

"Security in the Midst of Disintegration"
Challenges of Ensuring the Continuity of Security
Arrangements in the Middle East
Amidst the Regional Order's Disintegration and Ensuing Breakdown

Friday and Saturday, May 25-26, 2018
Maison Ddu Futur, Bikfaya

The chaos in the region, resulting from conflicts that have been exacerbated by foreign interventions, puts the Middle East in the midst of a deeply rooted crisis causing many of its states to disintegrate. This period of chaos and conflict has produced a phenomenon of groups embracing an extremist version of Islam, leading to the collapse of state borders and the appearance of signs of deep social shock and identity crisis at state and society level. Religious, sectarian, ethnic and tribal sub-affiliations grew, and small communities bound by such sub-affiliations surfaced, replacing binding national communities. Fragmentation and disintegration reached levels unprecedented in the region; some states collapsed into failed states, while other states are on the brink of collapse. The region's order was disrupted, making stronger states less influential and weaker states play overrated roles.

Despite this tragic scene, and despite regional and international developments that do not bode well for the chances of re-stabilizing the Mideast order, security systems in the region cannot be neglected because these systems, no matter how fragile, guarantee for affected communities minimum continuity and survival.

Future House Foundation held in its headquarters in Bikfaya on Friday and Saturday, May 25 and 26, held its annual international conference entitled **"Security in the Midst of disintegration: Challenges of Ensuring the Continuity of Security Arrangements in the Middle East amidst the Regional Order's Disintegration and Ensuing Breakdown."** The conference discussed the breakdown of states and the process of interstate fragmentation in the region. It also tried to assess the repercussions of the collapse of the regional order on various security fields, from difficult security to security of resources to cultural security.

The conference was held in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Tufts University (Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies), University of Quebec (Raoul-Dandurand Chair in Strategic and Diplomatic Studies), and Bikfaya-Mhaydseh Municipality. A number of elitist decision-makers, diplomats, academics and media personalities participated.

Former Lebanese President **Amin Gemayel** opened the conference by welcoming Lebanon-based and visiting participants who came "to explore the prospects of the coming phase with all its pains and hopes." He also welcomed former Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, German Ambassador to Lebanon Mr. Martin Huth and participating diplomats, scholars, politicians and media. He said the conference was being held in the midst of military and political conflicts plaguing the region, conflicts turned into "futile and suicide fighting that caused human and material losses" and targeted societies and people "in their existence, freedoms, safety and well-being." The situation of disintegration and fragmentation that affected many states in the region, he said, was exacerbated by the involvement of major regional and international players, "who sank into the region's quicksand. They brought in large numbers of troops and large arsenals - in terms of land, sea, air and intelligence warfare - on the pretext of helping in crisis resolution. But in fact, their intervention has exacerbated the situation from a problem to a crisis rather than bringing in peace." He wondered, "Are we facing an open crisis, missing security, political disintegration and geodemographic breakdown? Are we facing an explosion or a breakthrough? Do breakthroughs come into being by force of arms or by diplomacy? Which international body will take the initiative to establish regional security, which must be based on rights, justice and the satisfaction of peoples? Without these three aspects, there will be no security at all, or there will be fragile, unauthentic security that cannot last! Is there an international body ready or able to impose genuine peace based on rights, justice and satisfaction? One worries that there will be fake peace of another kind." Peace by force of arms at the expense of rights and justice is "surrender to fate and surrender to the status quo," he said. This does not establish permanent stability; it establishes the complete opposite."

About Lebanon, he said, "In Lebanon, we must focus on establishing rational governance that addresses our structural problems and puts an

end to corruption and waste in all parts of the state. All this should be accompanied by the achievement of full and undivided sovereignty over all national territory, sovereignty according to international law and Lebanon's constitution and national charter." Regarding laudable international initiatives towards Lebanon, he said they remain incomplete unless they are "protected by a procedural system based on the rule of law, the restriction of armament to state security agencies and neutralizing Lebanon from neighboring crises. Otherwise, the initiatives would be building in vain on quicksand." "Thanks to the experts, researchers and academics it hosts, this conference is qualified to discuss the regional problematic phenomenon of fragmentation in the region and its repercussions in terms of collapse of national borders, establishment of confessional and ethnic militias and preparing for the establishment of failed states. The conference is also capable of approaching roles for both regional and international players." He concluded by saying, "Together we seek to move from an open situation of disintegration to a sustainable solution, from an existential breakdown to existential realization. It is the academic act to stop the absurd reaction of suicide at all levels, in Lebanon and in the region."

Former Lebanese Prime Minister **Fouad Siniora** affirmed that crushing crises in the Arab world today are "a sort of testing and examination as much as a source of pain and bitterness... Crises can trigger rising elites to come up with futuristic visions and perceptions, and this will allow for turning crises into opportunities to face risks, achieve change and restore the ability to adapt to developments and transformations." He spoke of two important issues that feed into the situation of security and stability decline in the Arab world: Arab states that are threatened to turn into failed states and the phenomenon of non-state groups, transnational terrorist jihadist organizations and their destructive roles. Regional states experiencing conflicts, especially Syria, have become "scenes of regional and international conflicts," leading to "the emergence of international and regional areas of influence inside these states," he pointed out.

Regarding ways to get out of current impasses and save the Arab national state, he said no Arab country can do it alone; it is necessary, he said, to achieve pan-Arab integration and consolidate Arab resources to ensure the survival of states and realization of desired goals, while continuing to address terrorism and the spread of extremist ideology. He underscored the importance of restoring Palestine as the primary Arab cause, urging for joint Arab action to end internal Palestinian divisions, highlight to the

international public racial discrimination practices by the Israeli occupation and push for a just and comprehensive solution for the Palestinian cause according to the Arab peace initiative (announced during the 2002 Beirut Arab Summit). He also called for "restoring dignity to the Arab individual," saying, "By dignity I mean everything related to fundamental freedoms and rights, whether political, social, economic or cultural."

Leading Arab states, especially those with internal stability and national and regional decision-making capacity, must achieve cooperation and complementarity among them "to confront external interferences in the affairs of troubled Arab states such as Syria, Libya, Yemen and Somalia... and work in troubled parts to reach a cease-fires, end violence, sponsor reconciliations, prepare for drafting new constitutions and holding democratic elections and contribute to the restoration of national armies and other security forces." He urged for a clear, frank and firm Arab stance on Iran's interference in the internal affairs of the Arab states, and called for diplomatic work to develop common interests between the Arab states and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran cannot sustain its expansionist and destructive policy because of such policy will have consequences Iran's internal scene, especially under the international sanctions imposed on it, he said. Similarly, Arab-Turkish relations must also be clarified based on mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of the Arab states.

He said cooperation and communication with major powers is vital to secure stability in troubled Arab parts and move towards political and social stability by facilitating internal reconciliation, reconstruction, the safe return of displaced people and the establishment of the state of law and institutions and good governance.

He added, "We Arabs remain the primary stakeholders in restoring stability to our countries and our region, preventing further human losses and halting the growing destruction of the potentials and capabilities of the present and the future." Exiting current crises, he said, can only be via two tracks: The first track is to save the national state, restore confidence in it, guarantee the rule of good governance, ensure political participation and provide social justice through development and the rule of law, as well as the development of education systems. Equally important here is the renewal of religious discourse, which should focus on learning and education, emphasize the culture of work and production, encourage the

development of critical thinking in our societies in order to how our future generations will view the world, correct distorted concepts and prevent instilling in new generations extremism, hostility to our national states and a desire to spread violence in the world." The second track is "the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the land of Palestine," and this will only be achieved by promoting joint Arab action.

He concluded by saying that refocusing on what we should do will only be done by returning to "enlightened and open Arabism," moving away from policies of interventionism and hegemony, progress on the path of reform and promotion of common interests and security cooperation among all Arab states.

The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Lebanon, Mr. **Martin Huth**, hailed the conference's organizers, who brought together "an elitist group of diplomats, academics and experts interested in the affairs of the region." He said the entire world lives today on the crater of a volcano, with accelerating developments becoming difficult to follow up and influence even by regional and international decision-makers. In the midst of successive developments, he added, the question now is about foreign policies adopted by the states and their objectives and effectiveness. What are the objectives behind the Saudi policy in Yemen, for example, and does Iran have some legitimate concerns that might explain its foreign policy? Does the United States have any guidelines for its foreign policy? Last night, we went to bed to news about an imminent summit between the presidents of the United States and North Korea, but we woke up this morning to reports that the summit was called off. What is the logic behind such stances and policies? The methods used in international diplomacy and their objectives concern us. Diplomacy relies on the ability to listen to others and try to understand them. We are now incapable of doing so: We lost the ability to listen to one another and try to take into account the fears and problems of others; hence, we failed somewhere." He added, "We have to realize that the world is not white or black but multicolor, a fact that forces us to open up to everyone."

As for the Middle East region in general and Syria in particular, he said, "New realities have taken place in this geographical area. Today, we enter the post-Islamic State (IS) stage. We are also embarking on the incomprehensive track of the Astana negotiations." He added, "As a representative of the West, I wonder how and why things in the region got

to the way they are today. Is it the failure of regimes that have governed the region's states for decades and decades? Is it the failure of international policy to deal with the region's problems? Or is the reason Iran's role and plans in the region? It is difficult for me to find an answer to these questions. Perhaps all these reasons are behind the current situation in the region. However, what concerns us today about the role of Iran is the fact that a small circle of people, centered on the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, takes decisions deemed fundamental because such decisions affect the whole region in the long term." After being appointed ambassador to Lebanon, he concluded, "I had the feeling that Beirut would be the most appropriate forum to bring Saudi and Iranian viewpoints closer together. But I was surprised that this was not true, and that we are unable to achieve this rapprochement. However, I hope we can play a positive role in this crazy world."

A speech was given on behalf of the resident representative of KAS in Lebanon, Dr. Malte Gaier. He commended "cooperation with Future House, which provides a serious framework of objectivity, political neutrality and academic professionalism." Since the revival of Future House, "our closest partner," he said, "we have organized several conferences together and prepared more than 70 political papers. Our main objective was to promote and establish the principles of democracy, dialogue and coexistence."

The theme of this year's conference was a complement to the topics dealt with in the previous annual conferences, he said. The most recent conference last year was about the limits of aspirations. It dealt with the question of interference of regional and international external powers in the region and the role of some of these forces. He added, "This year, we have chosen to focus on security in the Middle East and on the factors necessary to sustain security arrangements because this is a fundamental issue and will remain so for many years given its ramifications and links to other issues, especially in light of the fragmentation in the region. With this participating elitist group of decision-makers, diplomats, academics and experts, we hope that this conference will be a first step in the right direction to understand the problems of the region and the causes of its conflicts."

First Session: "Multi-Faceted Disintegration"

Mr. **Oraib Al-Rantawi** moderated the first session. He introduced the participants: Ambassador Husain Haqqani, a former fellow at the Institute of Houston and former Pakistani ambassador to the United States, Dr. **Shafeeq Al-Ghabra**, a professor at Kuwait University, and Dr. **Russell A. Berman**, a university professor and senior researcher at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

After Mr. **Al-Rantawi** thanked the organizers of this conference, which is "important in its subject and timing," he wondered about the best way to approach this thorny issue and to set a date for the beginning of the situation of breakdown and disintegration we are witnessing. "What ideas and approaches can we come up with to put an end to collapse and contain fragmentation? What are the roles of local, regional and international actors in causing the phenomenon of breakdown?" he asked. He underscored that the root causes of this phenomenon are "deep in the history of this region," highlighting a number of "accumulated and overlapping" reasons: The failure of the Arab national state to perform its basic functions, including building a binding national identity and wasting its national sovereignty, the spread of patterns of tyranny and corruption, the absence of freedoms, the monopoly of power and the search for sources of legitimacy outside the ballot box.

"The effects of the unholy trinity - tyrants, extremists and invaders - have done their part in rupturing our national identities and fragmenting our states and societies," he said. "Autocracy is the spiritual father of extremism and arrogance, both of which call for and lure various forms of foreign intervention," especially in a region that has long been considered vital for the influence of several regional, non-Arab states, including Israel, Iran and Turkey. He diagnosed the current situation of the region, speaking of several phenomena, including mainly: The increasing number of failed states, the exacerbation of sub-identities and the growing role of non-state organizations, in addition to the collapse of the rules set by the Westphalia Treaty, which established the global order and international relations.

He underscored the importance of security in the life of nations, but stressed on the other hand that "Man shall not live by security alone." He criticized the approach that links calls for freedom and the prevailing chaos and holds the Arab Spring responsible for the current situation in the region. He highlighted the dangers posed by the culture of "ruling dualities"

to the Arab political mind, arguing that the most serious manifestation is the duality of "political Islam" and the rule of the generals.

Since connection with Ambassador **Hussein Haqqani** could not be established via Skype for technical reasons, Mr. Al-Rantawi gave turn to Dr. **Shafeeq Al-Ghabra**, who began his speech with a number of questions: What is the fate of our Arab peoples, which are being destroyed and are of low priority to our states and rulers? What will happen in the Gulf, especially in Saudi Arabia, if the crises continue? What awaits Egypt, which is central to the region and the reason for its weakness or strength? Will Egypt be able to bear more economic hardship? What is the fate of the imprisoned intellectuals? What about Jordan, which is in a situation of economic and social deterioration, with rampant corruption and a lack of confidence in the state? What about the mother of all crises, Syria? The regime responded to a revolution with total destruction of the country, Turkey's intervention stripped the opposition from great opportunities and Russia's intervention destroyed the opposition. What about the mother of all causes, Palestine? Will it be restored to the heart of the Arab movement at the midst of a complicated confrontation: Infighting and internal division and the injustice and tyranny of occupation? Being the largest population with similar concerns and problems in the world, what do Arabs want?

He added, "The alarm that sounded in the Arab world in 2011 - when revolutions erupted in several states - was a warning to the ruling class that its style of leading states was improper and unsustainable." The winds of change in all Arab states blew to varying degrees, the regional order was disrupted its disruption was exacerbated by the instability of the international order. He added, "The Arab order still holds intellectuals and activists behind bars, restricting freedoms and practicing torture and violence, amid the spread of corruption and the absence of development at all levels." He attributed the breakdown of the Arab order, the escalation of extremism and terrorism and the exacerbation of the phenomenon of non-state groups - "whether these groups are organized (I have reservations about this word), that is, part of a state, like in Lebanon and Iraq; supportive of the state, like in Syria; or unorganized, like IS and its Sunnite and Shiite counterparts" - to the failure of the Arab order in the establishment of democratic national states based on the rule of law, political participation, power transfer and development. The Arab world lacks one strong state that achieves a balance of power with Turkey, Iran and other major states, he said. There is no single democratic state in the Arab world, "and it would

not be an exaggeration to say the Arabs are just around the corner from being excluded from history." He said confessional divisions had become cancerous, and all states were victims of the absence of democracy, the rule of law and development.

He added, "Violence, terrorism and the inability of people to sustain their rights by peaceful means are at the center of this reality. The situation is open to unpredictable surprises, especially given that young people are the biggest driving force in the Arab world today, and their number today is the largest in the history of the Arab world." He pointed out that the desires of those young people are at the core and essence of the question; what they asked for peacefully, beginning with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, was simple and politically, socially and economically rightful. The current generation has entered a stage of long conflict, he added, while future horizons raise more challenges to young people, including extremist ideology and violence, and challenges to intellectuals and activists, including the suppression of freedoms, imprisonment and torture. He concluded by underscoring that the conflict between violence and justice would remain with us for a long time as an embodiment of an existential crisis experienced by oppressed peoples who try to deal with attempts to isolate or even abolish them. "The Arab citizen lacks even symbolic existence," he said. "The generation that will inherit the vacuum will stand on what is left of the Arab world, and a new ideology that will emerge will emphasize democracy, the state's neutrality towards its citizens of all affiliations, the army's neutrality in internal conflicts and the freedoms of expression and belief."

Dr. **Russell Berman** took the stage and explained at the beginning of his speech that he will address the phenomenon of disintegration and breakdown in the Middle East through an international approach that puts regional changes in the context of what is happening in the world. "Although what we see in the region is special for sure, it is also a result of the large and profound transformations that have taken place in governance structures around the world."

Talk of the disintegration of the regional order suggests that at some point in the history of the region there was a regional order and then the phenomenon of disintegration began, as its most eloquent manifestation, IS, almost removed the borders of the states established by the Sykes-Picot Convention at the turn of the century, he said. "What regional order

are we talking about? Are we talking about the order that prevailed after IS? Or is it that of post-Arab nationalism, post-colonialism or even the order that came into being after the fall of the Ottoman Empire?" he asked. In the midst of this chaos, the only invariable in the region after the war against IS has been the fact that its borders did not fall down.

He spoke of another side of dissolution, the dissolution of the state, its institutions and its sovereignty as defined by the Westphalia Treaty. Some of the causes of this disintegration are undoubtedly internal, he said, some causes could be tracked outside the region, specifically as part of September 11 and the ensuing War on Terrorism. The US war against Iraq was radically different from the 1991 Gulf War, which sought defending legitimacy and liberating Kuwait. As for the 2003 war, the goal was completely different: To undermine legitimacy by overthrowing the regime. In addition to the near collapse of the European Union, China's expansionist ambitions in the South China Sea region and Russia's efforts to turn back the clock and establish itself as a major power in its backyard and in Lattakia, there is Iran's expansionist ambitions in the region, which threaten many states.

This international framework contributed largely to the situation of disintegration and breakdown in the Middle East, he said, especially in light of major powers shifting their international policies towards giving priority to their national interests at the expense of the stability of the world order. "This is best seen in the US policy of disengagement in the Middle East." The policy of US President Donald Trump in the Middle East is nothing but a continuation of the policy of former President Barack Obama: The same disengagement policy that gives greater role to local and regional players. The process of disintegration in the Middle East, he added, was only part of the transformation witnessed by the international order and the status and role of sovereign states in this order.

Regarding the causes of the fall of sovereign national states, he also talked about the role of globalization in shifting power from politics / states to economy / markets, and the movement of peoples - a reference to the Syrian refugee crisis that reached Europe and was one of the factors of the rise of populism in the continent. "When the Syrian president (Bashar Assad) said in a speech in July 2015, 'The fatherland is not for those who live in it or hold its nationality, but for those who defend and protect it,' he abolished the basic law of national sovereignty: Residence, nationality and

citizenship no longer each provide a legitimate basis for belonging to the political community of the state," he said.

The challenges facing the international order with its institutions are many, the most important being, probably, populism, which is sweeping a large part of the world, from Europe to the Middle East, with regional or national agendas, he added. He discussed the impact posed by the end of the old international order and the rise of populism on security in the Middle East. The adoption by major powers of foreign policies based on safeguarding their national interests at the expense of maintaining the international order, the sovereignty of states and world peace led these powers to focus on Iran's nuclear ambitions and ignore other crises and wars ravaging the region, he said. Therefore, he added, Obama focused his attention on the completion of the nuclear agreement with Iran, although this agreement was not welcomed within the United States and Obama did not refer it to the US Senate, which is the sole authority mandated with the ratification of international conventions. Therefore, the agreement remained only an executive act, which allowed the subsequent Trump Administration to cancel it. While it was too early to assess the impact of the cancellation of this agreement on security in the Middle East, he said, three things must be taken into account:

- 1- So far, it seems that Iran is sticking to the agreement and not wanting to violate it.
- 2- Trump's stance on Iran could strengthen anti-Iranian forces in the region.
- 3- During the Syrian war, Iran reinforced its military existence in Syria, and in recent weeks, we have seen Israeli warplanes targeting several Iranian outposts. Although this confrontation is not surprising, it is surprising that Russia implicitly agrees to the targeting of its ally. Russia may believe Iran's existence in the region threatens its own interests, and Tehran's foreign policies may threaten Putin's quest to improve relations with Trump.

He concluded by saying that regional security considerations have moved beyond the region and are linked to the hostile rivalry between major powers (especially the United States and Russia), which has replaced the old international order and its rules. The discourse adopted by these powers has changed, and this has nothing to do with who their leaders are. Competition for power and authority in service of national interests is the

game today, he said, and here lies the cause of the phenomenon of disintegration that is undermining the region. "The consensus of these powers can provide correction to the disintegration trends prevailing around us."

In the debate that followed, the following questions were asked:

- Former Prime Minister **Siniora** spoke of the concept of enlightened Arabism as a solution to the region's crisis, at a time when Arabism is no longer the common denominator among the Arab states. The Maghreb, for example, is not Arab but Maghreb, and its culture is Amazigh, not Arab. In Egypt, the dominant argument is Egyptian nationalism, which is introverted and confined to the Nile Valley. In the Gulf, the prevailing discourse today is about Greater Saudi Arabia and Saudi identity as an alternative to Arab identity. In light of this reality, is the talk about enlightened Arabism a purely Levantine discourse? What is the point of mobilizing Arab integration at a time when economic and cultural concerns differ from one state to another and from one society to another? As for the "unholy trinity" of which Mr. **Al-Rantawi** spoke, "the tyrants, extremists and invaders," it seems as though we are overlooking the responsibility of our societies for what has happened in the region and focusing on that of external factors.

- **A question for Dr. Russell:** The United States is known for its volatility and reversal of its positions. Do you think the United States' reversal of its position on Iran through the abolition of the nuclear agreement will lead to a decline in the position of US President Trump? Do you think there is room for reform in the Iranian regime?

- **A question for Dr. Russell:** You talked about a transition in the global order. Does this mean that this transition will shift the chaos of the Middle East to the West?

Responding to the questions addressed to him, Dr. Russell said, "As for the US stance on Iran, especially with regard to the nuclear agreement, I do not think there has been a change in US policy. Since the beginning, this agreement has not received support inside the United States, not in decision-making circles, not among researchers and academics and not in popular circles. On the other hand, I do not think the Iranian regime is capable of reforming itself. Iran's problems are very large, Iran does not

have the fundamentals needed for reform and it lacks the resources because it uses them abroad. However, I believe that the hand of the world, including that of the United States, is still extended to Iran. Tehran must stop interfering in the affairs of the region's states. I believe that if the Iranian threat disappears, we may reach a solution to the Palestinian issue. We need an international peace conference for the conflicting parties in more than one place in this region." He added, "I do not think the chaos will move to the West, but the breakdown we see today in the Arab world is also seen in the European Union; Europe is on the threshold of a new phase that establishes a new kind of relations between people and states. Yet I do not expect a violent breakdown, so to speak, similar to what is going on in the Middle East."

Dr. Al-Ghabra said, "Arab societies are changing rapidly and their foundation is changing. The Arab Spring is not yet over, as some would think, and youth mobility has not yet spoken its last word. The young people will not return to their homes as the current order's players expect, and we can no longer ignore the new, activist Arab generation, which will not accept what impositions. Something is happening at the bottom of the Arab region, and we see many transformations that we cannot overlook; for example, we did not expect the rise of IS, for example, and we did not expect its defeat later on. As for the link between the Arab states, whether in the Levant, the Maghreb or the Gulf, it exists, and it is reflected in this Arab aspect that we cannot be denied, as much as we cannot deny the existence of limited separatist movements and other nationalities such as Kurds, for example. Language is one, diversity is one, and common concerns are many; hence, integration among Arab states is necessary. The region will not be able to rise, resist all the external pressures it is undergoing and build its domestic scene except with some sort of harmony among the various states, a harmony that is based on justice among these states where the big does not control the small."

Mr. Al-Rantawi said, "If invaders come from abroad, tyrants and extremists are the product of our environment; therefore, on the contrary, I emphasize the responsibility of our societies, with their leadership and popular aspects, about the current situation of these societies, as well as the situation of weakness and breakdown they suffer."

Former Prime Minister **Siniora** responded to the question addressed to him, saying, "In confirmation to what Dr. Shafeeq Al-Ghabra said, our Arab

societies undoubtedly undergo profound transformations as a result of the fact that the majority of their populations are young, and we have yet to see the last of these transformations. The technological revolution has broken the barriers of silence and fear, and as long as most Arab governments are unable to meet the needs of the people, the people will stand up and will not remain silent. The decline of enlightened Arab thought has allowed the emergence of extremist ideology and sub-identities. Moreover, every Arab state feels that alone it will not reach anywhere; hence, it is necessary to cooperate collectively to, first, prevent external dangers and, second, to build the domestic scene. The world decides the fate of the region without it playing any role in this; hence, it is important to follow the proverb, 'stand up to be heard.' We recognize that every society in the region has its own issues and problems, which we must not neglect, but there is an inclusive framework binding these societies that we must develop in order for this nation to be taken into account among nations. The interests of life for future generations combine the states of this nation, and we must work hard to take these generations away from sub-identities, away from extremism and away from violence. We will only be able to do so through civilized and enlightened thought. It is a journey of a thousand miles."

Ambassador Huth said, "The only diplomatic success the world has seen in decades is the nuclear agreement between the West and Iran, the only framework that could have kept Iran away from the nuclear bomb. We are well aware that there are other problems caused by the Iranian regime, such as its interference in the affairs of other states, its expansionist policy and its quest for hegemony. These problems exist, and we have to deal with them. There was no need to add a new problem, the problem of Tehran's nuclear ambitions, which we managed to resolve. The US cancellation of the nuclear agreement brought us back to the zero point in the Iranian nuclear file, in addition to its impact on European companies and the European economy."

Second Session: "The Repercussions of the Rule of Militias and the Disintegration of States on Security"

The second session was opened by the coordinator, Mr. **Peter Rimmele** from KAS, and the speakers were Mr. **Riad Qahwaji**, founder and CEO of the Near East and Gulf Institute for Military Analysis in Dubai, Mr. **Mohammad Al-Yahiya**, senior research officer at the Gulf Research

Center in the United States, and Mr. **Ali Al-Dabbagh**, former spokesperson for the Iraqi government.

Rimmele outlined the subject of the session, saying the phenomenon of non-state militias is not new to the world; the new thing is the extent of force these militias have reached: In some states of the region, they managed to control land, and in other states, they were able to control the state itself or share ruling with it - and either way, the militias got a say in security. Equally new are the roles played by these militias, particularly in the economy, and this directly affects the security of resources. "As in Future House conferences, our speakers, who come from various institutions, will not restrict themselves today to characterizing the problem, but will also try to anticipate realistic solutions for it.

The first speaker was **Riad Qahwaji**, who thanked Future House and the conference organizers for bringing together this large crowd of thinkers, experts and decision-makers. He pointed out that in addressing the meeting's subject he adopted a scientific approach based on several experiences, including his experience as a military man. For his speech, he chose the following title: "**Militias and the State: Unsustainable Forced Marriage.**"

"The phenomenon of militias sharing power with weak governments has become prevalent in the Middle East, and threaten to lead to the collapse of the state's structure and spread chaos across borders," he said. "This is the result of schemes prepared by regional forces." On the definition of a militia by military literature, he said, "It is an armed group fighting a government, a foreign force or another militia in a state that is under occupation, has become a failed state or is on the brink of becoming a failed state. The members of these militias are ideologues who constitute radical nationalist or sectarian extremist groups seeking to weaken central governments and impose their ideology on the state. Militias are the best tool that states use to wage proxy wars, and they thrive in times of crises as the case is today. What makes things more dangerous today is our digital world."

What we are witnessing today is fourth generation wars, where the state loses exclusive use of arms and power in favor of militias acting as a tool for foreign forces to influence other states and intervene in their affairs, he said. Aggressor states no longer need to send their troops to invade other

states. They now rely on the creation within these states of groups that they train, arm, finance and task with waging a war instead of their backers in order to achieve their backers' interests at a lower cost. In the process of militia establishment, aggressor states target national, religious or sectarian groups; this is what Russia did when it cleverly used Russian minorities in Ukraine to enter Crimea; Nazi Germany also used this strategy in the Second World War to control Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic where German-speaking minorities lived. In the Middle East, he said, foreign powers control states through militias; things get more complicated when a state witnesses the birth of several militias each linked to a different foreign power, and things get even more complicated when these foreign powers are at odds with one another, as the case is today in Syria.

He added, "The other serious phenomenon in fourth generation wars is the coexistence of peoples, political parties and even governments with these militias, and their acceptance of their existence, their sharing of power with the state and their coexistence with its various political institutions and military agencies. Even more dangerous is when foreign states begin to deal with these militias making this abnormal situation accepted internationally. Maintaining the stability of states is often the argument to justify this stance by foreign states."

Those states that coexist with non-state groups are rogue or failed states, he argued, and eventually, this coexistence will cease to be peaceful because the militias will compete with the state on the exclusive use of weapons and power. At a later stage, the militias will try to replace the state by pushing for regime change according to the desires of their foreign sponsors.

"The conflict between a militia and a state can be delayed but is inevitable, and we have seen examples in the Middle East," he concluded. "One party must control the other; it is optimal and natural for states to control militias because the only way out of the crisis caused by their existence is that the state assimilates them."

After thanking Future House and KAS for the "generous invitation," Mr. **Mohammad Al-Yahiya** began his speech by underscoring interconnectedness between disintegration, the theme of the conference, and militias. The situation of disintegration reached by some states as a result of the erosion of their sovereignty, the atrophy of their power and the

loss of their already questionable legitimacy, puts to question the difference between their institutions and military and security agencies on one hand and militias on the other, he said.

The militias in this region have a similar quest for changing the region's order in a way that suits them, he said, echoing Qahwaji's argument that militias are now the best tool used by states to intervene in the affairs of other states in order to secure their political and economic interests. He rejected the notion that the Sunnite-Shiite divide is a criterion for the classification of militias and their orientation. Despite the religious and confessional character of most of these militias, their goals remain political and economic, he said. "Tehran does not want to diminish Saudi Arabia's influence in the region because its regime is Sunnite and because Iran is a Shiite state, but because Tehran considers Riyadh the US arm in the region and is seeking to cut that arm. This explains the relations between Iran and Sunnite jihadist groups, including Al-Qaeda and Taliban: What brings them together is hostility to the United States, and their goal is one: To reduce US influence in the region. This applies to Yemen, where Iran does not want to change the Sunnite regime or turn Yemen into a Shiite state, but rather to secure a foothold in Bab Al-Mandab. The Houthis went further than what Iran wanted. We cannot ignore this fact and describe the conflict as a Sunnite-Shiite conflict."

He added, "I said earlier that the difference between the state and the militias has become foggy. Here, I pose some questions: In light of all that has been happening in Syria, is the Syrian army still a national army? What is the difference between it and the militias operating in Syria? Does the Syrian government have the legitimacy to use force? To what extent can Hezbollah be considered a non-state and a non-government group, while it monopolizes the right to declare war and the use of arms, controls the borders of the country and all parts of governance and government? Did not we hear the Lebanese Interior Minister (Mr. Nouhad Al-Mashnouk) say Lebanon has become a terrorist operations room, where attacks have been launched on Cyprus, Bulgaria, Bahrain and Kuwait? The minister is part of a government that would not have been formed without the consent of Hezbollah and a president brought by Hezbollah. What is going on in Iraq? Militias are many, but not all are subject to Iranian influence."

He added, "In fact, with the exception of IS, which has been defeated in principle, we face a network of militias in Bahrain, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen

and Iraq working for Iran and under its control. The Gulf states' fear of the nuclear agreement concluded by the West with Iran has proven to be real: The agreement favored Iran by limiting its danger to nuclear ambitions and ignoring its interference in the affairs of the region's states and its sponsorship of militias of various agendas; hence, the agreement allowed Iran to expand its influence. Since 2011, we have seen the new Iranian regime, which Obama described as moderate, creating new facts on the ground embodied in its rooted existence in each of the said Arab states."

The third speech in this session was by Mr. **Ali Al-Dabbagh**, who thanked Future House, President Gemayel and KAS for organizing this conference. One of the main reasons for the weakness of the state is the uncontrolled armament of people and the weakness of state institutions, he said, pointing out to the fact that 36 million weapons are held by Iraqis. The earliest militias in Iraq were formed as resistance groups against the US occupation, he said. They were made up of the Baath Party's remnants and were dominated by the Salafist movement and Al-Qaeda. Uncontrolled borders, support by the Arab media and the flow of funding helped boost the influence of these groups. During this period, the first jihadi migration took place: Thousands of people from various parts of the world entered Iraq to participate in the resistance against the US occupation. The phenomenon of regional and international influence by groups fighting outside their homelands was known for the first time. After that, the Iranian-backed militias were formed, also to resist the US occupation. Their strength grew until they controlled security and then entered decision-making circles through their political arms. Along with the existence of militias in Iraq, it is also necessary to mention the parallel existence of armed tribal groups. The role of these groups is reduced or increased according to funding (In Basra, for example, there is a favorable regional neighbor, rich oil fields and a port).

A most dangerous repercussion for the existence of these militias, he said, is the inability of Iraq to build independent institutions: Militias are inside decision-making circles and work hard to encourage sub-affiliations at the expense of collective national affiliations. He added, "Successive Iraqi governments failed to solve the problems suffered by citizens, and this opened the door wide for militias to compete with the state in the provision of services to citizens. These militias benefited from the freedom of expression that prevailed after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, and unleashed a sectarian discourse advocating community rights. Even worse

is that the government also adopted a sectarian discourse. De-Baathification, sectarian segregation and a sense of grievance among Sunnites have led to the emergence of incubators of radical ideology and Al-Qaeda among Sunni communities, while Shiite communities rejoiced in their show of force. This sectarian rivalry pushed various Iraqi factions to seek support from abroad, and enabled states such as Iran and Saudi Arabia to find proxy groups inside Iraq. Unfortunately, all of this is the result of wrong US policies in the wake of US occupation of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime."

With regard to the Popular Mobilization Forces, he said this group emerged because the state was unable to protect the country from the onslaught of IS, which managed to occupy a third of Iraq in record time. Today, the biggest challenge is how to assimilate these militias and bring them under state control, especially since most of the militias are loyal to Iran. The great regional challenge facing Iraq today is the conflict between Iran and the United States on the one hand and between Iran and Saudi Arabia on the other, he said. If these conflicts exacerbate, it will be disastrous for Iraq, especially since the country is historically known as a scene of conflict among empires.

He added, "Iraq is witnessing today qualitative transformations, mainly the rejection of Iraqis of various affiliations of political Islam, both Sunni and Shiite. Once again, we see in the Arab world peoples more aware than governments and politicians of internal and external risks facing their country." The sectarian discourse has begun to fade and lose audience, and figures that relied on it have fallen, he said. The participation rate in the recent general elections was surprisingly low, he added, as if people wanted to punish the ruling class. The Iraqis have become more aware in selecting their representatives and more immune to militias and their role. This explains why the Popular Mobilization Forces did not receive the votes that it and others had expected. These elections showed that people no longer accept the role of militias and do not accept that militias translate their militant achievements into political gains. He concluded by saying, "As I said earlier, facts in Iraq reflect a very big change. It may not be the change we aspire to, but the government can build on it to reduce the influence of militias."

In the debate that followed, the following questions were asked:

Question: What Mr. Al-Dabbagh said about the decline in the role of militias in Iraq is reassuring, but this does not apply to Lebanon, Yemen and Syria, especially to the militias allied with Iran. The ability of Iran to have proxies in these states is not only a result of strategic relationships between these proxies and Tehran, but also due to the nature of political sociology in these states, in addition to the failure of these state to manage pluralism. My question is: Can stability, major compromises and the handling of all problems be part of internal, domestic deals, or do we have to have a regional deal in which Iran is a fundamental party?

Question: I have two observations. First, I find it necessary to distinguish between the Popular Mobilization Forces and other militias in Iraq. The former was a key Shiite movement that came into being according to a religious edict (*fatwa*), and ordinary individuals and militias took part in the movement. When the war against IS ended, the individuals returned to their homes and the militias remained. Through their political arms, the militias managed to win 40 seats in the House of Representatives, and this number is not insignificant. Moreover, I do not think the danger of militias is disappearing; it is still there. In Lebanon, there is one militia, while in Iraq, there are 40, and all are linked to Iran. The problem is that the government itself, which is the product of the parliamentary majority, runs a militia. Second, none of the speakers addressed the role of civil society in eliminating militias. This is my question: Is the emergence of militias and their growing role at the expense of the state temporary or permanent?

Question to Mr. Qahwaji: Some of the assumptions you put forward are controversial. A militia is not just an entity that challenges the state, but also an entity that acts like a state and tries to control it. What is the meaning of the state in the Arab world? Do states in the Arab world abide by the standards of the modern state or are they just dictatorial regimes? The states in the Arab world act like militias, and their armies act like militias. I agree here with what Mr. Al-Yahya said about the line being vague between militias and states in the Arab world. I believe that the main reason for the emergence of militias in the Arab world is the absence of security.

Question to Mr. Al-Dabbagh: How will Iran react to the electoral victory of Muqtada Al-Sadr? Are we going to see a confrontation or a compromise?

My second question to Messrs. Qahwaji and Al-Dabbagh: In some states of the region, especially Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, we

witness an application of the Iranian model of bilateral governance: A state with a regular army and a militia. Do you think this model, which Iran succeeded in exporting abroad, is viable in the long term?

Question to Mr. Al-Dabbagh: The Sunnites in Iraq played a major role in liberating the country from IS control, and this participation was a major proof that the Sunnites in Iraq give priority to national over confessional affiliations. How do the Sunnites of Iraq see the Popular Mobilization Forces and its entry of decision-making circles? Will this bring us back to the zero point in terms of injustice that Sunnites have felt since Saddam Hussein's fall?

Question to Mr. Qahwaji: You said the greatest danger arises when civil society, alongside political circles, accept the existence of militias, coexist with them and grant them legitimacy. The language of diplomacy relies on the power of logic while the existence of militias stems from the logic of force. How can a compromise be reached here?

In response to questions, Al-Dabbagh said, "All the militias in Iraq are linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, especially to Major General Qasem Soleimani. I do not exaggerate when I argue that the Corps handles Iran's Iraq policy. Even the Iranian ambassador to Iraq comes from the Corps, not from among diplomats. Regarding what was said about the emergence of the Popular Mobilization Forces because of religious edict, let me clarify that the *fatwa* addressed all Iraqis of all sects, calling on them to volunteer to help the national army, not for the establishment of a militia alongside the national army and with links abroad, especially in Iran. In this context, the Popular Mobilization Forces usurped and distorted the *fatwa*, and Iran used the *fatwa* to strengthen and establish its influence in Iraq. Individuals who responded to the *fatwa*'s call to volunteer eventually returned to their homes, while the militias that were formed in exploitation of this *fatwa*, all remained intact, sustaining their links to Iran. As for Muqtada Al-Sadr, we should not forget that Iran created his movement in the beginning, but he later wanted to rid himself of Iran's influence. I think Iran still holds key parts of the Sadrism movement, and I am not sure if the movement will be able to rid itself from Iran's influence. It should be noted here that many of the groups that constitute today the Popular Mobilization Forces emerged from the Sadrism movement, such as the League of Righteous People; Al-Sadr call them "rogue groups." As for the duality of militias and the army, I did not give a rosy picture of the situation in Iraq; I spoke of a glimmer of hope stemming from popular

rejection of the existence of militias and their role and the fact that incubators for militias ceased to exist in Sunnite and Shiite areas. After the recent victory of the Iraqi army against IS, the Iraqis, with all their affiliations, began to feel that their savior from IS and their bastion against it is the army, not the militias, especially the Popular Mobilization Forces. However, I cannot be sure whether the logic of force or the power of logic will eventually prevail. Legalizing militias in laws stems from the large number of both the militias and their recruits. The big challenge today in Iraq is how the state will be able to shift the loyalty of these recruits from Iran to Iraq. The experience of the Sons of Iraq (*Sahwahs*) is still fresh and can be replicated with the Popular Mobilization Forces through integration of recruits, not only within security and military agencies of the state, but also in the state's civilian fields."

For his part, Al-Yahya said, "Iran does not favor militias operating in social and other services; hence, replacing the state. First, this model proved to be a failure, and second, its cost was too high. Iran does not want the militias it created to replace states. For example, it did not want the Houthis to enter into a conflict with the Yemeni government and try to change the regime. All what it wanted and still wants in Yemen is securing a foothold in Bab Al-Mandab. Iran does not want its proxies to occupy positions where they can be held accountable. In Iraq, Iran has benefited from the weakness of the state to have control on a group of militias, and its capacity to build such militias has grown after the US occupation of Iraq. It is dangerous for Iran and the local community when these militias become very strong and start playing the role of the state in providing educational, social, medical and economic services."

Qahwaji said, "Let's start from this point: There is a difference between fourth generation wars and civil wars. The regional powers that wanted to strengthen their influence found opportunities to do so in fractured states, first through the creation of civil society organizations and the provision of services, and then through the formation of militias. As governments failed to address people's problems, these militias gained strength and built on this failure of states, and then began to promote themselves as providers of solutions.

Hezbollah is wearing the hat of a Lebanese party that provides services, fights corruption and resists Israel, but it is in fact a militia taking orders from Iran and ready to fight anywhere in the world to secure Tehran's interests. When tyrants lead states, the state becomes a militia because

the interests of the state become the interests of the tyrant. This is the cause of chaos in some states such as Iraq, Syria and Libya. When regimes fell and militias arose, nothing changed. I am afraid that we are beginning to see the real meaning of the Iranian slogan about exporting the revolution: Building states with dualities similar to that of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and this is what we see today in Lebanon and is being repeated in Iraq and in Yemen."

Session Coordinator **Rimmele** asked the speakers about what should be done to address the problem of militias in this part of the world.

Al-Dabbagh replied, "Iraq has not yet reached Lebanon's dependence on another country, whereby decisions made abroad are imposed at home. The biggest proof is the failure of former Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki to serve a third term. The region is in a situation of uneasy tugging due to Iran's policy and its troubled relations with most of the region's states. In contrast, since the outbreak of the Iranian revolution, the policies of Western states, including the United States, have failed to contain Iran and have given it opportunities to expand its influence. Is the solution war or coexistence between the region's states and Iran? In Iraq, we are very much afraid from the war scenario because we are sure that if it breaks out it will run on Iraqi soil. Is there a way for coexistence? I doubt it. We have a dilemma that no one can predict now about how to get out of it."

For his part, Al-Yahya said, "The discourse in the United States has changed in terms of determining the Iranian threat, and the current US administration has shifted its policy towards Iran compared to former administrations. US policymakers are now aware that Iran's nuclear ambitions are part of its greater threat that is to expand its influence in the Middle East by meddling in the internal affairs of the region's states. Nuclear ambitions may be the smokescreen Iran uses in its dealings with the West, while it continues in the background its expansionary policy. On the other hand, the main problem lies in the weakness of the states in which Iran has successfully extended its influence. This brings us back to the question of the chronic failure of Arab states to found themselves on democracy, the rule of law, social justice and development.

Qahwaji said, "It is no longer acceptable from the international community to overlook this abnormal situation of forced marriage between the state and militias. What is puzzling about this is that these militias have offices in

a number of Western states. Representatives at these offices hold meetings with official bodies, suggesting that the West accepts this abnormal phenomenon and considers militias legitimate bodies that it can deal with. The international community must correct its view of the situation in the Middle East and how it deals with these militias. For our part, we as Arab states must address the issue of national identity so that we can confront the militias. This is the only way that will allow us to get rid of the militias. If we do not prioritize the issue of strengthening national identity, we are heading for civil wars.”

Third Session: "Case Studies: Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and the Gulf States"

The coordinator of the third session, Mr. **Joseph Khoury**, started the session by clarifying that discussions will focus on the current turbulent situation in the region and attempts by the Gulf states to adapt to these changes. "This session will look at the underlying causes of unrest in many states of the region, the stalemate that is taking place and what the Gulf states are doing to protect themselves," he said. "In addition to the emergence of militias, the region - similar to the rest of the world - is witnessing the emergence of new entities that represent citizens and have great power in influencing, framing and attracting people. These entities are civil society organizations. On the other hand, governments, especially in the Gulf states, have begun to pay more attention to the citizens and their needs. A Ministry of State for Happiness was established in the UAE, for example, while Saudi Arabia is increasingly working to protect the interests of its citizens. The speakers will try to discuss the causes of crises in the region and try to envision ways out." He introduced the speakers as follows: Dr. **Fadi Al-Ahmar**, a professor and researcher at the Holy Spirit University-Kaslik in Lebanon and an expert on Syrian and Middle Eastern politics, Mr. **Wahid Abdel-Meguid**, head of Al-Ahram Center for Strategic Studies in Egypt and Mr. **Motassem Al-Sioufi**, a Syrian political activist and researcher and executive director of the Next Day initiative.

Wahid Abdel Abdel-Meguid took to the platform. After thanking Future House and the organizers of this conference, he said the theme was very broad and required studying the cases of nine countries. "When we talk about a study, we mean an analytical study far from wishes, dreams and bias. Today, I will put aside my bias in public affairs to try as an intellectual, not as an academic, to explain these cases that raise several questions and whose answers need hours, perhaps days." He added, "Since in the study and analysis of international relations I am an advocate of the most conservative branches of political realism, I will present a realistic picture and a realistic analysis of the current situation; and this picture will not be rosy. The prevailing scene ascertains is that any talk about improving the Arab reality in the short and medium terms is only a matter of wishes. Hence, I will discuss what we can do to reduce the decline and stop it at this point. If we could do this, it would be a great job."

He added, "Any study begins with a question, and the question I have chosen is: What has happened in the countries of this region, specifically since the beginning of the current decade, and generally since the beginning of the second millennium? In fact, several volcanoes exploded in the beginning of this decade, preceded in the beginning of the second millennium by two earthquakes that were the largest in the history of the modern world and led to repercussions suffered most by our region. The five volcanoes are the revolutions that broke out in five Arab states. The most important factors that led to the revolutions were tyranny, the reproduction of underdevelopment, the reduction of the national state's authority and the reduction of authority into a network of interests that differ from one country to another. These volcanoes were inevitably going to explode. The two earthquakes that preceded these volcanoes and took place in the last decade were the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 - the latter led to the degeneration of the state and confessional conflict. These two earthquakes paved the way for the five volcanoes and revealed what was simmering deep inside the Arab world. In Syria, the confessional engine has become an engine of political conflict and is becoming the engine of a regional conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Conflicts in Iraq and Syria are protracted conflicts. In Iraq, the conflict has subdued but is not over, and in Syria, the conflict is still raging and will not end soon because it is being sustained by local, regional and international feeds. In the Gulf two countries, Oman and Kuwait, tried to protect themselves from the conflict and succeeded in doing so. A third country, Bahrain, lived through the conflict and is yet to end it because the

conflict there was oppressed, not addressed. A fourth country, Saudi Arabia, tried to exploit these conflicts in its biggest conflict with Iran. Political Islam bears a large part of the responsibility for the deterioration that occurred and led to the eruption of these volcanoes. "The Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, prevented the volcanoes from exploding inside their territories and tried to put down the volcanoes in other countries. They were involved in the Syrian volcano before retreating to indulge in another war, the war in Yemen, which I expect to continue for a long time and become a war of attrition."

He added, "Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are seeking to increase their influence in the region. Saudi Arabia is experiencing successive interactions and awaiting others that will make the situation less stable than it seems to be. The irony in this scene is Lebanon, which is a light in dark surroundings; it appears to be the least affected by what happened and is happening, despite the fragility of its situation. One explanation for this is the immunity against wars that have been acquired by the Lebanese civil war, especially after all parties to the war realized that none of them would be able to abolish the other. Despite all contradictions, the country witnessed some kind of acceptable coexistence. The Lebanese may not see this, but we are talking about a comparison in which things are relative. This interpretation is derived from a historical reading of conflicts of this kind: It says a conflict ends either with a final and crushing victory - this is not likely in the cases we are talking about - or with the realization of the parties to the conflict that none of them can eliminate the other. Conflicts in this region will end only when their parties reach this conclusion and reach compromises that allow them to coexist in some form. This is the painful reality that we should be thinking about."

He added, "It was said in a previous session that new generations can make this change - the realization that no party can eliminate the other - and can stop the deterioration after they feel exhausted and realize that the continuation of the war will strip them from any gain they make. Until then, I say the time of solutions is not yet ripe, and we must understand this to be able to manage crises and restrain them and their losses and effects. Internal and external factors have not yet matured to reach compromises and solutions, and all we can do today is manage these conflicts and think about how we do it. As for solutions, they are still very far away."

Mr. **Motassem Al-Sioufi** took to the platform. He started with thanking the organizers of this conference, saying he hoped that "my remarks relating exclusively to the Syrian affairs will be a good addition to this conference." He said, "Despite the decline in violence in Syria, the collapse and almost complete elimination of IS and the decline in strength of Al-Nusra Front, we still face a complex reality: The conflict between Syrian parties continues, solutions have not yet been reached and problems are worsening. The problem is not only with the political opposition, but also with the remaining pockets of armed opposition. The problem is also in the north-east of Syria, where the Syrian Democratic Forces is having its own problems with its immediate Syrian environment and the Arab environment in general."

He added, "The nature of the engagement is regional: It is Iranian-Israeli-Turkish, in addition to influences coming from two directions, Iraq and Lebanon. The current conflict is also international because of influences from the Iran-US conflict and after Iran's withdrawal from Syria has become on top of the US agenda and because of Russia's differences with some regional and international parties. The biggest complication comes from the absence of a US-Russian understanding. Syria is now divided into spheres of influence held by groups with affiliations abroad, as well as external foreign military existence. The boundaries of these areas are not delineated but have been identified through understandings: In the south of Syria, there is a Russian-Israeli understanding on the need to keep pro-Iranian groups away from the border. In the north, there is a Russian-Turkish understanding over the existence of 12 Turkish outposts. In the region east of the Euphrates River, attacks are rampant: Russian forces try to advance and US forces retaliate harshly. In the region east of the Euphrates River, there is also an Iranian existence trying to create resistance groups against US occupation."

As for the ongoing peace processes, he said the Geneva process was "dead" and no one expected any outcome from it. There are two working tracks. There is first the Astana track, which fulfilled its aim; that is, to clean up pockets controlled by the Syrian opposition and create observation points. "This was demanded by the regime from the first day of the Astana talks. The aim was not to establish de-escalation zones, as it was said, but to clean up areas and restore regime control there." The second track is that of Sochi, where the question of constitutional change is being raised by drafting a new constitution for the country.

In an analysis of the security issue, he said, "The security approach that prevailed before 2011 was tyrannical and repressive in favor of the regime, and it failed miserably in managing Syrian diversity and in managing the relationship between the Syrians and the state. The Syrian identity was weak; hence, the conflict developed from a conflict calling for freedom to a conflict of identities, bringing to the surface the fragility of Syrian society." He added, "In light of the current situation, I do not think the Syrian state will be able to regain sovereignty over all the territories, rebuild the military apparatus and the army, formulate a new social contract that can pave the way for an inclusive national identity and allow for development, or make policies independent of the interests of regional and international allies. The other Syrian parties, such as opposition forces in Idlib, the South and Syrian Democratic Forces, have become too linked to their backers abroad and bound by their interests and guidance. For example, the situation in northeastern Syria is linked to US plans and to whether the US forces plan to stay there long. "In conclusion, I do not see a solution to the Syrian crisis soon."

He added, "Of course, I can say what I see fit to break the deadlock. Syria needs a comprehensive political solution that is acceptable to local, regional and international parties, and this is not currently available. The answer to the question about the future of the situation is related to the outcome of the conflict of others on our land. The focus today will be on the Iranian existence in Syria, especially in light of Israeli attacks on Iranian outposts, the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement and Washington's request from Tehran to get out of Syria. As for those who hope to see a disagreement between Iran and Russia, they will be disappointed because the two countries have a common enemy, the United States, and a common ally, the Syrian regime."

Fadi Al-Ahmar took to the platform and began his speech by saying that demographic change in Syria threatens social security in the state, as well as community security in some of its neighboring states. The question there is about the existence of a systematic internal, regional and international policy to bring about a demographic change in Syria, where the population looks like a mosaic due to a multitude of races, ethnicities, religions and sects, he added. About 80% of the population is concentrated in main conflict areas, he said; hence, internal and external displacements were very large, he said. In terms of external displacement, there are 1.5-1.8 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, while Turkey hosts 3.4 million others. In

Jordan, the number is over one million, while Iraq is home to the smallest number of Syrian refugees. Regarding internal displacement, according to official figures, Idlib alone hosts 2.3 million people, while activists talk about 2.6 million.

He added, "Is displacement taking place according to a strategy? Yes, there is. The strategy adopts a single approach, which begins with besieging, starving and bombing, and ends with forced displacement. Assad himself said, "Syria's society today has become more homogeneous and nationally unified." It is known that Shiites fought the key wars in "Useful Syria;" they fought in Homs, Damascus, Aleppo and the south to immunize "Useful Syria." On the other hand, deportation agreements were not struck mainly by the regime but by Iran and Hezbollah."

Population evictions started in Homs in 2012, and at the time, identification papers and ownership documents were burnt; after the end of the military operations there, only 200,000 people returned to their homes. The Baba Amr neighborhood, which was inhabited by 35,000 people, has become deserted. The same applies to Al-Waer neighborhood, where 700,000 people lived, and Al-Qusayr, which had a population of 65,000. The reasons for the people's reluctance to return are many, including large-scale destruction, the creation of security zones where people are not allowed to come back to and fear of the regime that reactivated its security system. In this regard, Law No. 10/2018 is the most dangerous measure in terms of its impact on the Syrian interior and neighboring states. The law legitimizes the demographic change in Syria and allows the regime to build new cities called "organizational zones" and house whomever it wants there.

This law, he argued, complements a decision issued in 2012 on the establishment of organizational zones in the countryside of Damascus. These zones, he said, will house foreign fighters and their families who came from abroad (there are no official documents on this subject, but there are testimonies of individuals). Iran began buying land in Syria early on, especially in the countryside of Damascus, and established a large number of religious seminaries, he added. This is evidence to intentions of demographic change through displacement and Shiification. Through this strategy, Iran wants to establish the "Shiite Crescent," in which IS emerged as a loophole and Tehran worked to remove it. Hezbollah "may be working to secure the establishment of a Shiite state or mini-state, which stretches

from the countryside of Damascus to the Bekaa Valley and includes Al-Qalamoun," he argued. He added that Russia is a partner in this strategy because it provides it with military and political cover. As for the goals of Russia, the first goal is a federal Syria, he said, pointing out that Russia was the first party to suggest this and arguing that demographic change contributes to this end. The second Russian goal is to protect minorities; there are voices from Syria talking about a holy war being waged by Russian President Putin, and praising Russia's argument in favor of a Useful Syria.

Demographic segregation in Syria is leading to a religious, confessional society, causing profound demographic changes and creating organizational zones or settlements, he said. He said he feared that demographic segregation would make it impossible for the largest number of displaced Syrians in Lebanon to return to their country and areas. Finally, he underscored the importance of repealing Law No. 10/2018 and the need for the international community to focus on ensuring the return of displaced Syrians to their country rather than financing their stay in host states. Host states should carry out a coordinated campaign to pressure for the return of the displaced.

In the debate that followed, the following questions were asked:

- **Question:** All the Arab states have dealt with the Arab Spring as a threat, not an opportunity. Some states assimilated it softly, others harshly. Why not think of a scenario where no political negotiated solution will ever take place in Syria? Why not think developments in Syria are actually the solution? Are we not witnessing a draft solution whereby the Syrian regime is reproduced if it distances itself from Iran and Hezbollah? Is not that what Russia and Israel want too? Israel's Institute for National Security Studies has issued a recommendation saying, "Better the devil we know than the demons we can only imagine if Syria falls into chaos and the extremists from across the Arab world gain a foothold there." It urged "the devil we know" to distance itself from Iran and Hezbollah. I do not believe in a Russian-Iranian disagreement. On demographic change, I think the matter is exaggerated. First, a large part of the Sunnite community supports the Syrian regime. Second, Sunnite businesspeople are the ones who are building the organizational zones. Third, the Sunnites in Syria, including the Kurds, are estimated at 77-80% of the population; that is, between 14 and

16 million people; these millions cannot be replaced by the 70,000 brought in from Afghanistan, Pakistan or Iraq.

- **Question:** The talk of a plan for the establishment of a Shiite state in Syria is exaggerated. The Shiites do not exceed 1-2% of the population, and the Alawites are estimated at 10-12%. This is not to mention huge religious differences between the two communities. Second, I do not think Iran is interested in establishing a Shiite state because its interests stem from Persian national, not sectarian considerations. Hence, I think linking unrelated issues to prove that a Shiite state is in the making is unrealistic. The crisis is primarily political.

- **Question:** I think talk about a systematic plan to introduce demographic change in Syria is full of exaggeration. Those who say Russia supports this plan are unaware of Russia's history and its suffering from demographic displacement. Russia understands that this policy is vicious and will not lead to any sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis. My question to Mr. Al-Sioufi: Do you think the drafting of a new constitution for Syria is timely? Is it the necessary threshold to solve the crisis?

- **Question to Abdul-Majid:** Do you think what is happening now in the region is an attempt to redraw the borders of states on confessional and sectarian basis and an indicator to the fall of the borders drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement? Have the features of the map prepared by the late Bernard Lewis started to appear?

Question to Mr. Al-Sioufi: Are you really convinced that there will be no disagreement between Russia and Iran? Do not you think the raids carried out by Israel against Iranian outposts in Syria with Russia's knowledge or disregard are evidence to a tactical, imminent relationship between Israel and Russia? **Question to Mr. Al-Ahmar:** We know that most Sunnites who fled Syria went to Lebanon, and you said Hezbollah contributed to their displacement. What is Hezbollah's interest in having more Sunnites in Lebanon, especially since your speech suggests that they will not return to their country because their displacement took place under a strategic plan and a systematic policy?

- **Question:** Talk of Shiification in Syria is not based on any statistical facts at all (Shiites are 1% of the population and Alawites 12%). Shiification attempts have failed. Even talk about the existence of 70,000 Shiite

militiamen in Syria is exaggerated. In fact, displacement cannot be denied as demographic change, but the population count is based on loyalty and opposition to the regime, not sectarian considerations; hence, displacement targets the regime's opponents. On the other hand, the Shiites who fought in Syria were not Syrian; they were members of militias that came from abroad. I agree with Mr. Al-Sioufi's argument that the regime is helpless and incapable of any action. I also agree with his argument that Iran's plan in the region in general and in Syria in particular is not driven by Shiism. Talking about a map attributed to Bernard Lewis is wrong. The map was prepared by a small official in the US State Department and does not reflect US policy toward the region. Today, the United States wants to clamp down on Russia. We have to be realistic and avoid blowing things out of proportion.

In response to the questions, Abdul-Majid said, "As for what has been said about a plan or plans to redraw the region's map and the borders of its states, there is not yet reliable elements confirming the factuality of these plans, neither regionally nor internationally. The biggest example is the Iraqi Kurdistan region and its fate. To redraw borders in a sensitive area such as the Middle East requires a coherent global order. The current order is fragile and has not yet been able to digest the repercussions of redrawing borders in Eastern and Central Europe more than two decades ago. Moreover, the nature of conflicts in the region cannot bear with the consequences of the creation of new states. Current conflicts are protracted social conflicts. The only national conflict is that of the Kurds, and it is more of a historical claim and a dream than of a plan. What Dr. Hassan Mneimneh said about the US historian Bernard Lewis is true. Lewis was a member of a committee formed by the US Congress in the 1980s to explore new ways to contain Soviet influence. The plan that resulted from this workshop has never been published, and as far as we know, Lewis' contribution to this committee was a recommendation that the United States strengthen its relations with the Kurds and supports their cause because the Kurds are its only reliable ally in this region. Lewis is an orientalist and has very positive attitudes towards Islam and the East. We must read his work and not rely on what some critics say about him. In the final analysis, I believe that when conflicting parties are exhausted, no settlement they reach will violate the current geographical framework of the region. Many scenarios and perceptions are being presented today about a range of solutions, but the actual elements that should be available to resolve any conflict are not yet available. We have a long time to go before

elements appear and force us to think about the formulas of expected solutions. Fire is still under the ash in most of our states, and several volcanoes are likely to explode, especially in Jordan, Morocco and Sudan. The countdown for getting out of the series of crises that the region has witnessed since the beginning of the last century has not yet begun. As I said, it is more worthwhile to think today about how to manage conflicts to reduce losses rather than wasting time thinking of solutions whose elements have not materialized locally, regionally or internationally. This applies to the issue of displaced Syrians. Idlib, for example, hosts a huge reservoir of opposition groups and looks like a time bomb that can explode any moment."

Al-Ahmar said, "I am convinced that the Syrian conflict will continue and that the problem of displaced people is intractable. The demographic change is taking place in Syria and the regime is seeking it to have facts on the ground in its favor when the time is right. The experience of President Hafez Assad's regime in this field is still evident. He strengthened his authority through the administrative organization he adopted for Syria. As for Hezbollah's interest in the existence of so many Syrian Sunnites in Lebanon, I asked this question to people close to the party and their answer was confused and unclear."

Al-Sioufi said, "I agree with Mr. Abdul-Majid's argument. The elements needed to resolve the Syrian crisis do not exist today. As for the constitutional amendment, this empty and useless step does not lead to a solution of any kind. Syria needs drastic changes: First, the overthrow of the regime; second, a transition; and third, the establishment of a new regime and a new social contract. Only then, we will need new interim constitutional measures. As for the Russian-Iranian disagreement, a number of obvious questions come to my mind: If the Russians want to pressure Iran out of Syria, they would not do so without getting something in return. Have they been offered a price to do so? Do they have the ability to get the Iranians out of Syria? If the Russians get the Iranians out, can they fill the vacuum that the Iranians will leave behind? With regard to Law No. 10/2018, it is a fact that 12 million Syrians are displaced (both internally and externally), and most of them are opponents of the regime. What will the regime benefit from this law? First, it punishes the opponents by depriving them of their property, and second, it benefits from the change that will affect the nature of areas, especially those where the revolution broke out. Moreover, there is a security aspect of this issue: It creates

environments that are not eligible for revolution against the regime in the future. Third, the regime benefits by establishing holding companies in real estate rehabilitation projects."

