni dictator, a Shia dictator, an Alawite dictator, a Maronite dictator, a Druze dictator is not the solution. It will perpetuate the problem in smaller scales which might lead to subnational and sub regional sub sectarian identity and it's an endless game. Focus on governance. Focus on identity building, bill of rights for equal citizens regardless of their identity difference might be the road.

It might be difficult. It might require so many resources, so much support that is not available today in nationalist governments in the west to provide development aid and support. However it might be a way to easy solution to resort to these sub identities which might lead to further problems in the future.

Kathleen Koch: Anyone – that was a comment and not a question.

H.E. Minister Bakir: For example three weeks ago the Iraqi parliament passed a law to ban alcohol. We in the Kurdistan region we reject that and we don't implement it. First it's not a priority for the country. Second this is not the role of parliament. Third the minorities immediately felt threatened, not only the Kurds – the Christians, the Adzidis, the (unintelligible), all of that.

That's why we are not talking about why not to have many democrats and not many dictators. Why would you judge beforehand that they would be dictators? The point is that we have to give an opportunity because what we have tried has failed. Iraq and Syria have failed. We will not accept.

Kurds have their own language, culture, history, music, civilization, even the cuisine is different. Why should we be denied the right to have a state of our

own? The point is not about Kurdistan presents that as a source of solution. Otherwise a year or five years from now we would see a bloody fighting within Iraq because we are not going to accept each other, two different thinking.

In Kurdistan we are secular. We want to have a liberal democracy. We do not want the churches or the mosques to dictate what we would be. We fought for the Iraqi constitution to make sure that Islam is a source and not the source. It was not easy. We have protected the rights of the other minorities who live there. That's why we have to give this a chance and see what will be the result.

Question: Josef Joffe (ph). Eliot our common teacher wrote a book called Who Are We. You answer that question by referring to the Constitution to a certain set of documents, the liberal state which obeys rule of law and which protects minorities and so on. But how is that a source of particular identification or love for America if every western country shares exactly in those ideals as enshrined in their political system? Why not then equally love Sweden or Denmark or Germany, maybe even France?

(Laughter)

Dr. Eliot Cohen: You said something very interesting Joe which proves my point. You said protection for minorities but in the most fundamental sense there are no minorities in the United States. We're all Americans.

(Applause)

The most important identity is not I'm a Jewish American, I'm a Polish American, I'm an African American.

Question: (Off microphone)

Dr. Eliot Cohen: Oh, in terms of the political system? I wouldn't tell Frenchmen they shouldn't love France as much as I love my country but they are different things. I will fall back on what I said to say the quote from William (unintelligible), saying I'm a Frenchman is a statement of fact. You can be a Frenchman under Petain. If God forbid there was some sort of dictatorship in the United States and Congress was abolished and there were no independent court system, I wouldn't consider myself an American anymore.

That I think is quite a profound difference. I remember going to a naturalization ceremony in the United States which is something a lot of countries do not have. I was standing in place of the parent of a student of mine. They go through all the different countries all sorts of people had come from. They take

the oath of allegiance and then it was a while back they put a video cassette into a recorder and up pops George W. Bush.

He's saying congratulations. You're now every bit as much an American as somebody who came over here on the Mayflower, whose ancestors came over on the Mayflower. That's very powerful. Honestly I don't think you could quite say that to say a Turkish origin citizen of Germany, you're every bit as much a German as somebody who's descended from Goethe. I just don't think that's what you would say. There are loads of citizens of Turkish origin in Germany. I doubt they feel quite that way.

Question: Alex Pediliskis (ph). I'm with Global Affairs. I cover the Middle East and Europe. This is a question for Mr. Kasyanov. You've pointed the problem of information. We are in an era of disinformation, misinformation and no more so than what's happening in Syria. We were able to end the Vietnam War because of media but we cannot do it unless the Russian people know that what is happening right now is that the people of Aleppo are being buried in rubble because of the Russian support for the Assad regime. How do we fight misinformation?

Question: My name is Yaqui Silla (ph). I'm from South Africa. I'm from the Institute for Security Studies. I want to – I think what we're seeing in the Middle East and Africa is what we consider to be a process of delayed state formation and this is always a violent process. In our view the process of state formation is inevitably violent.

In a certain sense nationalism precedes development in many ways. I think that's true of Europe. It's true of North Africa. Since in these two regions which are structurally unstable, sub Saharan Africa and North Africa and the Middle East, these are regions that are going through a process of delayed state formation.

These are not regions, particularly sub Saharan Africa that have received much attention here. We see a long process of violence and turbulence in the years that lie ahead. In one sense this is a process that the rest of the world has gone through and that is happening in the Middle East and in Africa.

Strangely this is maybe a natural process that needs to happen as we redraw boundaries and as we gain an identity and as we fight and as we develop to create that identity. I think that one must not in a historical sense get too excited about the – one must look at this in a historical context in my view. Middle East and Africa are going to remain, particularly the Middle East I think is going to remain unstable for decades to come. I think that's just the way we are.

Dr. Eliot Cohen: I'd like to push back on the idea that there are these nations out there and then there's a historical process that eventually leads to a preordained outcome in which they become states. As I said, nationalism is an artificial construct. I'll give you an American example.

A lot of quite respectable historians of the Civil War now make this argument. You can argue convincingly that in 1860 the American south was a distinct nation. It's an entirely plausible argument. While we settled that one at the cost of 700,000 lives and nobody really thinks that the American south is a separate nation it's a distinctive part of the United States, a lot of interesting variation to it.

If Abraham Lincoln had stopped a bullet in 1862 we would be talking now about how completely natural it was that there were going to be two or three or four states in what's now the United States of America. It didn't have to be that way.

Kathleen Koch: Mikhail, what about the question about Russia and disinformation?

H.E. Mikhail Kasyanov: On Syria, the information policy, it's very important to create feeling that Mr. Putin is right. He did it successfully. He's advancing in this. As I said, the media under full control of him and on television what they show? They show some kind of liberation of part of the territory of Syria and Iraqi with the American operation in Mosul and just near there the catastrophe. That's what the television shows.

Russians not very much interested in Syria in general. That's why for Mr. Putin that's the only issue, just to demonstrate how he competes with America, with United States in particular. The only reason he wants. Even he doesn't want to talk to any of European leaders. He wants to talk personally to the US President. He needs some kind of compromise there because of the simple reason, that's source of legitimacy.

Then it will be in jeopardy then his propaganda that finally those Americans understood that I was right and Russia is a great power again, etc. etc. The whole story about Syria and Ukraine too, that's a story about keeping power in Russia. Mr. Putin doesn't have any ideology. The only purpose he has, to keep power. Now it seems to be forever, his wish, but we're running very difficult period of time.

As I said economy in a very fragile position and society has started to waken up. Right now in Russia we already have 66 million users of internet, half the population. Two years ago it was 50 million. This year already a lot. Mr. Putin adopting legislation, revenging further spread of internet, raising the costs of using internet etc. That's what's already coming in a serious period.

He is nervous. He doesn't know how to get out of this. That's why the hope that Mr. Trump could come, could get something, could buy something. That's one of the ideas. That's why he was ready for trading and he's expecting that something would be offered.

Question: Gabriel Guerra (ph) from Mexico. I was one of the few people who did not raise their hands when you asked if we were concerned about nationalism and probably because I disagree with the premise of the return of the nation state. I don't think it ever left.

I also think we have many things to thank the nation state for or the concept of nationalism beginning with the fall of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Iron Curtain. I lived in Moscow during the Perestroika and Glasnost years and I could say apart from Moscow and Leningrad the real reason why the Soviet Union eroded was nationalism in the Baltics, in the central Asian republics and Ukraine and so on.

On the other hand do we really want with some few exceptions, Kurdistan being one in particular but do we really want regions in different countries to return to let's say sub nationalism or regionalism or will it be nationalism that keeps countries like Spain, like France together, even like Canada which would be a case in point. Just bear in mind, in some places nationalism actually works quite well. In my region of the world were it not for nationalism just imagine the mess Latin America would be in. Thank you.

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: Let's look at the EU as a confederation. Each of these countries are proud of their identity, their nationality but they are part of a bigger confederation. I don't believe there would be any loss if we tried a different model that brings the stability and cohesion to that part.

In Iraq we are seeing politicization of sectarianism in the country. That's why what we believe, we had a panel on make democracy great again but I believe give democracy a chance in the Middle East. Give the people a chance to exercise the right to self-determination and see what will happen. Can that bring stability? We have failed in bringing about a national order.

There was disorder in our part of the world. Because if the order is kept through coercive means, a dictatorship, that's not order. That's why we believe we have to give a chance to democracy and a different alternative before we try to insist on keeping the current one.

Dr. Eliot Cohen: I just want to say, first I think this all depends on particular circumstances. I would have one view of Kurdistan, another view of say a Basque state. It seems to me it's important to remember, one person's regionalism is another person's nationalism. If you're a Basque or a Catalan or a

Corsican or a Scot, why isn't that legitimate nationalism? That can end up going absolutely anywhere.

Question: My question was really related to – you mostly answered it. The point was this. You mentioned right now the Catalans. I listened to the Kurdish arguments and of course I love Kurdistan and I study Kurdistan and I know a lot about Kurdistan. When you listen to the arguments from the Catalans and they're basically the same.

We have our own language, we have our own food, we have our own culture. Where do you draw the line? The point is do you decide which nation states work and which don't work because if you ask that to a Scot or if you ask that to a Catalan or to a certain portion of the Catalans, some of them will say that Spain doesn't work and they are burying all the charge.

The point is how do you draw the line? I'm not necessarily looking for an answer. I'm just posing the question. Where do we draw the line or is it we just put it to a vote and then the people decide? When does that work and when it doesn't work?

H.E. Minister Bakir: Great Britain went to this referendum and they said we want to get our country back. That trend is coming whether the international community accepts that or not, it's their problem. It's coming and I believe it's better for the international community to prepare itself to deal with the consequences or to be with the process from the beginning and not to be able only to deal with the consequences.

Question: Yussef Menir (ph) from Washington DC. My question is for Mr. Ya'alon and I hope as one of the few if only Palestinians in this room I have an opportunity to make a comment here. Mustafa Barouti (ph) was supposed to be here, a prominent member of Palestinian civil society. Unfortunately he was unable to come because he did not receive a visa.

I spoke to him this morning. He asked me to convey his apologies that he would not be able to be here. He also mentioned to me that three days ago his office at the Health Policy Institute in Ramallah was raided by Israeli soldiers, ransacked and had property Avigdor Lieberman and this is the news out of Israel today, confirmed that the team of Mr. Donald Trump has in fact got in touch with members of the Israeli right and asked them to turn down their jubilation in response to his election in Washington DC.

Israel's own Donald Trump, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu who you ran alongside in fact did use quite vicious and pernicious nationalism in his election campaign at a time when you really had no objections to that nor the Islamophobia that was deployed in that effort. He sent text messages for example to Israeli voters

which referred to Barack Hussein Obama, the Muslim and what might happen if he was not elected.

He spoke of Palestinian citizens of Israel like me as people who are coming out to the polls in droves and that we should all be aware and afraid of that. I'm really surprised by your sudden concern over Islamophobia and downplaying of this right wing nationalism in Israel.

Kathleen Koch: We're running a bit short on time. Could we hear your question?

Question: The question is very simple. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory enters its 50th year now. Israel rules over millions of people who have no say in the government that controls their lives. For how much longer and you Sir have said very clearly you do not support a Palestinian state. You do not support there ever being expressions of Palestinian self-determination on par with that that the Israelis have.

You've stated that very clearly. How much longer Sir if Israel continues down this path do you believe and do the people in this room believe that Israel will continue to be seen as part of a collection of likeminded democracies?

The Hon. Moshe Ya'alon: I'm not going to wash Israeli laundry here regarding certain internal disputes which actually caused me to resign from the government because of certain developments regarding extremism. Israel is a vibrant democracy in which you can see the media, the Supreme Court, the public expressing their views in order to avoid this kind of extremism that you mentioned which I regret and I criticize totally.

That was my reason to resign from the government to go out and to deal with it from outside. Israel is a strong democracy and people are encouraged to express their views. They are not afraid to express their views, to criticize the government. That's one issue. The second issue, Israel recognized Palestinian right to self-determination. Actually the positive outcome of Oslo which I supported at the very beginning of the process is the political independence of the Palestinians.

They have now their political institutes. They have their own parliament, their own government, their own president, municipalities. They don't have to vote to the Knesset. Actually it was a Palestinian choice to be divided into two political entities, one led by Hamas, as we call it Hamastani (ph) in Gaza Strip and the other one is the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank. It was their choice, not our choice.

Having said that, I supported Oslo to the point that I realized, serving as the head of the intelligence under late Mr. Byng (ph) going back to 95 that actually the core of the conflict was not according to the Palestinian perception, occupation since 67. It is until now occupation since 48.

You can't mention any statement or quotation of Mahmoud Abbas of today, or earlier Arafat, saying that even agreeing about territorial compromise along 67 lines is going to be considered the end of constitutionality of claims, meaning they are not ready as Mahmoud Abbas expressed it directly to recognize Israel's right to exist as a nation state of the Jewish people in any boundaries.

We can live with it. I understand we are not going to solve it in the immediate time. We can make progress as we do. It's very difficult even to separate between Israel and the Palestinians. I claim we are like Siamese twins. They are dependent on us by all means, the economy, the infrastructure, security. If Mahmoud would survive without us it would get (unintelligible) Palestinian Islamic Jihad and ISIS. We have to live with it, making progress from the bottom up. I can't see the end of this connection between these two Siamese twins.

Kathleen Koch: Thank you very much. I am so sorry that we have to leave those who still have questions. But we've got to cut it off. I want to just end with a very personal anecdote. My 22 year old daughter was one of the many citizens of the United States who's a bit dismayed with the election results and tearfully turned to me and said, mum, we've got to move to Canada. I haven't been shopping for real estate while I was here.

I turned to her and I said, no honey, that's not what you do when you face a challenge, a tough and in some ways frightening challenge. You stand and you fight for what you believe in. You don't cut and run. That's not what we do. Back to the video at the beginning, let's keep tearing down the walls. Let's keep building bridges and let's keep fighting for what we all know is right. Thank you.

(Applause)