

TRANSCRIPT
CHALLENGES IN THE WIDER MIDDLE EAST
A CONVERSATION WITH.....
Sunday March 16, 2008

Discussants: **The Hon. Dr. Javier Solana**, Secretary General of the Council of the EU and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

Moderator: **Mr. David Ignatius**, Associate Editor and Columnist, *The Washington Post*

CRAIG KENNEDY: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. Last year at the Brussels Forum, on the first night, out in the bar, late, we had one of the most really electrifying conversations between Javier Solana and David Ignatius focused on Iran. Now, one year later, we've asked them to come back and reprise their performance, maybe a little bit broader scope to cover the whole Middle East, and I think you can expect something at least as interesting as last year. So David, its all yours, thank you, both of you.

DAVID IGNATIUS: Thank you Craig. I love that introduction. It makes it sound like sort of the Mick Jagger return concert. It could be worse it could be Britney Spears so. But we are back a year later, the Middle East is back a year later, as we all know and there's an awful lot to talk about as always. Doing a little bit of research on our distinguished guest Dr. Solana, yesterday, to be honest, looking in Wikipedia, which has become our universal research tool, I found the following quote which is attributed to General Wesley Clarke, and General Clark is supposed to have heard this from Dr. Solana as his explanation to the secret of his diplomatic success, and he is supposed to have said; "Make no enemies and never ask a question to which you do not know the answer."

Well, Javier, I have a problem for you, you don't get to ask the questions in this session, but I love that quote because it illustrates a quality a quality that I think we all recognize and value in Dr. Solana, which is that he is an optimistic man. He's a man who brings that hope and spirit to everything he does. And that's been true of his work in the Middle East. And yet, as I know as someone who's been covering the Middle East now for almost 30 years, the words of a colleague that were said to me when I began still haunt me. And it was the phrase, "David, when you're covering the Middle East, pessimism pays." In other words, you'll never be wrong if you bet that it isn't going to work out.

And sadly, we're in one of the periods that recur for people who care about the Middle East in which, as we look around at all the different parts of this conflict, what we see is a sense of blockage that reinforces our pessimism. So, with the privilege of talking to



Dr. Solana, explore where we are, how we got here, and crucially where we go next, especially in this unlikely period, in which we're really waiting for a change of administration in Washington. So I'm going to come back again and again, Dr. Solana, to the question, "What in this period can the EU do?"

But let me begin where Craig Kennedy did. At the last Brussels Forum, we were gathered in April. Dr. Solana had just come back from Ankara, Turkey, where he had met with Iranian representatives, Dr. Ali Larijani, most particularly, for two days of what were regarded as crucial talks. And I remember, as he arrived in the salon up above, the sense of expectation, anticipation, that something real was happening. The United States had been signaling that we were finally ready, through Dr. Solana as the emissary for the US and the EU-3 to really sit down for hard discussions with the Iranians about a formula that might allow them to join in general talks on the nuclear issue and make some progress.

And I remember, as we finished that session, Dr. Solana, I think everybody shared a sense, "Gee, this may be a moment." So let me take you back a year ago to that and ask you to start by telling us, in that period of the dialogue -- we'll get to where we are now -- but in that period of the dialogue, do you felt that you and Ali Larijani came close to a formula that might have bridged the differences and provided a framework for gathering and real negotiations?

JAVIER SOLANA: Thank you very much, David. I will try to answer the question. I don't think so. I don't think we were that close, as is represented for you, or by you. But it's true that we were taking some steps in the right direction. That was, Ankara, probably the most important meeting that we had at the time. I mean, I can say now that are talking off the record. So I can speak everything I want.

IGNATIUS: I should caution you that, with cameras going...

SOLANA: I'm just joking.

IGNATIUS: ... that we're probably not talking off the record.

SOLANA: In Ankara, I presented to Ali Larijani with a paper -- a paper that never was fully answered, and has not been answered yet; but a paper that was sensible in the sense that they could have got it. And we could have moved, probably, in a direction that would have been faster than what we have...

IGNATIUS: Give us a sense of what was in that paper.

SOLANA: The idea was behind that paper. You know, where I was representing in Ankara, not only the United States and the European Three, but also the Russian Federation and China. At the meetings before that meeting in Ankara, we thought about the possibility

to get engaged in what we may call a pre-negotiation. The names are irrelevant, the terminology. But something that would prepare the ground for a full negotiation, which everybody will be engaged, including the United States.

Now, he took that. We had an interesting meeting. I think he understood. I think we left both knowing what we had been talking about. And then the time for the next meeting was a little bit too long. We went the next meeting to Madrid. And there, as you remember -- well, you don't remember. But it was very important the change in position that Larijani took at that point. And thinking that they had to comply with something we have asked, which is the relation with Vienna. As you know, there outstanding issues, were very, very important issues. And they never recognized that. In Madrid was the first time that they begin to think well, we may have to do something more on that issue.

Then we went to Lisbon. And Lisbon was very -- probably the most dramatic meeting, in which -- you don't know it probably -- but Larijani at the last day, he comes to the meeting that we had the following day in Lisbon, took a plane and went to see Mohammed ElBaradei immediately. The substance of that meeting was to look into the paper from Ankara, but in particular for he was too late to realize that they could not do anything. Before, they could not begin to solve with Mohammed ElBaradei some of the outstanding issues.

Now, for some this was not good news. For me, it was good news, because regardless of what happens, to clarify those standing issues with the agency is good. And the fact that we have the second report from the agency that has allowed just to go to another UN Security Council Resolution not long ago, is because that report of Mohammed ElBaradei and the IAEA is a report that that's not the case for cleaning Iran from all the outstanding issues. And I think that is important.

Now, the situation today, as you know, is that Dr. Larijani has got elected on Friday for the Parliament in a list, which is a more modern list. Let me put it that way. And we have to see how the situation evolves after the election in Iran. Nothing dramatic is going to happen. But we may have a possibility to analyze what is going to be happening in the elections in 2009.

IGNATIUS: Let's talk about -- we have so many months before we can talk about post-election issues with the United States. But we have post-election Iran. You have something to me while we were waiting to come in, which fascinated me, which is that Larijani...

IGNATIUS: ..post-election Iran. You said so to me while we were waiting to come in, which fascinated me, which is that Larijani has been campaigning with campaign posters that show him with you. Is that true?

SOLANA: It is true.

IGNATIUS: That is a hopeful sign I think.

SOLANA: You know he is campaigning from Qom which is a very important Iranian city, religious city, and he had won fairly well. I mean the final figures we will know tomorrow probably, but the impression is that he has won fairly well. And it is true that in the poster he has put on the walls of Qom that he had pictures in which he is with me shaking hands and he is smiling. I don't remember if I am smiling, he is smiling, that's for sure. There are other pictures – another picture I think he is with some of the trips he did to Europe and some of the leaders, and he is also with Mohamed ElBaradei in another picture. But, I have not read really – got translated what he says, the translations, I don't know if he said well. I will get to the translations

IGNATIUS: And Javier Solana..

SOLANA: I will read it a little later. I will let you know.

IGNATIUS: The question we would ask after the election, after the translation of the poster as well, is whether this is a time for you and for the EU to restate for the Iranian people, at a time when it appears that the reformers, if you will, or the more pragmatic group in Iran, has scored some gains from what was expected. If this is a good time to reiterate the interest in a dialogue and specifically, to reiterate the paper that you presented to Dr. Larijani in Ankara a year ago? Do you that would make sense? How much to do that?

SOLANA: As you know, you read the statement of the Permanent Members of the Security Council after they moved to the resolution is in the statement and that statement is sentiment like what you have said is expresses. And what is expressed by the President of Security Council on behalf of the Europeans, the United States, Russia, and China, and we are going to try that. Now, I think it will be very difficult to know what is going to happen in the coming days. I don't expect a reply from – even for a meeting in the short period of time after the elections, but I don't – I don't – I consider that it will be possible to have another meeting during the time probably before three months, which is a time that this is established, the resolution for them to comply. Now, the problem now is Larijani, as you know, is Member of the Parliament. The negotiated role of Larijani in the meeting in Rome - still us two together. In the next meeting with Larijani, which was was in London. And then I met Jalili alone here in Brussels in the last part of-in the last days of January, informally, which was in Brussels, which is not – was not public, but it took place.

IGNATIUS: And some of the reporting about your conversations with Jalili, the successor to Larijani, have been quite negative. *The New York Times* quoted him or quoted a senior official with knowledge of your conversations as having said that he told you

bluntly, "It is all starting new. Nothing that was said before applies; I am new man." Is that true? Did he give you that comment?

SOLANA: Not that dramatically. But, in essence, he had to affirm himself. Dr. Jalili arrived there after a visit of President Putin to Tehran, and while we didn't expect that Larijani will be pushed away and be substituted by Jalili; it happened. And what we – the expectation we had after the visit of President Putin to Tehran, that it was a good visit and I want to praise that because it was very important visit. That is the response to the visit was not what was expected, but ((inaudible)) Dr. Larijani was out and Dr. Jalili was in.

IGNATIUS: Javier, tell us why, because there were some very negative press coverage after that visit and a view that this would set back hopes for dialog with the Iran of the nuclear issue. What did you find positive in President Putin's visit with the Supreme Leader, and specifically, it was said that Putin delivered a kind of a more detailed Russian idea for how to move forward.

SOLANA: No. What is important of that visit is that President Putin met with the Supreme Leader and he had the opportunity to convey and this is what he did and I am aware of that, that he conveyed exactly the same position that I have defended and that was very good. It was not presented to Dr. Jalili or Dr. Larijani, but the Supreme Leader, and they first news that I got of that meeting may have some consequences for Larijani; Larijani was not present in that meeting, which is very surprising, he should have been. And – but, President Putin conveyed a message that I knew and I talked with him afterwards. President Putin talked to Prime Minister Olmert after talked to President Bush and we had the same reading— we got together to compare notes and it was a good meeting in that sense. The consequences were the opposite than expected, Larijani out, Jalili in.

IGNATIUS: Let me ask you before we leave the subject of Iran, a question you may not be – I hope you are not anticipating, but the premise of this round of discussions has been that it is possible for the EU3 and the United States to stop the Iranian enrichment program before they fully master the technology of enrichment, before they master the fuel cycle, is the phrase that is often used. But, I think someone looking at this process from the outside would say, that effort while understandable is failing. The Iranians claim now to be spinning 3,000 centrifuges in larger cascades that are increasing both the amount of uranium they can enrich and their expertise in using the centrifuges. So, there is some discussion that maybe it is appropriate now to think of a somewhat different target for the efforts of the – of those who do not want to see Iran acquire nuclear weapons, that would more specifically on weaponization issues and less on the fuel cycle because that may be a horse that as we say has left the barn. What do you think of that?

SOLANA: I think that the core issue is the cycle. Without the cycle; without enriched uranium; you don't have anything. Now, this is what I criticize of the National Intelligence Report of the – from the United States which came out the third of December and I have to remember three days after I met the last time with Jalili.

I think that the core issue is enrichment if you have the technology and the capacity to enrich, you have all kinds of possibilities; if you don't that, as for nuclear bombs, you don't have anything.

Therefore, it is very, very important that the question of enrichment is tackled and tackled properly to the satisfaction of everybody. Now, what I keep saying and I keep saying to them is that if you want to get nuclear power for civilian uses, you need nuclear power plants. Who can give you nuclear power plants? Very few countries in the world. Those countries are in the other side of team, the Russians, the Americans, the Europeans, if included the Chinese. The fact is that except with Bushehr reactor that is already – it will be operational soon and they have the nuclear material, which has been given by the Russians with a commitment that it will be used and recovered. Now, no other contract the Iranian has with anybody else that can provide a nuclear power plant. To construct a nuclear power plant takes at least – if you take the example of Bushehr, more than 10 years, so while we are going to accept the process of enrichment today to produce enriched uranium and there is no where that it can be placed, no where it can be used for reproduction of electric energy. Therefore, the question is open, why do you want that for? That is the guarantees that we have to receive from Iran in the use of enrichment. But for me, the most important thing is the capacity to enrich. If they don't have enriched material, the evident threats are different. If they do have, the threats are there.

IGNATIUS: Do you think the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate that was released last December, declassified, confused the issue in that sense?

SOLANA: The perception, no doubt; the perception was confusing. When you read it, it is not that confusing. If you read the first page and you read it together with the first note at the end of the page, you get the same things I am saying, but the spin was completely different if people didn't read it, didn't read the first page, completed it, and that conveys a little bit of a problem not only on to Iran, but let me say that that created a problem also in Damascus and many of the things that we are seeing now is Damascus vis-a-vis Lebanon, they are completely isolated from that report.

IGNATIUS: Explain that; say one more sentence about that. How did we move from the NIE and its statement, in effect taking Iran off that hook, to what we are seeing in Damascus?

SOLANA: The sentiment that was portrayed is that there was no risk at all, you know what I mean, and that was conveyed to Iran, but it was- was conveyed to as a consequence to Damascus, and I think this is the position of Damascus after December, after the end of December vis-a-vis Lebanon also was a little bit tougher and has not changed.



IGNATIUS: Have you seen – you are the person in the west who really meets most regularly at a senior level with senior Iranians, have you personally, Dr. Solana, seen a difference in Iranian behavior just as we say in body language since that NIE was released in December?

SOLANA: I have not seen many people after – I mean I only met Jalili. I have spoken on the phone with Dr. Larijani a couple of times. I don't want to say that it was a very profound conversation, it was on the telephone, bad lines, et cetera, but I sense a little bit of body change, body language change orally, orally. I have not had the opportunity to meet him. I don't think it will be possible to meet in the foreseeable future, Dr. Larijani, and with Dr. Jalili, I will try. I will try and see if we can meet. We have still from the resolution 30 days – 90 days, and let's see what is the response. We have to analyze carefully the result of elections, make an analysis, nothing dramatic as I said is going to come, but maybe there are signals of how is the vitality of the country today.

IGNATIUS: So, that we all understand that it would be your hope that within the next 30 to 90 days, you would have another meeting with an Iranian representative?

SOLANA: I'll try. I don't know if we will succeed or not, but I think it is our obligation to try and that is what came out from the statement of the President of the Security Council the day of the resolution was approved. Let me mention something on the resolution which I think is very important. The resolution was not easy to me to be accepted – to be approved. There were three countries that were difficult at the beginning and they were under 'no'. None of three had veto power, which was the Russian, the Chinese. After the meeting we had in Berlin late January, it was clear that Russian and the Chinese will be onboard. Now, we had three countries, Indonesia, South Africa and Libya, that were in the 'no'. Now at the end, you know what happened. Libya and South Africa went to the 'yes' and Indonesia stopped in that sense. It was 14/1. But, it was a very, very important debate to get the 14 all in the same boat. And I want to say the Russians and Chinese from the beginning were there. But not the South African and the Indonesians, they made a very – they gave us a very well the Members of the Security Council a very tough time. So, we have also to maintain our obligation to keep the constituency of the countries that understand what is at stake at here, together, not only the permanent members, but the (INAUDIBLE) countries and countries which they were understanding what was going on and now they have more powers, and that is the dangerous situation.

IGNATIUS: Well, keep following. Keep your eyes open watching for the possibility of a meeting in the coming weeks as you explore whether there is something still alive here. I want to now turn to a second part of your, I don't want to say mission impossible, but mission difficult, and that is the Arab-Israeli, the Palestinian peace process. And I want to set the scene here by remembering November of last year in Annapolis at the U.S. Naval Academy where Secretary of State Rice and President Bush had gathered a pretty impressive group of people supporting that process. In the audience, you had Saudis,

you had people from the – all of the Gulf Arab states, you had you from Europe, you had the Quartet representatives, you had Syrians coming to support a peace process proposed by Saudi Arabia. So, there was a moment of hope that we were entering into a period of detailed and systematic negotiation. Secretary Rice described a very precise set of objectives that involved different groups, different meetings, et cetera. And I would ask you to give your most honest evaluation, here we are, mid-March, four or five months after that Annapolis glow, where are we?

SOLANA: Well, let me start by saying that I have been engaged in this time to help with Annapolis policies, the Madrid Conference time to go before Oslo. So, I – for me to say that I am optimistic will be a naïve type of distinct. I would not say it, but I want to repeat or to underline what you have said. Annapolis was an important event for me. It was the first time that I saw together so many people, so many representatives from the international community, including the Arab League, because there was the Secretary General of the Arab League and practically all the most important countries of the Arab League together in a commitment to try to put a process to be finished, not complete, but to be at least wrapped up by the end of the year 2008. That was an important event and I don't want to say that it was a minor point or a point of just wishful thinking. I think it was much more than that.

Now, we are in March and we have to say that nothing really has happened, that time is running out and that by the end of the summer time, we will be practically done. Therefore, whatever is not done from here to the end of this summer, that gives the impression that something is moving, I think, will be a failure, and a failure that has very many bad consequences for that region. I think that the unity of the Arab League behind the process at the beginning has to be maintained and it will be an important moment, at the end of this month, the 28th ...

IGNATIUS: What might happen, suppose as you said, this is now ...

SOLANA: Actually, what ...

IGNATIUS: Almost to the point that it is going to blow up. OK, supposed to blow up what's going to happen?

SOLANA: I think what has to happen is some changes on the realities on the ground. If nothing changes from the ground, it will be very difficult to convey to the people of the region and the international community that is their will to move the process forward. So far, nothing has happened on the ground and nothing good. Some of the things bad, you know very well from terrorist attacks to settlement. So, in the two issues, some progress had to be made.

Now, it was last week, a potentially important meeting, the first tripartite lateral meeting that it was agreed in Annapolis, the first one by General Frasier and Fayad and Barak. That was the first time they together – they went to evaluate the condition in the ground together with a representative of the United States. As you know very well, that was – has been let's say a failure, but almost a failure, because the Minister of Defense from Israel did not show up. That is the moment in which the – now, there is not nobody from Israel came. The Deputy Amos Gilad, an important personality, knows very well diplomacy, but the fact that he and the Prime Minister of Palestinians was agreed in Annapolis and the Minister of Defense didn't come. Now, you can ...

IGNATIUS: Just to stop on that point, because the Frasier meeting was a key milestone in this process, do you think it is important that the United States and the EU express their disappointment that the Israeli Defense Minister who was expected to be there was not there?

SOLANA: I think, in a way, it has been expressed. In a way, it has been expressed by General Frasier and by several people. We don't want to ...

IGNATIUS: But, I am asking you here.

SOLANA: Yes, well, I am saying that I am disappointed.

Now, I will think it should have been very important in the last period of time from the last week, the weeks before the last. It was a very complicated week and as you will remember very well, or do well, the first ((inaudible)) the reaction of Israel, all this situation was not very promising. But, I was there, Dr. Rice was there, I had very good meeting with the Egyptians and I think that in these days, the Egyptians have done a good job that will work. It will work vis-à-vis Hamas and also could work vis-à-vis the Israelis. What we designed as a potential, I wouldn't say, roadmap, a potential action in the coming days, it has been done and still full results are not there. But, I think there's some little hope that this can move.

Now, this could not be the solution, it will be to relax, to get some time of quiet in Gaza, to get some time of quiet between Israelis and Palestinians and give some space, so that the realities on the ground can change and give some space to prepare the next meeting between all.

IGNATIUS: Just to be clear on what we are talking about here, this Egyptian process is a process of in effect indirect negotiation with the Hamas government in Gaza over terms for a ceasefire that would end their rocket fire on Israeli towns and would end Israeli retaliation. And we talk around this so carefully, but I want to ask you as directly as I can, is it time looking at the ruin that keeps coming because this Gaza/Hamas problem is not

addressed directly, is it time to move towards something more direct? It is very nice the Egyptians are doing this for us, but what is the next step after that?

SOLANA: But, it is not only nice, it is very important that they do it. It is not of course of being nice.

IGNATIUS: Nice is the wrong word.

SOLANA: But, the only catalytic group or country that can do that probably is Egypt. Therefore, it is very, very important that they do it, they do it in a very serious manner and a very determined manner. As you know, the person which is doing it, General Sulaiman, which is a very solid person and everything that would ...

IGNATIUS: The Chief of Egyptian Intelligence Service.

SOLANA: Everything that he agreed, it has been done. The results are not public yet, but I hope very much that it will – I think it would not be easy. It would be very, very difficult. And as you know, in the meantime, rockets have been fired, actions are taking place, but nothing has got out of proportion now, and I hope very much that that will move. Is that the solution? No, but we felt that without that it would be very difficult to keep on moving. And as I said, I know that it may sound naïve, but Annapolis has to be given the chance to act and those who have been engaging – that are engaged, I will work day and night if necessary to get it moving. It will not be the final peace agreement, but something that will be sufficiently important to get calm in that part of the Middle East and allow us to do many other things that has to be done in the Middle East. But, if we throw the towel now, it will be a mistake.

IGNATIUS: Throw the towel, meaning recognize the failure?

SOLANA: Recognising the failure, and I will not do it.

IGNATIUS: So, I wonder if you think, ask you to speak for the European people that you represent, but you should offer some signal to the Palestinians who live in Gaza, who were represented by this Hamas group, that if there are changes, if for example, there is a meaningful ceasefire that there is a willingness on the part of Europeans to begin a process of engagement that over time might make the situation in Gaza look significantly different. What do you – do you think that is a wise message to send?

SOLANA: Yes, it is – now, as you know, in all the documents, even from Annapolis, in all the documents, it says that it will be one Palestinian state. So implicitly, it said that the reconciliation between Palestinians is a must. Now, the rhythm of reconciliation of how to do it is something that is out of question. But, I think now after last week, the role of Egyptians today, that as you know, they were not in that position before

anywhere after the Rafah crisis. The Rafah crisis was very important for the Egyptians and therefore the Egyptians have recognized and now they have a problem that in Rafah, they want to get much more engaged. That is good, that is good. But, as I said, I think we have to – remember first that the interlocutor from the Palestinian side is the President of the PLO. He is the only one that has the responsibility to speak on behalf of all the Palestinians. Therefore, the fact that Abbas is negotiating is what it should be.

Now, when will the beginning of the reconciliation in – the Palestinian reconciliation can take place? I think it will take place slowly, but I think it is a must of – if you want to a ramp up in the peace process. This is what – how we see it. Now, from our point of view, we are very engaged economically, as you know, very engaged politically as members of the Quartet and myself involved practically involved every other day. And second, really important on security. We have the – we have prepared and we have developed the first Academy of Police in the Jericho, which will be the embryo of the police forces among the Palestinians. The other effort is being done by the United States through General Dayton, but it is an effort much more conceptual, much more on papers, we have people on the ground already, which I think is important, not only in Jericho, but as you know, we have people on the ground involved in Rafah..

IGNATIUS: And again, to ask a question I posed earlier by Iran, as we move through this period, we speak of it as a lame duck period at the end of a presidency in which the wind, you can just feel the wind going out of the sails of the Bush presidency. Do you think it is possible for the EU to take up some of that responsibilities so that we don't have dead time for these next nine months until we have a new administration on this specific issue of trying to do something to push a peace process everybody cares about?

SOLANA: Well, we follow the engagement of the United States as it is very difficult to move Annapolis. I believe it is a creature of the U.S. administration with the help of others. I hope very much that the administration will continue to work day and night until the end, and use all the time which is in front of them. They hope very much so. I don't know if it will be possible, but you know the President Bush will be in the region in the 20th of May. Probably, it will be the last trip and the last opportunity to do something meaningful. But, if that is a failure, I hope very much that the ground is paved so that after November, whoever is the President elected of the United States, with our continued commitment and other commitment from the international community, we don't have to wait another period of time until the new administration is put in place and waste another year, year and a half, two years, et cetera, that we have lost and wasted the first four years of this administration.

IGNATIUS: Hear, hear. Let me turn briefly to one last slice of this story you struggle with and then I want to turn to the audience, and that last slice is Lebanon. For me, the scene setter is the day the Syrian army in 2005 did something people, Lebanese thought would never happen, they picked up and they left the country, and Lebanese said to

themselves, we have our country back. We have reasserted our sovereignty and the world stood with them. The European Union stood with them. Today, we are in a terrible continuing deadlock where the Lebanese are not able to elect a President, they had what appeared to be a consensus candidate in the current Chief of Staff to the Army, General Sulaiman, but it is not possible to get a quorum of Lebanese parliament to meet, to ratify that choice, and this is just deadlocked. And the universal view among analysts is that Syria for the moment, through its proxies in Lebanon, does not want to see election of a President. And I would ask you for your assessment, we have European troops committed on the ground in Lebanon, Lebanon has an historic relationship with Europe that is deep and important. So, it is especially on your plate, tell us what you think of the situation and what could be done to break the deadlock?

SOLANA: Well, I was in Lebanon last week and I was also with the Secretary General of the Arab League that, as you know, has been doing some work between Damascus and Lebanon. Now, the situation today is that the General Sulaiman, Michel Sulaiman, not the other Sulaiman, he will be – he should be elected President of Lebanon. It has the consensus of everybody, but as you have said and you have put it very bluntly, it is not allowed by the proxy of Syria to be elected. We have a Summit of the Arab League late days of this month, the 28th and 29th. The 27th will be the first report from the *International Tribunal* for Lebanon, the day before. I think we have a chance the 24th that it will be convened the last time before the summit to elect a President, to have what would be the right thing to do now.

Lebanon has been invited to the summit. They don't have a President. Therefore, the President will not be there. They are for months without a President. It will be really very, very good if the first action that the new President does is to go to the summit in Damascus. For that, the 24th has to be election. All the pressure has been put there, but to tell you the truth, I am not pretty sure that that will be done.

If that is not done, we will enter into a very serious crisis, and I think it will be also a moment whereby the Arab League countries and the most important countries have to take a very serious position vis-a-vis this problem.

Now, remember that this crisis is very dramatic. The majority in Lebanon may become the minority, not because of vote, because the candidates or the parliamentarians are being killed. This is something we cannot forget: The majority is becoming the minority because people, members of the elected, are being killed. This is something that we have to think about to analyze the situation. That is something that's really terrible.

IGNATIUS: So I take it that the message that you are sending, the Europeans and the Americans are sending to the Syrians is, "If you want this summit to take place in Damascus, it is essential that a Lebanese attend that summit having been confirmed by Lebanese parliament, otherwise it ain't going to happen."

SOLANA: That is the question that has been asked of Amr Moussa also. For the moment, as you know, the last day was the 12th to elect a President. Now it has been postponed to the 24th, which is two days, three days before the -- I think that the summit will not be attended, at least it will not be attended at the level the summit was supposed to be if that is not done.

IGNATIUS: So I want to turn to the audience for your questions on these subjects. Let me see if I see a head.

Yes, please.

VYACHESLAV NIKONOV: Vyacheslav Nikonov, Russkiy Mir Foundation, Moscow. Actually, Iraq was somewhat out of the picture at this conference. Is there anything happening there? Is there some European Union efforts concerning Iraq? It was mentioned only in the context of the U.S. Presidential election.

IGNATIUS: Let me just add one little addition to that very good question, and it would be the following: At a time, Dr. Solana, when the Democratic candidates talk about reducing the number of US troops in Iraq, there is a hope that European international troops might come in to help stabilize the situation as the American numbers come down. Is that realistic?

So the two: What role can Europe can play and, specifically, is there any chance European troops might be involved?

SOLANA: I don't think that is realistic. If you expect that the Americans are going to go out and the Europeans are going to into Iraq, you are completely mistaken. That is not going to happen. We can do many other things, economic cooperation, et cetera, but to imagine that the Europeans are going to go into Iraq, that is not something sensible to think about.

IGNATIUS: And so if European troops are not coming in and American troops are - I mean, do you think that there will be a need for somebody's troops to stabilize the situation?

SOLANA: I look around and we can look around together...

(LAUGHTER)

... but I don't think I see many.

IGNATIUS: (INAUDIBLE) Any volunteers here?

UNKNOWN: I think it should be Iraqi troops.

IGNATIUS: Bill Drozdiak had a question.

WILLIAM DROZDIAK PRESIDENT, AMERICAN COUNCIL ON GERMANY:
Javier, if the situation remains frozen on the ground, in terms of the Middle East and the Annapolis process, what recommendations or advice would you give to a new American President taking over the White House in January of 2009? Would you see the priority be to organize a regional peace conference among the neighbors of Iraq?

Would you recommend some kind of a new and bold initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian front or even, possibly, some kind of a grand bargain opening dialogue with Iran in the hopes that we could end the impasse on the nuclear weapons issue?

SOLANA: OK. I would not like to give advice precise of how to do it. I think that the format you choose is not the most important thing. I think the most important thing is to have the political will to do it. And the political will to do it is to get engaged and to get engaged, if I may say, every day, not every month.

The big problem we have is that the engagement is monthly or bi-monthly, and that is not possible if you really want to do it, and we have examples of that. If you want to try and try seriously, you need an engagement that has to be from the time you decide until you finish, day by day. If you don't do it like that, I don't think you can do it.

Now, on the second issue, it's very important -- and I said this a year ago up here in this place -- what I would recommend not to a new President, I'd recommend to this President last year when we talked about Iran. I have not changed my mind.

IGNATIUS: There was a gentleman here in the first row, yes. Yes, please.

KONSTANTIN EGGERT: Konstantin Eggert with the BBC in Moscow. I want to come back to Syria and ask a question. I was there in a private visit in the end of last year and two things that really struck me were, a, the amount of influence the Iranians have, not only in the higher echelons of power, but I would say in wider sways of society, and, secondly, the tension that exists inside the country, basically, between the Sunni majority and everyone else, which, to my mind, is pretty ready to explode in the coming years. That's my assessment.

What do you think should be Western strategy with regard to Syria. I'm not talking only about the Tribunal and the Hariri murder but why the strategy with regard to Syria. What do you think can be done, if anything can be done at all? Thank you.



SOLANA: With Syria, as you know, we had historical relations, very sophisticated relations with Syria, but everything that has been done so far has failed. The position of Syria has not changed, it has not changed substantially.

Now, there was a moment, you remember, that it was common doctrine that it might happen, and you know that moment is over, and that doesn't seem to materialize. Therefore, I think that the pressure on Syria has to grow in order to solve at least the situation in Lebanon. And, again, I think the opportunity is there before this summit that will take place in Damascus. It will not take place in another place, in Damascus.

And all the pressure has to be placed now to see if the President of Lebanon can be elected before the summit and participate in the summit.

If that is not the case, I will be very pessimistic about the coming period of time. You know, the Saudis and Egyptians are very, very tired of the situation. I don't think that President Mubarak or the King are going to be in Damascus for the summit; I don't think so. The point is what is the level of representation, and that will depend very much on the situations around that day.

And, remember, the 27th, keep that in mind, is the full report of the Tribunal, the 27th, the day before the summit starts.

IGNATIUS: What was your interpretation, if I could ask, of the Saudi announcement to Saudi nationals living in Lebanon that they should leave immediately, that it was unsafe for them to be there? This was at roughly the same time that the US war ship, the Cole, steamed into the waters off Lebanon. What's your interpretation of that?

SOLANA: I really don't have any interpretation. That is not the first time that they withdraw people from Lebanon. I don't think that has anything to do with the aircraft in the water, I don't think so.

I think they are concerned about the situation very much. You know, they are, for the first time, very much engaged for the first time, I will say, five months ago, with the Tribunal. They are financing them a good part of the working of the International Tribunal, the UN Tribunal. They are very engaged. I cannot interpret -- I don't think it has any special meaning.

IGNATIUS: Would you let me mention the interpretation and see if you agree with that, that this is a statement by Saudi Arabia to its own citizens that unless the crisis of Lebanon is resolved soon, it will go into a new and more dangerous in which Saudi citizens should be careful.

SOLANA: I think it's more important that the statement, in reality, that Saudi and Masr (ph) in Damascus have not returned for some time. That, I think, is more important.

IGNATIUS: There was a gentleman -- yes, yes, please.

JOLYON HOWORTH: Jolyon Howorth from Yale University.

Dr. Solana, I'd like to ask you a question about your judgment on the EU's role in this. Obviously, the EU's assets in this whole process -- obviously, the United States is the indispensable nation, everybody recognizes that, but the EU has potential assets of considerable weight here in terms of its relations, both with Israel and with the Palestinian Authority.

And yet there is a perception out there that these assets -- trade relations, scientific exchanges, educational exchanges, culture, football, soccer -- I mean, there's an awful lot going on, and there's a perception out there that somehow the EU is not leveraging its own resources and assets to the extent that it could within this situation.

Nobody can answer this question better than you can. I'd like you to give your assessment of the EU's real leverage potential in this and why that perception is that it isn't optimum or maximum.

SOLANA: Well, I think that the perception is that nobody has leverage, and the reality is that. But I think, honestly, that the European Union is doing, I wouldn't say, as much as it can because always you can do more, but a lot, a lot economically in both places, a lot politically through the Quartet and through bilateral relations with the United States and an engagement that goes beyond what you thought.

Today, we have an engagement with Israel that goes beyond what it was thought before as far Israel participated in some of the programs from the European Union, you have referred there. I mean, soccer is very important, but I don't think it's the most important asset, really.

And police. We've got to do it. We've got the responsibility, we offered the responsibility. It was given on police. And on police, as you know, we have established the Academy of Police. It's in Jerichio. I've been there many times. Tony Blair has been there many times. We are doing that. We were engaged in the (INAUDIBLE) which is the only - - we have put people around what has been asked and we have accepted.

Now, if we could do more, probably we could do more and better organization internally to get the European Union more in the member states really and contribute to what they have to contribute through a channel, but if you look back, what has been done in the last period of time, it was unthinkable when we started, if you remember that.

The first time that we were engaged fully as the European Union was in Sharm el Sheikh. The last summit with President Clinton was the first time that we were there physically as the European Union. And from there on, we have been really in every important -- from the Mitchell report, which I was with Senator Mitchell, the one who could do that, until the mention of the Quartet on the 6th. It is true that politically the draw of the United States police in Israel is much more important, but that's many times where it's not important. It is very important.

IGNATIUS: So we're getting down to having a relatively few number of minutes, so I'm going to collect some questions. I'm going to go in the order I've seen people, and forgive me, I'm going to ask the gentleman here and then moving this way, the lady in the red jacket and the lady in the blue jacket, and then we'll take another round after that.

So, Javier, you may want to make notes and then answer these as you choose.

Yes, sir, please.

PHILLIPPE DE BUCK: I am Philippe De Buck from Business Europe. I have a follow-up question. You will have new institution in Europe from the 1st of January 2009 with the President and a High Representative. Do you think that will change the position of Europe that we enforce Europe capabilities to intervene in the region? And do you have a view on what the private business can do in the region to reinforce the positions?

IGNATIUS: Yes, ma'am?

MIA DOORNAERT: Thank you. Mia Doornaert, Newspaper De Standaard.

My question is based on the very good article by Mr. Ignatius on Ayatollahs and Jacobins. So you quote Kissinger warning that the status quo powers made the mistake of assuming that the revolutionary power can easily be contained or bought off. So that applies to Iran.

One reading of the policy of Iran in the region is that it is a revolutionary power that wants to change the status quo. It uses Hamas and Hezbollah to destabilize Israel and Lebanon. So if you are just discussing with Iran on limited issues like nuclear power but not addressing the whole of its policy, where are you going to get with that?

UNKNOWN: I have similar question concerning the treaty. The European Union was active economically in some regions but not politically because of divergent interests of nation states and, of course, the treaties giving some new possibilities but at the same time the number of new members is much bigger.

So the question is, do you think that the number of divergent interests in foreign policy will increase in the future?

And second thing, what is your opinion about European army, because from time to time there was a discussion that European Union should have its own forces. Thank you.

IGNATIUS: Dr. Solana, accepting the middle question, which I think, shockingly, is for me, we'll ask you to talk about...

DOORNAERT: It's for Mr. Solana.

IGNATIUS: It's for Mr. Solana. OK. Shockingly, it's not for me.

SOLANA: With pleasure, I give it to you.

(LAUGHTER)

DOORNAERT: It's based on your article for Mr. Solana.

IGNATIUS: I fear he may not have read it, but go ahead.

SOLANA: The first question was double. The treaty was not tied to the discussion but, in any case, the treaty will facilitate the working of the European Union, particularly on the international affairs and security. There's no doubt about that. This is the hope. Therefore, my successor will have better means than I do have.

Now, on the private sector, very important. It's very important to incorporate the private sector, with the private sector. A lot has been done, and I have to thank those who are participating already. But in order to move, the reality is on the ground. The economy, as you know, is fundamental. Therefore, the engagement of the private sector is fundamental.

Let me say a couple of words about the economy. Now, in 20 years, last 20 years, North Africa and the Middle East grown, has been below the demographic, and you know that. Last year, for the first time, they are rich income. The people in the Middle East has grown 5 percent. Remember that the last 10 years that figure was 1.2 percent. So it's an important change economically.

What is going on? A lot of things are going on from that point of view. The last meeting in Qatar was very, very telling on that. The amount of private investors who were there, the amount of people not from the West from the East that were there, Chinese, Indians. So the Middle East and North Africa is maybe booming economically. Therefore, this is a message also to the private sector which is important to follow that.

And it's not only on produce countries, producers for oil. Two-thirds of the population of the Middle East are not in countries that produce oil, so they have to be for other reasons. So keep all that in mind.

On Iran, the question of Iran, yes, Iran, it has to be engaged in many other issues, which are regional and energy. A big battle we're going to have -- what is happening with the energy in Iran. It's very important it will be if the Chinese through Sinopec enter or not enter into Iran on their own energy. That will be a very important decision in the coming period of time.

But the nuclear issue is fundamental. If the nuclear issue is not handled, the others will not be happy. Remember what we are talking about. We are talking about capabilities of enriching uranium beyond what is necessary to build this energy. So that has to be tackled. That doesn't mean that the other issues have not to be tackled. At what level linking all of them? High level, but without forgetting that the nuclear is fundamental.

Now, on the treaty -- I'm not going to give a speech about the Lisbon Treaty. As I said, I think it's a positive, very important, very important step forward. And I think as time moves, and I've been here since 1999, I have seen many, many things taking place. And I think the voice of divergence in policy are not very many. You can pinpoint two, three, four. It's not divergent on every issue that we have to tackle together, no. I think the convergence is growing and not only the convergence, theoretically, but the action.

The European Union, let me put it that way, has grown as a human being grows, first, in foreign policy and security policy. First, we begin to talk, then we went a little bit further. We also wrote some statements, and then we began to act. We are already in that phase, and it's not going to change, and that's what's going to be the reality of the European Union in years to come.

Now, as far as the army is concerned, you know that this is not on the program of anybody to construct a European Union army. The different thing is to cooperate on security, on the cooperation of different countries on defense, but that has to be compatible with other commitments that the European Union do have with other organizations, particularly with NATO.

But it is very important to get together the concert of security and defense, although not an army, because that is not in the program, but, yes, to have better cooperation, more interoperability, et cetera, because the number of missions from peacekeeping or peacemaking or things of that nature we have to do will grow, and we have to assume our responsibilities. We are assuming some, and we have to assume more.



IGNATIUS: Dr. Solana, let me ask you a question that's occasionally posed in the U.S. political debates. If we let ourselves imagine that there really is a two-state solution in the Middle East and we have two states living side by side, Israel and the Palestinian state, there, it's argued, may be a need for some outside military force that acts as protector, guarantor, trip wire.

The U.S. interposed such a force in Sinai after the Egypt-Israel Camp David peace agreement. And there's discussion about whether it's appropriate to think about it again. That's one of the things that General Jim Jones, who you know well, who is SACEUR, is thinking about in his assignment for Secretary Rice.

But putting aside the question of U.S. troops, what would you think about a European contribution, either through NATO or through some independent ESDP European force that would be there, interpose itself, play that role?

SOLANA: Well, let's see how is the final outcome, and you have mentioned General Jones, which is working on the security part of the potential final stage of the agreement. There's a possibility of being asked to have by the international committee some pressure. I think it can be -- and I don't want to exaggerate it -- the answer will be, yes, we will do it.

IGNATIUS: So I have Ambassador Kornblum and then a gentleman here and then, you, sir. So those three questions. Yes, please.

JOHN KORNBLUM FORMER US AMBASSADOR TO GERMANY: Well, I wanted to follow up a little bit, both on the private sector issue but also the question of who one engages, which countries in the region one engages.

It has been said for decades, really, that one of the problems in the Middle East were that there were a bunch of undemocratic countries with authoritarian societies who really didn't want peace with Israel for reasons that we can understand.

What is happening now is not only economic growth, but you're starting to get a number of Arab countries, mostly now the smaller Gulf states but also others, who are becoming status quo parties. They are getting into the capital markets. We had a representative here the other day. They're building big airports, they're building big hotels, they're starting to behave like, dare we say it, decadent Western societies.

But we don't engage them very much on this process, at least I don't see us doing it. Maybe I don't see everything.

And the question is, to go back to David Ignatius' article, isn't this a time to start looking more at those kinds of countries, assuming Syria is going to be what Syria is?

Somebody else is going to be the Egyptians who are, of course, friends of ours but are not exactly somebody pushing for this kind of change. Is that part of the strategy or if it isn't, shouldn't that be part of the strategy?

SOLANA: That is part of the strategy. The strategy has not been realized completely, but that is part of the strategy. That's what they want in a manner that is very clear, the process in Annapolis. Now, let me say that this engagement is so important, it's so important that it produces end results on the ground.

Now, the other initiative, remember how it was bold and the momentum that it's taking now. If nothing happens, we may be in a situation where the Arab initiative disappears from the table. That will be a very bad moment, very bad moment. Therefore, to maintain that engagement of the Arab countries -- and you have mentioned some of them, others can be mentioned also, Morocco, for instance -- I think their engagement is real now, and that is the most important difference from Camp David or from other places, the engagement of some Arab countries.

Now, you know that from that engagement has been also played a very important role, the President of Iran. We don't have to cheat ourselves, this is a reality also.

IGNATIUS: Let me just back up the tape one second. You said that you thought it was possible that the Saudi initiative, endorsed by the Arab League, might be withdrawn. Would that follow the collapse of the Annapolis process? Is that one of the dangers that we should understand of Annapolis failing, that that...

SOLANA: I think that will be the reverse. If it will be there to give a chance to Annapolis or to this process, and it may be -- at least it will be a threat that it may be withdrawn if nothing happens.

IGNATIUS: If nothing happens.

SOLANA: I tend to say that the last latest statement on settlements -- and my friend, Ambassador here knows very well what I'm talking about -- I'm glad that the (inaudible) has come out and the (inaudible) has come out. Otherwise, I think it will be a very tricky situation, vis-a-vis the Arab summit on the 28th and 29th.

IGNATIUS: I should just note, that certainly would reinforce the concerns of Israelis who've never been sure that the Arab peace initiative by Saudi Arabia was for sure, that the minute you encounter obstacles along the way, that that peace proposal, that grant to recognize and accept is withdrawn. In other words, it turns out to be entirely conditional and tactical and not strategic. Wouldn't that just deepen the feeling on the Israeli side...

SOLANA: No, I disagree with you on that. I think that the Arab initiative has inside still an important potential that has not been developed yet, but it's an important potential. It's very good for them to have a common position, you know that very well.

Now, therefore, if they begin to toy with the idea that that can be withdrawn, it's a very delicate thing to my mind. Now, I think that we have a strategic commitment, the most important place, the regional place, I think so. And what we are seeing now is that, the Saudis and Egyptians. Of course, it's not perfect. The Israelis would like very much that the Arab initiative would not be binary just for now.

Now, the point of the Arab initiative is binary. If everything is done, we will engage. Now, it should be a manner whereby we can engage partially, we can begin to have them engage partially. That is something we have tried, and we will keep on trying, because it's true that the Arab initiative is yes or no. Engagement before the complete yes is there or more engagement before the complete yes is there is something that has to be considered.

IGNATIUS: We had a question from this gentleman here. Yes, please.

THOMAS VALASEK: Thomas Valasek with the Center for European Reform in London.

Dr. Solana, David Ignatius called you an optimist by nature, and your message on Iran was correspondingly upbeat, but when the meaning of the words of your presentation sinks in, you're left with a certain sense of hopelessness. At the end of the day, the end is to stop Iran's enrichment program, but in the last few months we have gone from a few hundred centrifuges to a few thousand. Iran, as you pointed out, feels less at risk of coercive action now than it probably has in a long time, and the recent elections on Friday dashed much hope of domestic change in Iran.

So when you look at the next few months and years, what events do you think would turn the course of events in Iran our way? Is it the recent election of the new Russian President, is it, perhaps, the forthcoming election of the U.S. President? Give us a reason, please, to feel as optimistic as you do.

SOLANA: Well, you can feel whatever you want; it's up to you.

(LAUGHTER)

I am a scientist, and I look at the facts, and I try to conclude, and then I try to put a little warmth on those things. But I am a scientist.

Now, what is the elements that you can contribute to your happiness today?

(LAUGHTER)

You are young, you are in London.

(LAUGHTER)

It's not a minor thing. But I think if you look at the situation, it's very difficult, it's very difficult. Don't expect that from today, from what you hear to listen to me, you are going to get excited a bit. No, because the reality does not provide that. But it should not be pessimistic either. There's no sense in being pessimistic. We have to keep working.

You have mentioned three elements. Try to put it together. Try to put them together. And don't separate one from the other. The three you have mentioned, put them together and imagine that they may work.

IGNATIUS: I'm trying to think whether a man who's a high energy physicist really fits the definition of, "by nature, optimistic." An optimistic physicist, we do believe in the law of gravity, there's certain irreducibles.

I'm going to conspire the restraint on free trade and call on my colleague, Mr. Steven Erlanger if he has a question.

STEVEN ERLANGER (NEW YORK TIMES): It's a follow-up on a (inaudible and will be short.

The President of the United States has said that the idea of Iran having a nuclear weapon is insupportable. Do you agree with that? Does Europe agree with that?

SOLANA: Yes.

(LAUGHTER)

IGNATIUS: Let me ask the obvious follow-up to that, which is, why is this nuclear weapon different from all others? It is the experience of the world that nations that proliferate and, despite our best efforts, acquire nuclear weapons, in possession of them, prove to be somewhat more stable and deterrable than their comments would have suggested. At the time that we began negotiating Henry Kissinger began negotiating with China, it was China's doctrine that it was prepared to lose 200 million or more of its citizens in a mass nuclear attack to defend itself as a rising nuclear power.

One reading you can make of this very controversial U.S. National Intelligence Estimate last December, is that the Iranians had a weaponization program which, in response to external factors -- and you can decide which ones you think are important,

because the CI doesn't seem to know -- but less posit that the external factor was the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, the American troops on the Iranian border, removal of the need to worry about Saddam's nukes, but also this great big Army -- that by the end of that year, according to the NIE, the Iranians had halted this weaponization program.

Now, what that tells you is the Iranians were responding in a more or less rational way to external events. And that would argue further, they would be in a category of nations that are deterrable, because when external forces threaten, they respond. So why is this nation different from all of us?

SOLANA: Well, I prefer not to enter into that phase that you have described. Now, there are two things that come to my mind rapidly. One, I think the question of disarmament has to be tackled. It will be very difficult if we don't tackle the question of disarmament, to keep on saying what we are saying forever. Therefore I said it last night or the night before, I think it's a very, very important issue -- very, very important. And it's doable. It's doable to begin really talking sincerely about disarmament and try to get the review of the nonproliferation treaty, seriously. That has not been done. We have in 2009, 2010, a recent number of revisions of treaties has to be done properly.

Number two -- the risk of what is armament rise in the Middle East. You cannot imagine sensibly that Iran is going to have a weapon, and the Saudis are not going to have a weapon. All the potentiality of getting race of close-by whatever. Now, this is a very -- this is a place where to really allow the race of weapons is really very dramatic, very bad. Now seriously, if this is linked to nuclear weapons and nuclear energy, countries that never were thought that they may have a nuclear power plant, they are going to have it. That is another important issue that we have to put it into the package. How do we do all this?

So there are three things which are, to me, very important: race in the region, security of the region, number one; number two, our obligation to go to work seriously on disarmament; and for that, it has to start very, very soon. And thirdly to put in a package also, the energy component of nuclear capabilities.

IGNATIUS: I saw Robert Cooper shaking his head vigorously a moment ago. Can I draw you into this conversation? Do you he a brief thought? The answer could be no, I want to stay out of it. But I...

ROBERT COOPER, DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL AND POLITICO-MILITARY AFFAIRS, COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: Well, the answer is that Javier said exactly what I was going to say, which is that if Iran, a major country in the middle of the most unstable region in the world, acquire a nuclear weapon, then this is something completely new, different, devastating for the whole of the nonproliferation system, which must above all be preserved.

IGNATIUS: But nobody's really still answered my question. Why, on the evidence before us, is this not a deterrable problem?

SOLANA: Next year. Too long to do today.

IGNATIUS: We had a question. Yes, please.

DAVID FRENCH: Thank you. David French, Westminster Foundation for Democracy. I noticed that we seem, for the most part, to have conducted this conversation by keeping Syria, Lebanon and Israel-Palestine in different chapters of the discussion as it were. Secretary General, you've spoken about the prospects of the situation in Lebanon getting very much worse if there isn't a resolution by the time of the Arab League Summit. I think it's fair to say that the people you least want, and who will least benefit from things getting worse in Lebanon, are the people of Lebanon. But I wonder if you'd just like to say something about what seems to me, perhaps, to be one of the risks in this equation that we haven't discussed too much today, which is the unfinished business between Israel and Hezbollah.

SOLANA: Yes. I think in any agreement, even with Iran when they have no any discussion with Iran, this problem you raise is monumental. I don't think it will be real security region. I believe that is not tackled well. But let me say a thing about Syria. You know that the trillion (ph) track a few months ago was fashionable. You remember. I think that today, if the Syrian regime has to choose between, today, peace in the Golans and solving the questions of the Tribunal, I have my doubts. Do you understand?

IGNATIUS: I see. There's a gentleman here who has a question, and a gentleman here I meant to call on earlier. So why don't we collect those, please?

JEAN-PIERRE LEHMANN, EVIAN GROUP: Thank you, Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Evian Group at IMD. I was at a meeting in Dubai a couple of years ago. And David, you were there too -- the Arab Strategic Forum. And on the agenda was the session on can the region afford a new nuclear power. And all the Westerners thought we were talking about Iran, and all the Arabs thought we were talking about Israel. And there has been no mention about the Israeli nuclear capability. And I wonder what, you know, you could say about that -- what kind of options there are in terms of diffusing the situation.

SOLANA: I mean, we have not talked about that, because we have talked so many times about that. Our position is the Middle East free of nuclear weapons. How do we arrive to that? We say this is the position. And I think the position just about everybody.

IGNATIUS: Yes, please, in the second row.

JOURNALIST, NEW EUROPE: (Inaudible) from New Europe, the European Weekly. We talked about the changes in the U.S. administration with presidential elections. But Mr. Solana, you did mention about the Lisbon Treaty and the Reform Treaty. But there are going to be major changes in the EU structure if the treaty gets through from next year. So what is going to be your role in the new structure? And how the EU policy will change with that? And the second question is, with the changes in the Russian position in the global political equation, how do you see the Middle East changing -- the E.U. role changing in the Middle East; because while traveling through these areas, one comes across the population saying that U.S. is pro-Israeli. And the E.U. is pro-Palestinian. Would you like to comment on that? Thank you.

SOLANA: Three questions. On the first, I mean, on the treaty. The treaty, if everything according to schedule, will be in place at the beginning of next year, 1999, and all the elements it contains, it will be in place. Some of them will require some time to be implemented. Others will be immediate, like appointments (inaudible) and all that. It's as far as I can go. I hope that that will be the case, that the process of ratification will be done in the year 2008. And it will be approved (inaudible) operationally. And in 2009, (inaudible).

Now, on the second issue, on the role of Russia in the region -- I think that Russia now is a member of the quartet. It is working constructively in the quartet. And I think it enriches the quartet the fact that the Russian is there. Now, the third question I think is a simplification. I mean, say one is for Israel and the other is for Palestinians. I think we are all for peace in the region. And for that is needed to work with both and to help both Israelis and Palestinians.

IGNATIUS: We'll take one last question here in the front row from Xenia Dormandy. And then we'll have some concluding statements.

XENIA DORMANDY: Thank you. Xenia Dormandy, Harvard University. I'd like to back to Iran, if I might, but from a slightly different perspective, looking at Iran's foreign policy. We've spoke about Iran's desire for nuclear weapons. We've mentioned earlier today Iran's possible influence in Afghanistan, perhaps in Pakistan. We've talked about Iran's support for Hezbollah. We haven't spoken about Iran's role in Iraq, particularly. And perhaps you could talk a little bit more coherently about Iran's foreign policy as a whole and what the E.U., what the U.S. actually might do to perhaps influence the foreign policy as a whole, as opposed to just looking at Iran vis-a-vis its nuclear weapons.

SOLANA: Well, I think we have talked a lot about Iran foreign policy -- maybe not explicitly, but it's not very difficult to understand, even country in the last two questions. Iran wants to be a regional power. There's no doubt about that. They know that they have



problems to get along with some of the regimes. And they are using other mechanism, like forces (ph), to use -- I mean, to be present in the region.

And then when we talk about answering the question of you, on the engagement with Iran, of course has to be an engagement. That hasn't covered the whole question, not only nuclear -- although it's the most important foreign policy -- energy policy -- energy, fundamental to talk with Iran. It's a fantastic potential country supplying energy; and from the European Union, very, very important. Imagine foreign policy. You are going to get in a (inaudible) root. Iran is fundamental, not only Central Asia. Iran is fundamental. So when we talk about very fundamental investments in the future on the south part of Europe, and have more conferences (inaudible), it has to be related to Iran in a way. So all those issues are very, very important issues to be discussed.

I like to insist that the question, the nuclear issue, is at the core of the problems that we have to face vis-a-vis Iran. And therefore, we have to talk of that and to devote energies and political capabilities there to solve that problem. That doesn't mean that we have to forget all the others -- impossible.

IGNATIUS: So I want to wrap up and make just a brief comment on my own and then turn it back to Dr. Solana for his response. My comment is this. Once upon a time, Middle East peacemaking, Middle East diplomacy, was something that was jealously guarded by the United States. You know, we all remember Dr. Kissinger and a series of American emissaries trying to make themselves in the Kissinger mold, holding onto every detail, and every secret and every stopover. You know, you weren't allowed to talk to anybody's chef de cabinet without American approval.

And what Dr. Solana has done the last few years is fundamentally to change that model. He has been a partner for the United States in an unusual way -- sometimes has spoken, in effect, for the United States, sometimes has been an alternative to the United States. But having watched this process in Washington and knowing how difficult it is to get everybody to tolerate anybody's fingerprints on anything of this importance, I would just note that it's a significant accomplishment, that Javier Solana, as the E.U. high representative, has been a partner, an emissary, a colleague. As I say, I don't think I've seen anything quite like it in 30 years of following the Middle East.

And so, although we've talked about a series of blockages and difficulties, the reality is that this process that you have been conducting on behalf of Europe and the United States and this alliance is significant. In a sense, it's the process that matters. And what you did differently -- how you changed this paradigm, so that others are now allowed in, welcome, needed -- I think will have some lasting consequences.



So I just want to note that for this audience. It's the sort of thing that is so obvious, it's staring you in the face, but is rarely said. So I wanted to say it to you, Dr. Solana.

And then I want to ask you to conclude. This has been -- you know, as the Beatles song said -- it's been a long, strange trip, you know? You've had meeting after meeting with the Larijanis of the world. You've struggled to find ways of connecting Israelis and Palestinians when, you know, a rational person would despair of that. And I want to ask you, you know, the basic question we journalists like to ask, you know, at the end of something; which is what did you learn from this? I mean, you know, if you were to start all over again as Dr. Solana, version 2.0, what would you write into your operating system that would be a little different given what you've learned?

SOLANA: Well, it's very difficult to answer that question rapidly. I think that one fundamental thing is engagement. You cannot solve problems if you are not engaged. And engaged means work, a lot of work with a good team, and intelligent people trying to do it. I think that is lacking. At this point in time, I think much more engagement has to be done. Now, engagement doesn't mean that you're going to solve the problems. That's the other problem -- that you think that when you get up in the morning, you have the list of problems in the world. You check one, done, done.

This is not the way. This takes time. It may take generations. But it doesn't mean that you don't have to be strong and committed and engaged. If you don't do it, somebody else will do it, but not abundantly. The thing is this is the sense that the problems can be abundant. It doesn't help at all for you or for the next generation or the next people who come. Therefore, as far as how to handle the issues, to my mind this is fundamental -- generosity, really service to the international community.

Like sometimes I don't see it. And I don't see it, because domestic audiences limit if you are not really a statement (ph). You get limit. And you cannot afford to do that.

IGNATIUS: Do you think it's easier for you in a way, because you don't have to face elections the way...

SOLANA: No.

IGNATIUS: ... a politician -- well, but why wouldn't that be so?

SOLANA: Web, no, no, no. I don't have to face elections in the sense I did already during my many, many years in office in my own country. My case, I think, which is worse.

[LAUGHTER]



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IGNATIUS: (Inaudible)

(CROSSTALK)

SOLANA: To have prime ministers that have to go through elections.

[LAUGHTER]

In a section and at different times, at different moments, with different proportions, et cetera. So the constituency is very complicated.

IGNATIUS: Well, better or worse, optimist or pessimist, we're grateful to have you. So I want to just to ask everybody to join with me in thanking Dr. Solano. It's really a pleasure to be able to talk with you.

[APPLAUSE]

Now we have a Belgian foreign minister who's going to address us soon. I was handed a note more than a half hour ago saying he was a half hour late. And so that -- but perhaps Karen can enlighten us.

CRAIG KENNEDY: Yes. First, I just want to say thank you so much for those of you who were here last year. We started the second Brussels Forum with this pairing. And it was so popular that we thought we had to reprise it. And sometimes that doesn't always work that well. But it was fantastic. So thank you, both, for doing this again.

IGNATIUS: Thank you.

[END]