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From Mali to Syria: Dealing with a Troubled Neighborhood

Mr. Julian Borger: Thank you very much. Thanks very much. I'm Julian Borger, and this panel is called From Mali to Syria, Dealing with a Troubled Neighborhood. That's some neighborhood. I know my idea of a neighborhood is somewhere we can go next door and borrow sugar. But this, we're talking about a substantial chunk of the planet that is in turmoil. And it's definitely, obviously, certainly troubled, to say the very least. To say the word in the same sentence as Mali and Syria underlines what an understatement it is. We're talking about fragility fraying into collapse, failing in failed states, which have an extreme potential for violence and contagion, and it's those dangers which pose the West this fundamental dilemma that is extreme, the question of ultimate intervention, military intervention.

Now, intervention is tricky. When you go in, anything that happens after that is your fault, even if you can't control it. Arguably the intervention in Libya removed Gaddafi, but of course it didn't deal with the underlying trouble, the underlying divisions in that country. And arguably, the spillover from Libya led or pushed Mali over the edge, a very fragile state, over the edge into war. Now, two months ago, France went into Mali, and the question is, although there does seem to have been a successful military operation, have the underlying issues even begun to be addressed, and what is the potential for contagion there.

But inaction, also, obviously has unintended consequences. You only have to talk to members of the governments of U.K., France and the U.S. who were in power when Rwanda and Srebrenica happened, how much that haunts their consciousness. And now we're looking on we have 70,000, maybe more, dead in Syria. So that's where we're going to start this crisis in Syria, and let me introduce the panel. Justin Vaisse is the new

Director General of Planning of the French Foreign Ministry. Wendy Sherman is the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs of the U.S. State Department. Kristalina Georgieva is the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian affairs and Crisis Response, so not a big job then.

The Hon. Kristalina Georgieva: (Inaudible) the Commission.

Mr. Julian Borger: In the European Commission, I should say. And Louise Arbour is the President and CEO of the International Crisis Group. If I may start with you, Justin, because today and yesterday, we do seem to be at something of a tipping point in the EU, especially when it comes to U.K. and France and what is going to be done about Syria. If I may ask you the kind of classic journalist damned if you do and damned if you don't question, why now, why not a year ago? What is it about now that seems to be triggering this change?

The Hon. Justin Vaisse: Thanks, Julian, and thanks for the GMF for the invitation, of course. I just wish GMF had been a bit more sensitive to gender balance for this panel, but fortunately when I look at the room, I'm sort of reassured. However, your question is a pretty serious one. So, why now? Well, I guess the first element of answer is that we always had a preference for negotiated multi-lateral solution. We went to the U.N., we discussed with our friends in the international community. We went to a vote at the U.N. Security council three times in October 2011 and twice in 2012, and we got--each time, we got vetoes. We went through endless peace plans, the NN Plan, the Arab League cease fire, the Lakhdar Brahimi's efforts to bring about peace, and the truth is, it doesn't work.

We don't believe right now that this will be the way out. Rather, it will be a way out only when the military solution on the ground changes. And the truth is, and that's the second element, it doesn't change. Or it doesn't change quickly enough to prevent or

simply to put a stop to that bloodshed. And what is even more painful is that the embargo that was inspired by very good reasons, not to add death and destruction to death and destruction, is now backfiring, because the situation on the ground is very unequal. Bashar al-Assad's forces are supplied by the Russians and by the Iranians. They do have access to weapons, and it's not the case for the opposition.

And that's why, a couple of days ago, along with David Cameron, Francois Hollande, and (inaudible) decided that they would ask for an end to the embargo, something that will be effective at the end of May when the embargo ceases and we need unanimity and with at least the U.K. and France, and probably others. And I do hope, and it's the hope of Laurent Fabrius that we will have unanimity to lift the embargo, that the situation will be better.

And just one last thing, which is that the preference for a negotiated solution still stands. It is not antithetical to lifting the embargo. We do

believe that the National Coalition's offer of negotiation will be taken up by Bashar al-Assad only when he has no other option. And so we see the lifting of the embargo as complimentary to the negotiated solution, which we very much hope for.

Mr. Julian Borger: Thank you very much. Wendy Sherman, can I follow up and ask, is the same tipping point approaching in the Obama administration? We're hearing different kinds of noises coming from the Obama administration about level of engagement intervention in Syria. Is the policy changing?

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: I think there's probably not a government in the world who is worried, cares about and focused on Syria that doesn't think every day about what more it can do, what's the best thing to do, what's the best route to end this as fast as possible. At the same time, I think every government that is engaged in this is also very focused on the day after, because I think without a doubt, whether it is tomorrow or whether it is, God forbid, months from now, this

will end, Assad will go, and we have to care about what happens the day after.

And those two things are connected because we want to make sure the day after that the chemical weapons that are in Syria are protected. We want to make sure the day after that the government that does come into power in Syria represents the aspirations of the Syrian people and not outside forces, such as one of my favorite, the IRGC Quds Force in Hezbollah. So I think it is why every government, and the United States for sure, has tried to be very careful about what we are doing here, to make sure that we have now collectively, many of us, recognized the Syrian Opposition Coalition as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, why many of us, and as Secretary Kerry just announced on behalf of the president and the United States, additional non-lethal assistance directly to the SOC and to the SMC.

And quite frankly, we are less concerned about whether the United States gets credit than we are

concerned about the SOC getting credit for delivering those meals, that medical assistance, that communications technology to local councils on the ground so the day after, they are seen as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people. So I think this is an incredibly complex and difficult problem, one that worries each one of us every single day. So every day, we have to look at what more we can do, what can we do, but we have to be led by the Syrian people themselves, and as we talk about the other issues across the Maghreb to the Sahel to the Arabian Peninsula, it's really about how can we best reinforce the aspirations of people themselves.

Mr. Julian Borger: Thanks very much. Commissioner Georgieva, from a humanitarian point of view, this is something that the West and the international community from the beginning agreed they could do. They could be there on the borders, they could be providing for the refugees. How would you assess how Europe and the wider world is doing that job?

The Hon. Kristalina Georgieva: There is a saying that you can avoid reality, but you cannot avoid the consequences of avoiding reality. And I think we are faced with this in Syria from a humanitarian perspective, especially over the last months, there has been an exponential growth of the impact of this crisis on Syria and on the neighborhood. Inside Syria, we know the numbers. I mean, they are now compatible to Afghanistan, actually apparently higher than Afghanistan, and from Syrian, that we have growing number of people pushed out of their homes, over two million inside Syria.

But what is becoming so very pressing is the impact of the crisis on the neighborhood. Last year, a year ago, we had 33,000 refugees. Comes March 1st this year, how many do we have? One million. How many do we have today? Today is 15th of March. One million, one hundred twenty-six thousand, eight hundred and sixty-five when I went--entered the room. Now, of course, they are more. And we--I don't know whether you would agree, but

this is, if not the most fragile region in the world, one of the most fragile regions in the world. So my point is very simple. When we look at the humanitarian catastrophe that we are facing today, very clearly we haven't done enough to reduce suffering of people, and also very clearly, that words that Antonio Vaterishus is saying, the Syrian crisis's existential trek to Lebanon, these are not words thrown lightly. Today, we have eleven, and in Jordan refugees that are seven, eight, nine, ten percent of the population. This thing goes--I mean, you are talking about the day after. When is the day after? This goes for another six months, not unlikely that the population of Jordan and Lebanon would be 20 percent bigger.

I'm a Bulgarian. My country is 7.5 million people. I don't know how you're going to cope if you have 1.5 million refugees to house and feed and treat. I don't--think of Europe. Europe is 500 million, 100 million more refugees. How we are going to cope with that, so we have to recognize that not only from a humanitarian

standpoint, we are hitting a wall that we cannot beat with our heads. We cannot, we soon won't be able to fund our humanitarian activities to the level that is required. You and us -- Europe and the United States -- we have spent already $1.2 billion in humanitarian aid and we haven't even touched half of the people that need help with this money.

So from a human point of view, from a cost point of view, from the impact of the region, we have to recognize that this day after we are talking about, unless we find the political solution soonest, is going to be a very dangerous for the region day after with humanitarian, political and security consequences. And what we cannot say is, "Oh, we didn't see this coming," because we see it coming.

So we argue from the humanitarian community on two levels. One, political solution is what we should be striving for. I'm not going to--not my expertise--is it more arms better or not? Many humanitarians have worries about that. Not my expertise. But what I do

know is that in the end, it is only political solution that can bring this horrendous suffering to an end.

And when we are not there yet, can we please focus on an agreement on humanitarian grounds to respect international humanitarian law, to have basic standards of medical care and attention to people? Can we agree on this if we cannot agree on the bigger solution? And I believe we can agree on this if we are focused on saying we have no space to run anymore.

Mr. Julian Borger: Thank you. Louise Arbour, given the scale of the humanitarian crisis that Commissioner Georgieva has just talked about, do you think there's any alternative for the West, other than getting more militarily involved to tip the balance inside Syria?

Ms. Louise Arbour: Well I think it's interesting, if you put it in those terms. In fact, I think the essence of your question is should there be more deployment of military assistance to address the humanitarian crisis. It seems to me that there are many

lessons learned from Libya, which I think was a military success and a diplomatic disaster.

One of the lessons learned is the necessity to articulate objectives with clarity before determining a course of action. And I think in the case of Syria now, we have a lot of public debates about action options, but not a lot of clarity about what they purport to achieve or what they're designed to achieve.

And the objectives in Syria are numerous. Some are consistent with each other in terms of the action that they would trigger. For instance, there are things that are said all the time: The humanitarian concern, every speech starts with that's the primary concern. Secondly, there's no military option. There has to be a diplomatic and a set of negotiations. The reality is at the same time, Assad must go. This has been part of the discourse from the beginning.

So we have to ask, what is the primary objective? Is it the reversal of the regime by force? Is it a negotiated solution, and if so, is there, as there

currently seems to be, an assessment that there has to be changing the facts on the ground to displace the notion by both sides that they will prevail militarily--to break the stalemate by changing the facts on the ground by supporting the opposition?

Is the primary objective stopping this catastrophic humanitarian disaster, which would call for a cease fire? A robust one would guarantee, provided by both sides that it will be enforced and thereby possibly freezing the conflict for quite some time.

And then there's sub-objectives. Is it to further marginalize Iran to pursue other objectives in the nuclear talks? Is it to prevent at all costs a recourse to chemical weapons? I mean, there's a whole series of objectives, as I said, and none of them are advanced with great clarity in the public debate about the methods that should be pursued. And if we come back to Libya, I mean this is at the heart, of the, I think, of the diplomatic fallout after Libya--lack of clarity about the objective, whether it was limited to the

protection of civilians in Benghazi or whether it was part of a grander scheme of regime change.

And this led, of course, now, I think, to a stalemate in the Security Council with some--Russia, China--claiming betrayal. They don't have to be sincere. They just have to be plausible. And whether they are sincere or not, it's very hard to tell. To me, it was relatively apparent that the protection of civilians in Libya would entail--had to entail--regime change. Why not say it? Why not say it explicitly, right from the beginning?

So to me it comes back to--in order to be a policy maker, you first need clarity of purpose, clarity of objectives. And in that sense, I think we should never hide behind expressions like "unintended consequences." Bad things are never intended. The real test is unforeseen or unforeseeable consequences. They can be unintended but eminently foreseeable and actually foreseen.

So in designing a course of action and a policy, we need clarity of objectives. The current, as I understand the current debate, it seems to be shifting to we need a negotiated solution, which will lead to the departure of the current regime--and we need to bring that through military assistance to the opposition to change the facts on the ground. That carries a lot of assumptions, such as that if Assad starts to think that he may lose, he'll come to the table. Well, his behavior so far indicates something completely different. If he starts to think he may lose, there's a lot of indication that he will leave nothing behind. If that's the case, will he then turn to chemical weapons, call on his friends and allies to beef up their support? What is the foundation for the assumption that giving more military support to the opposition--I'm not taking a position as to which is the preferable course, but I think we need to hear a chain of reasoning that is considerably more sophisticated than a knee-jerk response to the "do

something" cries for people who are actually offended by our level of tolerance for humanitarian disasters.

Mr. Julian Borger: Okay, there were a whole lot of questions brought up by this opening session. Let's open the floor to some questions and let's perhaps start with Syria, but I'm mindful that we're supposed to be talking about a whole swath of the planet so we should move on after that. But let's start with Syria.

There's a question in the second row, gentleman in the red tie. You got a mic? Mic over there. Very good, thanks.

Mr. David Ignatius: David Ignatius from the Washington Post. I want to ask specifically of Secretary Sherman and Mr. Vaisse, there was a lot of discussion over the past week about creating an interim government of the Syrian opposition. That interim government could then claim Syria's seat in the Arab League. It could then claim Syria's seat at the Islamic Conference. It could then, perhaps, claim Syria's seat in the United Nations and claim legal legitimacy and

even through the international criminal court, have leverage to go after those who have been committing atrocities in Syria.

It's my understanding that the United States, France and other European nations--Britain, Germany--argued against this, fearing that it could contribute to the creation of a power vacuum in Syria going to Secretary Sherman's argument about wanting to make sure the day after that you haven't created a more chaotic situation, rather than less. But I have to be honest. I'm not sure I understand why having an interim government and developing those personalities, skills, public acceptance of them would be contrary to the objective that you've described. So please speak to that.

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: So David, I think there are a number of assumptions in your way you posed the question. As I said, at the end of the day, the choices are for the Syrian people, not for all of us sitting in this room, quite frankly. And we can give advice and we

can give thoughts and we can give experience, but at the end of the day, it's not our choice. As regards whether the Syrian opposition should create a shadow government, what the United States has been concerned about is "A" what people spend their time doing in the midst of the humanitarian crisis and the facts on the ground. Secondly, that one of the things we learned out of Iraq was not to dismantle the entire infrastructure of a government and leave a vacuum the day after. We all, I think, have come to agree that de-Baathification was not a particularly great idea because you did not have the civil service. You did not have even in the parts of the Army that did not have the essential blood on their hands. And Iraq having to build its government all over again in some ways was very difficult, very complex, a lot of tensions, cross-cutting tensions in the different forces with inside Iraq. And so we have some concern that we learned some lessons from the recent past and that we make sure that the parts of Syria that are functioning--Syria has an infrastructure

in its governance and if that infrastructure should not be destroyed. There are many paths to ensuring that and I am sure that over time we will--not we, but the Syrian people and the (inaudible) will find the right path towards that.

I understand the competing demands here for greater legitimacy so you have a course of action, but at the same time we do have some concerns about whether that will lead to dissolving the infrastructure that exists and will be necessary and whether, in fact, just the time and attention for the in-fighting of deciding who's in first will dissipate the unity of the group to pursue the objective that the Syrian people have said they so badly and dearly want.

Mr. Julian Borger: Justin, do you have anything to add? Another question? Steven Erlanger had his hand up first. Can I get a mic?

Steven Erlanger: Thank you. Thank you Julian. The French and the British have been pushing privately for months now to change the balance and pushing Washington

to loosen up on arms supplies. You've now gone public, so there's a difference there. Our reporting seems to indicate that the ability of the Syrian army to hold the territory is eroding, so that seems to be changing.

But I'd love to understand if, from Ms. Sherman, if the United States--because you never really answered Julian's first question.

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: Really?

Steven Erlanger: Yes, I listened. Whether the United States rejects the French and British argument, that shifting the balance now will push the Assad regime into understanding that it must negotiate or whether you think that's an invalid argument. And since we've reported that the CIA is training Syrians in Jordan to use anti-tank missiles, tell me the real difference between that and providing those missiles. Thank you.

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: Steve, very good question. Probably won't be able to satisfy you with the answer you're looking for. I think the best I can say is

exactly what I said, which is that every day we look at whether we are doing the best we can to support the Syrian people in what they hope for. I think Louise outlined a whole set of very salient questions. I think the Commissioner laid out the staggering humanitarian crisis that is in front of us. My French colleague, you know, has laid out what the French are struggling to try to get all of us to think about. All of these questions, all of these realities are in front of all of us in this room. And the people who are dying every day and the people who are refugees and cannot live a life and face insecurity in the refugee camps in which they live because they're growing so large.

So these are not simple and every day we all have to struggle to figure out what is the right balance and it is not easy. There's nothing simple here. So I'm sorry I can't satisfy you.

Events are moving. Events are moving, and so we all must look. We just announced new tranche of non-lethal assistance, things we had not supplied in the past,

directly to the SMC and the SOC. That was in recognition of changing things, changing facts on the ground.

Mr. Julian Borger: Okay, the lady here wants to ask a question.

Female Voice: (Inaudible) and let me report to you that the feeling in the region, madam, is that this unclarity and uncertainty coming from Washington--70,000 people dead later has really harmed the United States and its vision and its--whatever it wants to do in the region. I would like to report that to you clearly. So then kindly try to explain, if you would, right now, that Secretary Kerry has spoken of the fact that the United States believes that Bashar Assad, and he named him, must go to the table with the opposition, which is really the Russian position. So now we have you embracing the Russian position while the Europeans are saying I--which pleases (inaudible) plenty. And the French and the U.K., the Brits, are saying something that is making him very angry, which is arm them, shift

the power, literally. So what kind of a conversation are you having with the Russians? Can you at least let us know what's going on on that level?

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: I think that what you heard and what you express, I heard myself very clearly. I was in Riyadh just a few days ago and met with all the GCC foreign ministers. And so I do understand the frustration and is the frustration that we share, that everybody in this room shares. And no more so than the people of Syria themselves, for sure. I think that we thought that al-Katib was quite courageous in making the offer to have a discussion with appropriate representatives from the current Syrian government. Not those with blood on their hands and certainly not the top. We thought that was very courageous. And what the United States was trying to do was simply to reinforce and offer support to that courageous decision. We are not in cahoots with anyone doing anything behind people's backs, we simply want to support what the SOC is trying to accomplish for itself (inaudible) yes, we

talk with the Russians all the time, as does every government in this room. But there is nothing that people are not aware of in that discussion.

And I think that, as has been said, what's best to deal with the humanitarian disaster is a political solution that gets to safety and security for people and they can return to their homes. And that the IDPs in the country can return to their homes, as well. So there's no--there's no one who would doubt that a political solution would be better than more deaths and more destruction.

Mr. Julian Borger: What I suggest is we do just a short bunch of questions to round off Syria so we can get a lot of questions in and then have a panel discussion, then go on to Mali and the rest of the region. There was a gentleman over here, please.

Audience: All right, thanks very much.

Mr. Julian Borger: Oh, and can you remember to say your name and affiliations on--

Mr. Roland Freudenstein: Right. It's Roland

Freudenstein, Center for European Studies, which is affiliated to the European People's Party. Now, I'd like to come back to what Louise Arbour said about regime change, which is a toxic term. It's almost radioactive, I'm afraid. And, uh, uh, such is, uh, the same is true for the global war on terror and nation building. Isn't it time to revive these terms, seeing that, of course, as toxic as they are, but this is what we're doing and this is what we will be doing in the future with new instruments, of course. Not the ones over the last decade but, you know, and then to Under Secretary Sherman, is this the right time to talk about nation building at home or about leading from behind, talk about ending a decade of war? That's what I'm wondering. Thanks.

Mr. Julian Borger: Thank you. There's a lady here in the white shirt. Coming behind you.

Ms. Trudy Rubin: Trudy Rubin from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. I'd like to ask the Under Secretary specifically, following (inaudible) question, has the

U.S. endorsed the Russian position that the Syrian opposition should negotiate with Assad? And if that is not the case--I would like to know the answer, but if that is not the case, then there is a stalemate, as the French have put forward, how do--does the U.S. believe that stalemate will be broken, and are meals ready to eat really sufficient to break the stalemate?

Mr. Julian Borger: The gentleman in the yellow tie and premium on questions to any other members of the panel, as well.

Mr. Nazar Al Baharna: Nazar Al Baharna, Georgetown University. I teach contract diplomacy in conflict zones (inaudible) diplomacy in Berlin. Now, the problem with the neighboring countries, that they're all part of the problem, rather part of the solution and that have eliminated any part to actually intervene and put a solution. Now, I cannot understand why the P5 cannot actually come with a solution rather than a military solution, but a diplomatic solution, similar to what's happening in Yemen. I think if they put their acts

together, probably they can do that a military solution is not a solution.

Mr. Julian Borger: Last one in this bunch Anton LaGuardia over there in the corner.

Mr. Anton LaGuardia from *The Economist*. There's a lot of surprise at the European Council a few hours ago that the French and the British came with this request, they said it was a complete surprise to them, so question to you is why now? Two weeks ago, you agreed to renew the arms embargo with a few tweaks, now you're saying it should be changed, it should be abolished. Why? What's the urgency? To Wendy Sherman, is (technical difficulty).

Mr. Julian Borger: --not the time for nation building at home. The question again about whether you agree with Russia on Assad, related question; why can't the P5 just agree and what weapons you're going to send? I guess we'll start with Wendy Sherman, seeing she's got the bulk of the questions.

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: Well, I must say for all of

the American journalists who have been asking questions, I probably feel, as they do, having arrived here this morning on the airplane, it does help us stay awake. So thank you for the questions.

I think that the gentleman's question, and referring to Yemen, says a lot, in the sense that, yes, the GCC and the Arab League, the GCC in particular in that instance, really put together an extraordinary proposal, that the rest of the international community helped to implement. And I've had the privilege of being in Yemen and meeting with President Hadi, and no one would've imagined that Yemen would be where it is today. It has a very long way to go but no one would've imagined.

Similarly, the African Union, Kenya, Ethiopia, came together and put together an African-led effort in Somalia, and no one would've imagined that we would be where we are today in Somalia.

That said we have the Libya example, which has been discussed, Mali, which is an altogether different

situation. And I think what that underscores, just to broaden out this discussion a little bit, is that each one of these cases is (technical difficulty) but some of the elements that are important is that there be a very strong regional dimension to what goes on, that the neighborhood matters because it's the neighborhood, as well as the people in the given country that are going to be most impacted by what occurs. So I think it's very important, it's why I wanted to sit with the GCC and hear what they have to say, because it is their neighborhood, as well. And stopped in Amman and met with the Jordanians because they feel this every single day, as do the Turks, in a way the rest of us do not.

So I think that understanding what the people in the country want, what the neighborhood is looking for, what forces can be brought together to create the solution is very critical in each of these situations, which are fundamentally different.

I agree that all of those phrases have become toxic, and so I think it's more important to talk about

objectives, as Louise said. What are we trying to achieve here, what are the concrete results that we're looking for on the ground, as opposed to just think of the cute sound bites that help us describe very complex phenomena.

Thirdly, in terms of whether, we agree with Russia. What we agree is if the Geneva Communiqué is still a basis for reaching a political solution, it is not a political solution in and of itself, but it is a document that does have the basis for building that political transformation. I think that out of that meeting, Russia and the United States probably interpreted the document slightly differently. But that said, we are, coming back to your point, trying to find the space that the P5, as the veto-holding members of the Security Council, can pull together and try to exert the international leadership that we ought to, as members of the P5. But I think this is a responsibility of the entire international community.

And to the last point, trying to answer your

questions, do we oppose arming as opposed to support it? And the answer I would give you is the answer I've given you already, which is this is a dynamic situation that every day, every one of us in this room looks at what more we need to do to try to reach specific objectives so the Syrian people can have the peace they want, they deserve. And underlying so much of this, going to the discussions that have happened here before this one, is really what the economics look like for people in their everyday lives. Tunisia was set off by a vendor who didn't feel that he could get the funds he needed to raise his family and lead a decent life, which is what everyone wants. And in this swath that we're talking about, from Syria to Mali, we have millions of young people under the age of 30 that see no future for themselves. And I am just as concerned about the African Spring that I think is coming, as I am about the Arab Spring.

Mr. Julian Borger: Justin, you had a specific question about sending weapons. The U.K. government

seems to want to have it both ways. Characteristically, they say they wanted to lift the arms embargo, but they haven't made a decision about actually sending arms. Is that the French position on it?

The Hon. Justin Vaisse: Well, lifting the embargo would pave the way to send those. But to answer Anton's question, which was more or less your question, why now? Why now? Well, because the political process on which we were putting our hopes or pinning our hopes all together, the proposal by Bashar al-Katib to negotiate, we see this isn't going anywhere and this isn't going anywhere because the situation on the ground is not conducive for Bashar to change his mind. And we think that the bloodshed will continue unless there is a change.

I think also, to do justice to the French position, as you know, the embargo has been changed in its details, allowing for the export of non-lethal material that is closer to lethal material to weapon-type material than what it used to be. So it's just a

gradual evolution, it's not a revolution, and that explains why Francois Hollande and Laurent Fabius decided to change. And what you have to see also is that it is going to be gradual. It's not going to take effect immediately, it's probably going to take a few weeks to try to agree, and then probably be effective at the end of May.

Mr. Julian Borger: But has France made the decision to supply arms, which is something the U.K. has not done?

The Hon. Justin Vaisse: To the best of my knowledge, I don't know.

Mr. Julian Borger: Let's pivot to Mali. I wanted to ask--to start off this section--

The Hon. Kristalina Georgieva: We had one more question here, actually. What the two of us think about this--

Mr. Julian Borger: Oh, I'm sorry.

The Hon. Kristalina Georgieva: Not that I'm eager to jump on this question, but I think it is fair to

answer it.

Mr. Julian Borger: I'm sorry, go ahead.

The Hon. Kristalina Georgieva: Well, it is--

Ms. Louise Arbour: I don't want to repeat myself. It seems to me that if we apply the law of foreseeable consequences in the pursuit of an objective, if the objective as I understand it--for instance, of the French position as it's currently being expressed, is that there ought to be initiatives to change the facts on the ground, to revive the possibility of a negotiated solution, which now seems to have gone in a coma. Assuming that if this is the objective, one has to be prepared for the method employed not being successful. So if arming the opposition, in-fact, rather than bring Assad to the negotiation table, brings him to escalating the hostilities, including by recourse to extreme force, much more extreme, I don't think we've seen the end of what this regime is capable of doing, including the total destruction of Damascus. And humanitarian consequences would dwarf what we've

seen so far.

First of all, is it sound to think that giving more military strength to the opposition will make this regime reconsider its military survival and bring it to the negotiation table, if that's the strategy, is it likely to occur? And presumably there has to be a plan B.

If in fact it does the opposite, then do we go the distance? And what is the distance? And at that point, is the, I won't talk about intended consequences, but imminently, foreseeable consequences of the humanitarian cost worth pursuing this strategy?

I'm not sure that in, again, that in policy debate, we see a lot of unpacking of these alternatives. And the basis, the evidence for the assumption. It's a very sound sort of military theory. When you have a stalemate and both sides are convinced that they're going to win, as with Bosnia, it's been done elsewhere, you intervene to just change that calculus, and it will change your behavior. But it's like sanctions. You have

to ask yourself, you know, the sanctions, they hurt, doesn't mean they work. So in the same way here, if you take a strategy that you calculate will lead to this behavior, you have to be prepared to articulate the evidence upon which you believe that. And what you're going to do if you're wrong.

And you cannot hide behind unintended consequences.

Mr. Julian Borger: (inaudible), can I—

The Honorable Kristalina Georgieva: In the, well, in the humanitarian world we are obviously not big lovers of guns. You give us a choice between guns and roses, we don't go for the guns. This is not to say that we don't see the use of military means as a deterrent.

For example, Patriot missiles in Turkey. They have played a protective role for the serious (inaudible) between the fighting (inaudible) and the Turkish border. When it comes down, though, to the question of adding more guns as a deterrent factor inside Syria, we are very worried. And Valarie Amos spoke about it

already. Because we see that in testifying, fighting means less access to people, more people fleeing.

Just to give you one very simple example. We want to take humanitarian cargo across fighting lines to Aleppo. We get five planes landing in Latakia putting the cargo on trucks and then for five days they're trying to get to Aleppo. They're being stopped by this fighting people and by those fighting people. They get arrested we need to release them. Finally they got to the destination, and I'm just thinking that more guns, more arms, is--from a humanitarian perspective, unless there is a very clear deterrent factor that they would play and we have more evidence it would be there, it is something that we worry. I mean, we all know Burke saying, all that it takes for evil for evil to flourish is for good men to and I guess—

Mr. Julian Borger: To do nothing.

The Honorable Kristalina Georgieva: We mean to do nothing. But doing something just for the sake of doing something is just--is not good enough.

Mr. Julian Borger: (inaudible) you wanted—you--

MALE VOICE: Just a quick word on what Louise was was saying. I agree. We need to think hard, but what I see is Bashar al-Assad is on the offensive with jet fighters. What I see is Bashar al-Assad using scud missiles to destroy Aleppo.

What I see is already a very high level of violence and yes, you can always imagine that it can escalate, that he could use chemical weapons, but we're already at a very high level of violence. So the question is, how long does it--is it going to take for what we hope for, which is a transition in power, preferably non-violent, and if necessary, violent. And that is the rezoning which I think has merit, which led us to consider that the playing field was not level and that Bashar supplied with as much weaponry as he needed. Whereas the opposition was not, and was fighting with hand tied behind its back. And, I do think this rezoning has limits. It perhaps makes him cynical. And yes, it does have a level of violence.

However, I mean, one of the big advantages in military terms of the regime is air control. And there is a chance that once the opposition can act against Bashar al-Assad, once one or two jets have been downed, the conditions on the ground will change. And, perhaps it would not be overnight, maybe it would take a month. Maybe it would take four months. But what I know is that the situation now is not moving at all. And that the level of death is extremely high and that if we do nothing, it will continue.

Mr. Julian Borger: We could go on all evening on (inaudible) complex and so entangled. But we have to deal with the rest of this chunk of territory we've been given. And let's talk about Mali, the other end. And then let's talk about the bit in the middle.

On Mali, Kristalina, do you think that the French intervention avoided a humanitarian disaster? Would that—

The Honorable Kristalina Georgieva: Definitely. Definitely. Categorically. I was in Mali in December,

and then I went in January. And it was very clear in December that the jihadis were not going to wait until September 2013, for us to get organized and stop them. Very clear. The humanitarian part was already very severe. But one thing I want to say about Mali.

Mali is a crisis in a crisis in a crisis. Mali is hit by reoccurring droughts. Three severe droughts in seven years, that's supposed to come every 10, 15 years. Then by political instability, then by the conflict. So, when we look at this whole region, I think it would be a grave mistake, first to talk about Mali outside of the overall Sahara region, and second, not to look at these with all the complexity of this being a region with a (inaudible) that is highest population growth rate in the world and lowest human development index. And extreme nature and extremism hammering on the countries on a regular basis.

So, our take is that yes, very good that Mali was saved from a tragedy, but we need to look at long-term engagement with this hell region that would bring

ethnic stability in Mali, the Tuareg and the southerners can work together, not hate each other's guts and you know, and on any occasion try to kill each other. But also look at the resilience to climate change, resilience to this violence, because governors, climate change, these are security issues. And we need to look at those issues as very, very significant challenges of the decades, years and decades ahead.

Mr. Julian Borger: Louise, following on with that, how do you learn the lessons of Libya and import them into Mali? What should the French particularly be doing, as an outside player?

Ms. Louise Arbor: Well, I think there are lessons to be learned from different environments, and now the conversation has moved to the composition of a U.N. peacekeeping mission. But I'd just like to take one, maybe small step back.

We think of the French intervention as the starting point. The real starting point, I think, is one step behind that. These insurgent jihads groups basically

chose the terrain and the timing for what looks a lot like the possible opening of the second big theater for the war on terror.

After Libya, they could have chosen, well, there were options anywhere from Somalia to Yemen, to Nigel, to Mauritania. Presumably, there were lots of options. Mali was presented with a lot of attractive features. A coup d'état that had just preceded it, a very weak government completely destabilized and in a separatist movement in the north that got them taken over by jihads.

But it was their call. It's not just a coincidence that the Tuaregs, which had supported the Gadhafi forces just happened to come home and, I don't want to overplay the planning, although there is now evidence of collusion and cooperation between various groups anywhere from the (inaudible) to Boko Harram, but I don't want to talk about massive conspiracy. But basically, they launched. And when they started moving south, it was eminently predictable, again, that

somebody would push them back. Maybe they didn't realize the push-back would be as effective and robust as that led by the French.

But that's right. They didn't wait for September because they thought by September the African armies that were supposed to be deployed would be in place. They got pushed back very rapidly. Now we're in chapter two, trying to transition to a peacekeeping mission, the features of which, I think, are extremely concerning for the United Nations, in my opinion.

We are looking at deploying a force of some, I don't know, 10,000, mostly from African armies, deployed in the north, with rhetorically a political mission in Bamako, but I'm afraid that when it gets militarized to that extent, the political enterprise becomes a very small part of the mission. Just look at the DRC. What progress we've made on the political side.

So, we're now configuring putting peacekeepers in harm's way. Mostly African troops with, I think,

probably in some case, questionable professionalism, capacity, ethics, in some cases, and there's evidence of that. Supported by Western money, possibly by some Western technology, like drones, that will also be of questionable wisdom and legality, but that could be for another conversation.

All that in the face of very resilient insurgents who picked the terrain and are familiar with it. And all that, to partner and support a government whose credibility and legitimacy will be again, eminently questionable. Is that the future of peacekeeping, I think is a very legitimate question.

Mr. Julian Borger: Can I throw it open, again, now to talk about Mali and the (inaudible) in general.

Male Voice: Thank you. My name is Ono from the upper house of Japan. I would like to ask one question on the- -about the MRA, that we are talking about the same kind of negative sanction to save the MRA. But he has over the case of the positive sanction. For example, (inaudible) in Iraq, the Fallujah, (inaudible)

we cope with the tribes and the (inaudible) to our tribes in the Sahail area. Already rejected the existence (inaudible) so why don't we, for example, encourage, in the (inaudible) positive sanction to save that area? Together with the negative sanction, using the power. So, do we have the (inaudible) initiative of the international society. How do you think?

Mr. Julian Borger: Before we go back to the panel, there was a question that, right back there, by the screen, at the back.

MALE VOICE: Hi, I'm (inaudible). My question is addressed to the panel. The Malian crisis, apart from being a concern for West Africa, is also an international preoccupation. When we know that drug trafficking has taken advantage of the fact that the Sahail region was not under the state control, but also the jihad had are trying to establish themselves there. I don't know why the international community's still dragging its feet to support the French effort to tackle the challenges that are in Mali.

Mr. Julian Borger: Let’s go back to the panel. Justin, do you feel that the rest of the west has your back in Mali?

Mr. Justin: You know, first of all, during the operation, when the operation was launched, it was very difficult in military terms to have the support of others, because it was triggered in a very abrupt and sudden way. And, in spite of that sudden nature of the intervention, we got support very fast from the Brits, from the Americans, from the Belgians, and others for transportation, for intelligence, and other assets that were needed.

In terms of peacekeeping and stabilization, yes, I do think international community is there. So basically there are three main areas of action. Military, political, and development. And let me address the development one.

So we have about 150 million euros invested in the development of Mali, but the EU 250 million, and put to

very good use. And, others are helping and in this regard, yes, the international community has our back.

In military terms, I address the question, I think you need very precise assets, many precise intelligence, that right now, only the French have by virtue, in particular of having had many hostages in the past five to ten years and having had to concentrate and focus on the region and knowing the actors really well.

On the political front, the idea is to, after the situation is fully stabilized, and we think we've made a lot of progress in recent weeks. For example, the high school, the French high school is Bamako has reopened last week and it was sort of a test because of course, entering the security of students was critical, but it was also critical to send a signal that we were confident that security in Bamako was re-established. So we believe we've made progress, but the important thing is to get the dialogue and reconciliation process going before the elections. The elections, the Milan

National Assembly has decided it would be hold in two rooms in July. Some say this is premature. We do believe, based on our assessments that it will be possible to hold them. We do think that the peace keeping mission will be a huge help, including logistically to hold these elections and to help organize them logistically and ensure that they happen in good conditions, after which we'll have presumably, hopefully, a more stable situation. And in this, also, we've received the help of the international community zone on this traditional particle of gripe. Also I forgot to mention, the EUTM, the EU training mission, which, yes, has taken more time than perhaps it should have, but is now starting to implement already 70 officers on a total of 4 or 500 that will come and that will be instrumental to developing the capacity of the Milan army, which frankly to reconstruct from the start.

Mr. Julian Borger: Anyone else on the panel want raise (inaudible).

Just two points. First on the question of positive engagement. We are doing two very big things with long term frame to implement. First one is a recognition that in the past we have not, the conventional community, has not supported Mali enough to build sustained community level reconciliation between the Tuaregs, the Arabs, the southerners, and that what was done in the past would be a deal to be reached between the top representing Tuaregs and the government from the south, we dealt legs based on this community level buildup and now we are looking into an engagement that would allow this process of reconciliation to be built bottom up and also top down.

Second, we know for that this region, for Mali, but also for Mursi, for (inaudible) for Chad, we must work for building resilience to shocks being caused by weather, by drought, and by flash floods, that are not supposed to happen in the dessert, to extremists and that investment in long term resilience building. We launched a fast participate, but so does Unites States

in a problem we call (inaudiable) of hell. And is for us in the commission, this is going to be at least billion, billion and a half over the next ten years engagement to allow the region to actually weather better the inevitable hammer that is going to hit again and again. And if I could just say on the training mission, I mean, you made the point that the Malian army is not quite known for being a good civilian. A big of the training mission is going to be train the Malian's to fight, but also to protect to ascend obligations under international humanitarian law, and I do believe this is a significant engagement from Europe.

The Hon. Wendy Sherman: Just to double down on what the commissioner said. I think we all are going to have to commit resources in ways that we haven't at a time when we all don't have resources. And so we're going to have to be creative and knit together the different pieces, whether it is the French, in this instance, providing the military support, ECOWAS working to

provide troops, European Union and United States putting in training missions, humanitarian efforts from the UN dealing with the long term resilience needs. It is going to be very complicated, but very critical. We started, we co-chaired with the Turks, a global counter terrorism forum to build capacity. There was a Libyan ministerial a few weeks ago, very focused on, and we're working very closely with Europeans on border security in each of the states because we saw weapons just coming across Libyan border into Mali and into Niger and into Mauritania, so this is a very complex undertaking, but absolutely critical or we will find new decentralized terrorists attacks on our doorsteps.

Mr. Julian Borger: Okay, we've got ten minutes left. We've got to cover the entire rest of the region and keep that in mind when you're asking questions, make them together. On the other hand, as brief as possible. The gentleman way over there.

(Inaudible)Foundation for European Progressive Studies. I think when we talk on these problems in Mali

and Wendy Sherman said, we have to wait also a kind of African spring. I think we also as Europeans, and we as Americans, we have also to rethink our development policies. Mali has been, since independence, one of the countries who's received years and years a lot of development aide and now we are in a situation that we are not knowing what's going on in that country. The same goes for a lot of other countries in the region, not talking on Ivory Coast of conflict, which is just (inaudible) a bit, but it's still on a level to grow up again. Thank you.

Mr. Julian Borger: Gentleman over here with the beard.

(Inaudible)from the World Agroforestry Center, a research organization. My question will follow one from yours. You make the point, Deputy Secretary, that there a lot of young men without anything to do and that's particularly the case in Mali, a country where 77 percent of the population is rural. The lack of agricultural productivity in that country is the root

cause of the instability that is besetting it. The droughts are an issue that comes on top of a systemic issue, but are not the systemic issue itself. There are examples in Niger, in (inaudible), and indeed in Mali, of successful agriculture development using agroecological principles, using agroforestry, and I would just encourage the commission and indeed all of those interested in the region, to use more science in their programming because that is likely to bring development programs that have a greater chance of success. Thank you.

Nik Gowing: I was with (inaudible)last night who is writing his book on Sudan, his ten years there, and he said responsibility to protect is dead. Can I ask you a direct question? What do you think of the future of R2P? Is there a hope for it, particularly after what we've seen in Mali and we heard from Louise that in the end Libya did achieve something even though it's left a dysfunctional state afterwards, but in Syria of course, it hasn't worked at all.

Okay. Let's go back to the panel those are fairly big questions on foreign policy R2P. Big questions about how the west approaches this region. I would add the additional problem, how do you overcome the additional problem of the western brand in this context being toxic itself. The people you weigh are trying to stabilize societies by incubating a toll in anyway and have reverse effects. So I just wanted to add that, as well, into the mix and maybe we can go across the panel and deal with whichever questions you want to address. So starting with you Louise then.

Ms. Louise Arbour: The tough R2P questions. Before I get to this. First, I think, it's only in the last few years, including I would estimating it starting with the World Bank development report in 2011, willingly making the connection between security and development. We've had these silos for a very long time and then Christine Lagard, when she was in (inaudible) a few months ago said public enemy number one in Africa is conflict, on a continent that is experiencing very

good economic growth, not exactly an equitably distributed but that's the story everywhere. It's not unique to Africa. I think Latin American, Europe, the whole world has a long history of inequities, tolerance for inequities that are, I think, not sustainable inside countries and between countries. But we're seeing economic prosperity on the continent and yet, conflict that is eating up at the capacity of people to sustain, I think, your economic progress. This is, I think, the first point for the development community, the donor community, the willingness to tackle this issue. And then to say, you know, in Mali we should have been more engaged before, there's an addiction to the rhetoric of early warning. I can tell you right now, we should be worried about Central Asia, particularly post 2014 when Afghanistan's dynamic changed. In my organization and crisis group we've published regularly about the decay, institutional decay, political decay, it's all there, perfect storm. What is virtually impossible predict is the trigger,

but the conditions are there to be seen and they are elsewhere. The increased interest now in the Sahel and the question also, of course, of the penetration we've just published on the gulf of Guinea. People talk about piracy off the coast of Somalia, well, look at what's happening in the gulf of Guinea. All forms of trafficking, including now piracy. The money that's in Mali and in the region in the Sahel that comes from allegedly unpaid ransoms for the last 10, 12 years, everything is there but has not been addressed, I think, in a comprehensive fashion. As for R2P, does it have a future? First of all, it's a doctrine that is profoundly sound. It's in fact, entrenched in the Genocide Convention explicitly. Probably the most commonly ratified human rights based convention and a norm of international law, the Genocide Convention. The only thing it adds is crimes against humanity and war crimes in terms of a responsibility to prevent, to protect, or react and so on. It's there. The likely hood that it would be activated as a doctrine in Syria,

I think by now, is nonexistent. There was a time to activate it. I mean, R2P was used as a platform for military action in Libya after fewer than 300 people had been killed in an armed insurrection where people took arms against their government. In Syria, the opposition remained specific and non-armed for almost a year and 70,000 died with absolutely no hope of the doctrine as it's currently enshrined that is requiring Security Council approval for military intervention. So I think in Syria it is not implausible to think that they would be at some point, an inevitable call for very robust military action. Currently, it's very difficult to imagine that it would be anchored in a Security Council resolution based on the responsibility to protect civilians. At this stage, I think it's extremely difficult to see that.

Mr. Julian Borger: Okay. We've just got a few minutes left.

Agree. Agree. On R2P. Actually, I disagree that now agree, agree, disagree. I disagree that it didn't work

in Syria. I think it worked in Syria because if you look at the thresholds that are just cause final result, legitimate authority, EG Security Council resolution, proportionally a reasonable prospect to achieve your objective. We don't have legitimate authorization. It's not there. And it is hard to claim that we can be sure that taking action in Syria with Assad saying I'm going to use chemical weapons if you do, that we meet the reasonable prospect of threshold so it is a concept that is applied, doesn't mean that every time when there is a need it gets triggered because we have the thresholds and they have to be crossed and I, like you, remain optimistic that the world may finally wake up and realize that in Syria there has to be a political unity that brings an end to this madness.

I quite agree with the comment that was made as Christine Lagard said that there is much wonderful happening in Africa. Six of the ten fastest growing economies are in Africa. And so it is a real conundrum

that there is growth, that there is possibility, that there is opportunity that's never been seen before, and yet there is this conflict. There is in some countries, absolute dire poverty. Mali is the fourth poorest country in the world, even after all of the years that everyone has tried to help them. In part, because it has a vast ungovernable desert and is an enormous country, just physically enormous and has had weak governance for a very, very, very long time, so I think that what we all have to do is figure out how to galvanize the things that we can in service of African-led solutions in Africa, of regional solutions in the Middle East and bring the talent that we have in terms of capacity that Europe has, that America has. We have very sophisticated capacity. We should bring that capacity to people in the neighborhood, in the countries themselves that are trying to move forward and leave the control as much as we possibly can in their hands which brings one inevitably to the right to protect when, in fact, people in their own countries do

not have the capacity to, in fact, protect themselves. I agree. I do not think R2P is dead by a long shot. I think President Obama, the United States, are very much supporters of R2P, but I quite agree, that doesn't mean it's going to work every time, and that doesn't mean we have perfected how to make use of it. We have created in the U.S. an Atrocities Prevention Board, in my view, a horrible title for an entity, but the idea is to try to think through how we can operationalize concepts that we have all agreed to, and it is not easy because it is a complex society we live in, and we try to do things in consensus, in agreement, and people have different interests, as we have seen in Syria, and those different interests cross the ability to protect.

Mr. Julian Borger: Thank you very much. Justin your (inaudible) France could be excused for believing it's trying to keep R2P alive on its own sometimes. Is that how you feel?

The Honorable Justin Vaisse: Yes, what I'd like to say is follow-up on Wendy's point because we know very

well--and that's pretty much the case for the U.S. and this has been the case for France and Africa for 15 years now since the Doctrine of Non-Intervention has been adopted in 1997. Damned if we do, damned if we don't, that is, if we don't intervene, then people say you had the responsibility, if not protect, at least to stabilize the region. You had the means to do it, and you did not intervene. What did you do? It's your responsibility. On the other hand, if we do intervene, then it's neo-colonialism. It's imperialism. It's France Afrique, right? And it's what we have heard for (inaudible) and in other situations, and that's one of the reasons why the (inaudible) government wants to make sure that the exit is orderly, but it also is quick because the warm welcome we've received might not last for very long, and even if populations were very enthusiastic about the intervention, there is a sort of legitimate concern that the French might overstay their welcome, let's say. The way out of the damned if we do, damned if we don't is what Wendy said. That is, to say

to make sure that the Africans themselves can handle such situations. If not, the crisis situation, at least very rapidly after the intervention, the handling of the stabilization and peacekeeping, and that's what we're trying to do with the AFISMA, with the transformation of the AFISMA into a UN mission, but a UN mission will be mostly manned by Africans themselves, and I think that's the only way to get beyond the debate of intervention and non-intervention is to make sure that regional actors can intervene because at this time of history, people just don't like us intervening around the world and throwing their weight around in a disorderly way.

Mr. Julian Borger: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank the panel. It was fascinating discussions. Clearly, there is no rule book, but inaction on the other hand, is also not an option. Thank you very much.

Mr. Craig Kennedy: Thank you, Julian. (inaudible). We're now going to head down for dinner. Let me tell you that the mystery session is going to be on cyber-

security. What Nick is going to do is take some questions in advance through tweets, hashtag. Brussels forum is the place to send them, and people will be guiding you down to the dinner, and then tonight, we have night owl sessions, three terrific ones, after the dinner, and we look forward to seeing you there. Thank you again to the panel. It was terrific.