

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**DISCUSSION WITH
AMRE MOUSSA,
SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES**

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JON B. ALTERMAN: Good afternoon. My name is Jon Alterman. I'm the director of the Middle East Program at CSIS. And on behalf of CSIS, it's my pleasure to welcome you to hear the secretary general of the Arab League. Amre Moussa will be introduced by the executive vice president of CSIS, Robin Niblett.

ROBIN NIBLETT: Thank you very much, Jon. And it is my pleasure on behalf of CSIS and John Hamre, our president, to welcome you, Mr. Secretary General, here to CSIS. I think there couldn't be a more interesting time for you to be here.

As everyone here in this room knows, the town is abuzz with discussions of the future of the Middle East. Obviously with the release of the Iraq Study Group report yesterday, with a much broader discussion taking place, which you are very well aware of, of a comprehensive discussion about the problems in the Middle East, not simply taking each issue, whether it be Iraq or Arab-Israel individually, but trying to think about them in a comprehensive sense. And the press conference that took place earlier today between President Bush and Prime Minister Blair I think was indicative of that, that surge of the moment.

But obviously, it is a equally, while an exciting time, a very difficult and problematic time: deadlock, especially in the Arab-Israeli situation, in Lebanon, from an American perspective and maybe a European perspective, trying to understand the rise of what is called at least here the phenomenon of political Islam, and also a number of wider conflicts which seem to be spilling into this area, whether it be in Darfur, in Somalia, remarkably all of which come under your orbit and your aegis in your capacity, Secretary General.

And really I think all of us would agree there could be nobody better placed to be taking on these responsibilities right now than you. I think, as everyone here knows, Secretary General Moussa brings an incredible experience both from his time at the U.N. as Egypt's ambassador, as permanent representative to the U.N., 10 years as foreign secretary of Egypt, and now, since 2001, his position as secretary general at the League of Arab States.

I would like to welcome you again. I would like to welcome all of our guests here, in particular, our distinguished guests. The ambassadors are from Egypt, from Oman, from the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Lebanon, and obviously the League of Arab States as well.

Jon Alterman will be handling the question-and-answer session after the secretary general's remarks, but in the mean time, thank you very much for joining us; we look forward to hearing your comments.

AMRE MOUSSA: Thank you very much. I'm very happy to be here today in this very distinguished center, addressing this very distinguished audience. I'm also very

happy to be in Washington at this juncture, where a lot of issues pertaining to our region are being put on the table.

We are going through a very special, very delicate, very sensitive period of time, with our agenda full of measured priority items, the idea of the drive to reform the region, the debate about the so-called clash of civilizations, which is a euphemism for the clash of the conflict between the West and Islam. We have major security and political problems: Palestine, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iraqi situation, the situation in Lebanon, the Darfur question, the Somali situation, so it is an agenda that I would call a very major and sensitive one – especially when you come to discuss issues pertaining to the regional security and the nuclear file in the Middle East.

I know the time is limited, it's only one hour. I will speak for half of it, and you will ask me and I will give you answers to the other half. So let me say the following: the city is abuzz with comments on the Baker-Hamilton report, as the region of the Middle East is abuzz with questions about the situation in Iraq and the future of that important country, in addition of course to the situation in Palestine and what would happen if there will be no peace process for a long time to come.

We continue to consider the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a major obstacle to peace and stability in the region. But with the developments that we have followed in the last few weeks and days – we have a ceasefire in place; we have talks, and I don't think that the talks have failed to achieve national unity in Palestine. We have been told, informed by the leadership of Hamas and the current government that they agree to the establishment of a state of Palestine within the borders of 1967. We listened carefully also to what Prime Minister Olmert has said in the desert the other day about withdrawals, about the settlements, about the readiness to accept elements, or certain elements of the Arab initiative.

So there are offers here and there, some power shift, some do represent a serious departure from original positions. We should not let such signs fade away. We'll have to base our efforts now on such signs in order to rebuild the peace process that has been dormant, if not dead, for the last several years. It is our responsibility to revive the peace process, and it is essential; it is vital for stability in the region, for our interests, and the interests of all of those concerned with the region, including the United States.

At this time, we need a mechanism that will lead to the revival of a peace process, of a serious peace process as we need the return – we need the U.S. to return to the posture, to the role of the honest broker. We have been promised by President Bush that a Palestinian state, that a state of Palestine should be established within a certain period of time alongside the state of Israel, where we hope that before the president leaves office, the promise will be realized. And this cannot be without a viable, serious peace process to be moved now rather than tomorrow, to negotiate the questions of Jerusalem, of refugees, of withdrawal, of the future relations, and of Arab-Israeli relations in general. This is the time.

If you to move to Iraq, it is indeed a major step forward to have the Baker-Hamilton committee to issue such an important report; it is very interesting, full of very sound recommendations. I'm sure that the institutions here in the United States will consider it, will study the recommendations, and will try to move on because the situation in Iraq is really deteriorating and threatening. We do need to work together to save that situation.

I must say that all of us are facing problems. The Arab world cannot accept a state of confrontation, bloodshed being or prevailing in an Arab country, an important Arab country like Iraq. I'm sure the United States, as you know, is also facing a major problem in Iraq, and the Iraqis themselves, and the neighbors of Iraq. So we are all on the same side trying to solve the problem in Iraq, to deal with the situation in Iraq in a way that would prevent anarchy, and let the country move on to build the new Iraq. There is no going back, but there is always the way forward, and that is what we are trying to build. We talked about that today. We will continue to talk about it, to see what kind of steps the U.S. is willing to take, and what kind of steps we are going to take.

And for your information, only two days ago, I called a ministerial meeting for the committee on Iraq. And the decision was to call for a reconciliation conference, national reconciliation conference to convene in Iraq, in Baghdad within four months. This reconciliation is the case in point; this is the departure – the point of departure if we want Iraq to stand on its feet again.

The reconciliation process which was suggested, proposed, and executed by the Arab League culminated in a major conference attended by all of the Iraqi leadership in November 2005, and decided to have the conference, the national conference meeting, in Baghdad. This process is being revived today, together with the report of the Baker-Hamilton Commission, and together with the efforts deployed by the neighboring country, countries of Iraq.

Can we do the job? I hope we can. If we underline and mobilize all of our energies to support a process of real conciliation, that Iraq would be the country for all of its citizens, no partition to emphasize the oneness of Iraq, the territorial integrity of Iraq – and that Iraq is for all of its citizens regardless of religion, ethnic origin, or whatever. This is the essence of reconciliation. Is it possible? I say it is. Is it doable? I think it is, but it needs efforts. It might take time, but the bloodshed has to stop.

On Lebanon, Lebanon is an important country for us in the Middle East. And the situation prevailing in Lebanon is not a good omen for the region; not only for Lebanon, but for the region. I was there also last week in an effort to help bring together the different parties just to achieve reconciliation. I had meetings with all of the sides as the secretary general of the Arab League should do.

We cater to the interests of Lebanon the country, to Lebanon the state. I left a certain package for all parties to consider. I have reports that they are moving on, but also reports that tension has not yet subsided. So we will continue to consider this package, and then work on the regional-side of Lebanon to help solve the main situation, this problem in Lebanon. We hope that we will do that in the possibly remaining few weeks of this year and the beginning of the next, be it the issue of the tribunal, or the issue of the national unity government, or the issues pertaining to elections. All of them can be put on the table and negotiated and a middle ground or an acceptable solution would be achieved. We'll continue to help; we'll continue to do our job and fulfill our responsibility in helping that beautiful and important country in the Middle East.

While in this region, and before we go to another sub-region, which is Darfur, which is Sudan, I will say a few words about the nuclear file. It is a unanimous position now in the Arab world and in the Middle East that the nuclear file has to be seriously approached. A, the Middle East does not need any nuclear military program; B, we cannot deny the right of any country member of the NPT to develop its own civilian program, nuclear program; C, we will have to work together in order to discuss a proposal that has been there for 30 years now, over 30 years, about declaring the Middle East, all of it, free from nuclear weapons; D, that we cannot do that if we address one program and ignore another.

We will have to address the file from the standpoint of the Middle East and the dangers of having nuclear weapons in the Middle East regardless of whom. And this is not a question of the program in country A or country B, but if those two programs continue, there will be another program in country C and D. It cannot be a monopoly except if we all agree that we should abide by one rule: no nuclear military activities in the Middle East. It would cover the Mediterranean and many larger areas around the Middle East, in Asia and Europe, and also Africa because the zone free from nuclear weapons in the Middle East is closely linked to the consideration, the program that considers Africa a non-nuclear area.

I here call for dealing with this issue, with this file, as the nuclear file in the Middle East, not the nuclear file in one country; the nuclear file in the Middle East. And as I said before in other meetings, that when we address the programs in any country in the region, it is not because it is linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but because it is linked to the future of the Middle East, the future of security in the Middle East. That is what should be our concern and should not allow any country to have monopoly or to open the door for another and another and another program of the kind.

Having said that, I wish to say a few words about Darfur. A good part of my discussions today, my consultations today covered this issue of Darfur. We were in Addis Ababa only 10 days ago, and a summit was held in Abuja, Nigeria, to deal with that issue. And the negotiations that led to the Abuja program, Abuja peace program were held for two years with the continued presence of representatives of the U.N., African Union, and the Arab League.

I declared, and I again say here, that on Darfur, there is a joint African-Arab problem, African-Arab policy. There is no African policy and Arab policy, but there is one policy, African-Arab policy. The situation in Darfur was never a situation between Arabs and Africans or a problem between Arabs and Africans, but it was a chaos that was created and had to be dealt with by the government and all of us helping to readdress the situation there.

Now the discussions center around two points emanating from the Abuja agreement: One, the peacekeeping forces, what kind of peacekeeping operation; agreed that it should be African, under an African leadership, commander, an African commander, but in cooperation with the United Nations, what is called a joint initiative hybrid force. What kind of force, this is still under negotiations. What number, what is the best number of troops that is needed is also under consideration, but the rest has been agreed.

But this is not the issue; the issue is the other side of the Abuja agreement that called for a reconciliation conference among all Darfurians, a problem for development, money to be earmarked for certain projects, for compensation. This should go hand in hand. The political side, the economic side and the security side and that is what we agreed on in our talks here today and previously in Addis Ababa and Abuja. Is there a window of opportunity, as I say? Yes, this is window of opportunity in Darfur. I hope I am right. I think I'm right.

Now, before concluding, I have a lot to say about this so-called clash of civilizations. You can not continue to have a policy insensitive to the feelings of the Muslim nation, or to accuse them in general, as a whole of being extremist or being terrorist. Or to talk about a religion, that a religion calls for that because we can say the same about other religions. We can say the same about other people. And if today there is a feud, a confrontation, a bloody confrontation between two sects – Muslim sects, and so you see, are killing each other. They are right and this is bad thing. But we have seen that, too, in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants, which is a bad thing, too. So, those things happen. And we have to mobilize our forces in order to resist, to stop such extremist actions and also extremist philosophies, before actions have to be checked.

The time has come to recognize that the so-called clash of civilizations has a different name and, in reality, it is a problem between the U.S. and Islam, between the West and Islam. And the time has come, also, to recognize, that it is not a religious feud. It is a political problem, a political problem that has to be dealt with properly, as a political problem. What's behind that? It could involve the situation in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the Arab world. It could involve ideas of arch-conservative philosophies. It should involve them. We have to talk about that and be very frank about it because, otherwise, the confrontation will continue. It is not a just group that will be defeated or put into prison if we are talking about Islam as a whole.

And here, there is a window of opportunity because many people of wider perspectives and sane minds know that such a situation should not continue and that Muslim, Christians and even Jews should not be at odds and should not be preys, victims of those who foment hatred and tension among civilizations.

Finally, the question of reform: we in the Arab world know that the time is now, is even overdue. We have to link up with the 21st Century. We have to be part and parcel of that century. We have to be able to contribute to the progresses made by people in that century.

And the constitutional work has been done. I submitted a proposal to the Tunis summit – Arab summit – on the question of reform. Democracy, transparency, women's rights, human rights, education, development, et cetera and it was approved. And we are following that. And a thing that you don't know, that there is a progress report published every year about things that have been done in the implementation of this document by elections, by way of assessing the role of women, by way of transparency, by way of development or the reform of education. We are moving. Slowly, perhaps; it has to be much quicker, a quicker pace. But, the Middle East, and the Arab world in particular, is determined to move on and to live in the 21st Century.

Some would differ, but fine. There must be a debate. A national debate, national debates about that and then the consensus, or the majority, will decide the pace of progress and how to move on. And on this, I'm really optimistic. I'm not pessimistic at all. I believe that we are going to move.

If I look at the Arab countries, one by one, today, December '06, and get back December '05 or '04 or '03, there is a change. There is change. Not much, perhaps, not as quickly, not as fast as we want, perhaps, but you can not deny that the Arab world is moving.

I hope that we'll continue to move and on a quicker pace in order to achieve what we want to see our countries in the forefront of societies that are contributing to the building of a new international system, a new international order. This should not be done in the absence of the Arab nations, but is our responsibility to make our presence felt and our contribution accepted.

Thank you very much.

ALTERMAN: Thank you very much. Secretary-General Moussa has agreed to answer a few questions. If I could just impose four rules: one is that you wait for a microphone. Second is that you identify yourself. Third is that you ask only one question so everybody can ask a question. And the fourth is that you ask your question in the form of a question, by which I mean you actually have a question for the secretary-general, not a long statement followed by "What do you think?"

MOUSSA: And fifth, I do that sitting down.

ALTERMAN: Amen. Okay, right there. And please wait for a microphone.

You've been working, I've been sitting so we'll just switch.

Q: Muhammad, Nile News, Egypt Television. In today's press conference with Prime Minister Tony Blair, President Bush was very reluctant to adopt some of the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group with regard to a more engaged policy in the Middle East. Is that what you got? Is this your feeling? In your meeting today with Dr. Rice, did you get any impression that they are more intent now to have a more active role in the Middle East and the peace process?

MOUSSA: I can say that my feeling – I got the impression, the definite impression from a long discussion with Secretary Rice this afternoon that the Middle East deserves an action oriented policy when it comes to the peace process. And for Iraq, the report of Baker-Hamilton group will get serious consideration by the administration.

ALTERMAN: There's a question right here.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, so nice to see you. I saw you a couple of years ago and you still look great.

MOUSSA: Thank you.

ALTERMAN: Identify yourself, sir –

Q: My name is Walid Maaluf.

MOUSSA: He doesn't have to. He said the right thing.

(Laughter.)

Q: You know well that Syria has been the mother of all problems for Iraq and for Lebanon, especially if you have read today what Farouk Shara said in the Arab papers. Very clearly, he's interfering in these demonstrations to topple the Saniora government. Will the Arab League have the guts to kick Syria's Assad's out?

Thank you.

(Laughter.)

MOUSSA: You shouldn't say "had the guts" but "the responsibility to." No, an international organization, or regional organization, does not do that. It is not a job, but

it's our job to bring Syria and Lebanon to a position where they can cooperate and deal with many of the problems that you mentioned and like them.

And this is our job: not to let the situation deteriorate between two countries, neighboring countries, sisterly countries, members of the same organization. Then it is our responsibility to do something in order not to let the situation move to a larger or a more dangerous level. This is our responsibility, so this is my answer.

I haven't read the statement you are referring to. I was busy the whole day. I didn't even follow the press conference of the president and Mr. Blair, but I assure you that yes, indeed, we feel it is our responsibility. That's why I went to Lebanon. That's why I'll go to Damascus later on. And I'm working on that to the best of my ability.

ALTERMAN: Thank you.

Q: Barry Schweid, Associated Press. I had a Syria question for you, even before this one; a different one.

You spoke in terms of the need for a reconciliation conference in Iraq. Is it possible, is it advisable to go ahead without Syria? Could enough be accomplished without Syria's presence or, considering Syria's proximity, et cetera, they should make every effort to get Syria to go to the conference and to include them and to invite them?

MOUSSA: Yes, sir. I was talking about a national reconciliation conference; an Iraqi national conciliation conference.

Q: Oh.

MOUSSA: Under auspices of the Arab League or with the cooperation of the Arab League and its members. So, you can not exclude Syria or exclude another country being around in order to help. See, but this is not an international nor regional --it is a national, Iraqi national reconciliation.

ALTERMAN: There's a question here with the gentleman in the striped shirt.

Q: My name is Kani Xulam, I'm with the American Kurdish Information Network. You spoke of your hopes for the future and I want to visit the recent past. And I do so quote Nathaniel Hawthorne who says "Our past is a rough draft of our future."

After the invasion of Iraq, some of the top secret documents of the Ba'ath regime were seen by the world. One of them, they did December 10, 1999, spoke of the transfer of 18 Kurdish women to the brothels in Egypt. Of this hapless bunch, three were related: a mother and her two daughters aged 29, 14 and 13, respectively on the last day of their freedom. The relatives of these women have appealed to the first lady of Egypt to help them find their loved ones. So far, nothing has come of their effort.

Two questions: as a spokesperson for the Arab world, can you go on record to condemn this evil act? Two: can you use your good offices in locating these stolen women of Kurdistan?

MOUSSA: Well, look, my brother. To my way of thinking, there is no Kurdish Iraqi or Shi'a Iraqi or Sunni Iraqi; you are all Iraqis. And to my way of thinking, I do respect the Kurds, their culture, as a sister culture to the Arab culture. I have no difficulty whatsoever to recognize whatever is due to you as a Kurd.

If there is a crime, if there is something that happened as you said, of course it is to be condemned. Who can accept such a thing? But you are bringing an example of what happens in all societies. The problem is that what happened in Iraq, or what used to happen in Iraq, should not happen again. Iraq should be the Iraq of all its citizens, regardless of religion, of creed, or ethnic origin, of anything. And that's what we are trying to do. That's what we are trying to get out of a reconciliation conference, national conference, national conciliation conference. That's what we are trying to do.

I want you to know that I was arranging the role of the Arab literature in the world, attending the Frankfurt book fair. And the Arab book was the guest of honor. It was upon my insistence that Kurdish books would be also put among the Arab books. And, not only Kurdish, but even the Amazigh in North Africa, I called for their books to be put on the shelves. This is the general Arab culture that has to be wide enough, open enough, open minded enough to have all its derivatives, all its sisters together with it.

So I want you to rest assured that our future is the same and we are going to move together, not against each other and not to the exception of any group that lives in the Arab world.

ALTERMAN: Question right here. Microphone and name.

Q: My name is Nouredine Jebnoun. I am a professor from Georgetown University. Do we think that this administration has sufficient time to shift or to adjust its policy or strategy in Iraq? Thank you.

MOUSSA: Yes, indeed, I think the administration has enough time to adjust its policy in Iraq and reassess its policy in the Middle East, too. There's two years and everything has been put. It is there. The files are ready. And there are recommendations put on the table. So, yes, two years are quite enough. If you are asking me my opinion about the time factor, yes indeed, it is enough.

ALTERMAN: There's a question in the second row, right here.

Microphone, sir.

Q: Zaria Madid, Syrian TV and radio. The vice president of Syria, Mr. al-Shara, yesterday was addressing the different political parties in Syria and was telling them very firmly that Syria was ready and willing to open an embassy in Beirut and a consulate in every Lebanese city once those who are the warlords of Lebanon, the lords of the sectarian war and those who are bought by foreign powers would be more respectful of the relations between the two countries, enough for the two countries to open an embassy.

With your mission in Lebanon recently, did you find that the role of these people – previous warlords – are having a role that is being self-destructive to Lebanon, to the Lebanese people and to the relations between the two countries?

MOUSSA: First of all, thank you for the part of your question which was a statement just for us to know about that interview.

Second, the situation in Lebanon is tense and full of potential problems. Our task is to help the Lebanese move away from confrontation or conflagration. And, certainly, Syria, as a neighbor, should help.

And I met with the present president, Assad. That was last year when he told me that, yes, opening an embassy – a Syrian embassy – in Beirut is there, is on the agenda, which was confirmed, as you told me now, by Mr. al-Shara.

ALTERMAN: Thank you. Now the second row, right here.

Q: Elise Labott with CNN. Welcome back, Mr. Secretary-General. I'd like to pick up on my colleague's question about Syria. One of the most controversial aspects of this Baker-Hamilton was on the need to engage Iran and Syria. Now, the United States argues that if you look around the conflict in the Middle East – Lebanon, the Palestinian conflict and Iraq – that Syria, and to a larger extent, Iran, has their hand in meddling and instigating trouble in all of these conflicts.

What do you think of the United States' approach, that is has not engaged Syria. It seems as if, even though this report is recommending it, the U.S. is unlikely to engage these countries on playing more constructive role. Do you think that the isolation approach has worked, or that it's time for something new?

MOUSSA: From my standpoint, I believe this recommendation by Mr. Baker and Hamilton and their committee, is a sound recommendation. I find it is in the right direction, talking to all the neighbors of Iraq and all those concerned with the situation in Iraq, including Syria and Iran.

The policy to isolate any country doesn't work. They're all countries that have their own influence, big or small, far or near. So, when we need to solve a problem, you can not isolate countries, otherwise you will create another problem, an additional

problem and this applies to the Middle East question, where Syria is part of the equation. And you can not isolate it when it comes to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

ALTERMAN: Does this refer to Arab countries talking to Israel, as well?

MOUSSA: Through negotiations.

ALTERMAN: And should cease to isolate Israel?

MOUSSA: Through negotiations, of course, through negotiations. When you negotiate with somebody, you have to talk to him, don't you?

ALTERMAN: So you would advocate face to face negotiations with Israel?

MOUSSA: What I advocate is the resumption of the peace process for a certain period of time to achieve our goal in the nearest possible date, because the time is running out. Time is running out and the ingredients for a process of peace are there, including the cease fire, including the statements by both parties.

But we do want a process of peace that will continue for a year and two and three and five and again, the same vicious circle. It has to have a time frame. Especially that every little point, every small point, let alone the big issues, have more than one alternative already considered, already prepared. So we don't need to use much time or to waste much time.

ALTERMAN: A question right here: the lady in the lovely purple jacket.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, Hoda Al-Ahram newspaper.

MOUSSA: Who?

(Laughter.)

Q: In your discussion with Secretary Rice today, did you also get any impression that she's interested in a commitment or go through with the recommendation of the committee on the initiative on Middle East and what is your own assessment to the recommendation on the comprehensive peace in the Middle East and the meeting, like a Madrid conference between Syria and Israel and Lebanon and the rest of –

MOUSSA: Who else? No, no. Continue, tell me who?

(Laughter.)

Q: That's it. It's only four.

MOUSSA: Okay, thank you Hoda. This is the first day of the report, so I can not have, as you said, a commitment by the Secretary of State on any of the recommendations. We are talking generally.

Q: (Off mike.)

MOUSSA: Yes, so, and the impression is a positive impression. It is well received and, recommendation by recommendation, it will be considered by the administration. We hope that this recommendation, among others, would be also put into effect.

But it refers to another problem, which is the Arab-Israeli conflict which I was talking about and that it stands on its own feet. This is the real old problem – the Arab-Israeli conflict – that will decide, either way, where the Middle East will go. So, it is and it is known, it is agreed, it is accepted that we have to address this situation and as soon as we can, including the possibility of an international conference, as you said, the Madrid thing, or any other mechanism.

We shouldn't stick to one mechanism. I myself believe that we need an international conference, but others do not believe that. Others said, okay, why not a group under the quartet? Fine. If it is workable, do it, but the sooner the better and within a time frame. It can not be left for another 15 years, come and go and invoice (?) and pictures and tables. That's enough. This is finished. We want to move and move quickly, as quickly as we can on the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

ALTERMAN: The lady right there, right next to you.

Q: Sue Pleming from Reuters. Just to get back to the Syria-Iran issue, did you get the impression from Secretary Rice that she was interested in moving towards dealing directly with Syria and Iran, particularly in resolving the conflict in Iraq?

MOUSSA: I was thinking you were asking me to decline to answer, but I still think that all recommendations are under consideration by the administration and they can not say anything that would commit that administration at this stage, or anything -- (inaudible). But, we talked about almost each and every recommendation of the report.

ALTERMAN: That's 79 recommendations in 40 minutes.

MOUSSA: Yeah, see?

(Laughter.)

ALTERMAN: Right here.

Q: (Off mike.)

ALTERMAN: What? Where's your microphone?

(Laughter.)

Q: Christopher Adams. I'm an attorney –

MOUSSA: What?

Q: -- in Washington, D.C. Thank you for coming.

MOUSSA: Thank you.

Q: You mentioned Amazigh. I am an Amazigh. My question is about human rights in the Arab world. Morocco has scored big achievement in that field, concerning women's rights, especially the Mudawwana. My question is, to what extent – I know you mentioned women's right – but to what extent the Arab League is introducing the Moroccan experience or, at least, explaining it to their members, to its members?

MOUSSA: What experience, in what field?

Q: Women rights; Morocco has scored a big achievement in women rights, especially the Mudawwana. So my question is, to what extent the Arab League has a program about women rights, to what extent they are introducing the Mudawwana experience, the big – I mean, under the new leadership in Morocco – to what extent they are introducing it to their members, to its members? Thank you.

MOUSSA: I like your pronunciation of the Mudawwana. (Laughter.)

Yes, indeed. We are aware of this Mudawwana and it has been sent to us as a formal contribution by Morocco in the field of human rights, which, now, is very active in the Arab League. We are drafting the final version of a new charter for human rights – Arab charter for human rights – with the mechanism to receive complaints.

So, the experience, yes indeed, is a very good contribution. The Mudawwana, okay.

ALTERMAN: Right there. Right in the back, on the aisle.

Q: Good afternoon. My name is Leah Kuchinsky. I'm with the Monterrey Institute Center for Nonproliferation Studies.

I'd like to ask you a question about the announcements of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia recently about having more robust nuclear technology programs in their countries. Has there been discussion about these

announcements within the Arab League or discussion of wider coordination among these states or other Arab states in developing nuclear technology? And do you have concerns about how the international community will react to these developments, specifically given -- (inaudible)?

MOUSSA: I want you to know that those programs – I don't know whether all the countries you mentioned have already announced that, but some of them did. They are talking about peaceful nuclear programs; peaceful nuclear programs within the meaning of, within the confines of the treaty on non-proliferation and under the supervision of the International Atomic Agency.

So this is perfectly in order, perfectly in order. They are under international supervision, within a peaceful framework, and for the benefit of the people and the question of development and generating energy and on which all those societies need.

The problem is not this. The problem is nuclear military programs, producing bombs, producing nuclear weapons. This is the problem and none of the countries you mention is or has or has the intention to embark on such a program, see? There are only two countries – one of them known to have the program and one of them said to be trying to get a program. But the rest of countries are talking about peaceful programs, which is alright.

Q: Right. I appreciate that. Is there any discussion within the Arab League, though, about coordinating these peaceful nuclear programs?

MOUSSA: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. We are talking about that.

ALTERMAN: Okay. The lady right here in the turquoise, or is that slate?

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, welcome to D.C.

MOUSSA: Thank you.

Q: My name is Jihan Mansour from the Egyptian TV. And after three years in Iraq, we see the United States of America is leading towards the Arab countries to help in Iraq, not throwing the ball, as usual, to the United Nations. How do read this situation?

MOUSSA: Simply, I feel we have a problem with the Arab world. We have a problem with the situation in Iraq, exactly as the Americans, as the United States of America has a problem in Iraq. So, we have to do something. It's not advisable to play witness; just see what's going on.

Iraq is an Arab country and not only an Arab country to reckon with, it's a very important and basic Arab country that we can not let it go down the drain. So, we have a

responsibility as we have a problem. We have a problem and therefore we have a responsibility. This is the time to work together to save the situation in Iraq.

ALTERMAN: Question right there.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. In so many of the countries –

ALTERMAN: Identify yourself, please.

Q: Yes, excuse me. Haim Malka from CSIS. Thanks, Jon.

In so many of the crises –

(Laughter.)

ALTERMAN: He works with me, but you didn't all know that.

Q: I'll pause for applause, as well, after.

In so many of the crises in the countries that you mentioned – Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq – we find non-state actors are playing an increasingly influential role in shaping the course of political events. And I was wondering, in your mind, how do you see the role of an institution like the Arab League playing? What role does the Arab League play in a Middle East political environment that is increasingly shaped by non-state actors like Hamas and Hezbollah and other militias?

MOUSSA: The world is full of non-state actors nowadays: the civil society, the NGO's and the organizations you mentioned and others. They are all playing a role in the new international situation. Years back, it was only states but, as you know, societies like this one, the American society, Western societies do push, support, the NGO's to play their role. This is a non-state actor, right?

Things have gone, perhaps, out of control with other organizations are bent to use force or choose violence. This is our responsibility; all of us – states and organizations – to deal with them. But at the same time, to deal with the reasons behind why are they so violent? To deal with the reasons behind that wave of violence or philosophy of violence or philosophy of provocation or philosophy that advocates theories of superiority. All things have to be put together.

Yes, indeed. We have to deal with issues pertaining to the non-state actors, especially the negative performers of some of them. So, the Arab League, like the United Nations, like the European Union, will do whatever we can, but in doing whatever we can, we have also to contribute to dealing with the reasons behind the feeling of frustration and anger that helped such organizations perform as you say.

ALTERMAN: There's a lady right on the aisle there, in the black.

Q: Olivia Qusaibaty from NHK. I just want to –

MOUSSA: What's NHK?

ALTERMAN: Japanese Television.

Q: Japan Broadcasting Corporation.

ALTERMAN: Japanese Television.

MOUSSA: Okay.

Q: The Iraq Study Group, as every knows, calls for a greater cooperation of Iraq's neighbors. How do you envision the role of the Arab League and Egypt as brokers between the United States and these powers, especially Syria?

And – thank you.

MOUSSA: Well, I don't think that Egypt is just a broker between the United States and whoever, but Egypt is a major country in the region, and it has the responsibility to push forward a peaceful policy, or to work for stability in the region. As for the Arab League, we are doing the same; we are not just agents here or there. We have a basic interest in achieving a peace, a fair peace and stability, which requires dealing with the situation in Iraq along the lines we were discussing, the situation in Palestine and the Middle East to be – the situation in the Middle East, as we were talking, and other problems, too. It is not the question on how to broker this.

You know, the broker – who is the broker, and the honest broker, honest broker, and will produce something – is the United States because it is not a Middle-Eastern country; it is a superpower. What we need from the United States is an honest brokering; that is what we need. And that would succeed – only this would succeed.

ALTERMAN: Thank you. The gentleman on the aisle has been very patient.

MOUSSA: Yes, indeed.

Q: (Inaudible) – Middle East news agency of Egypt. We welcome you in Washington. And I have three quick shots. First, you declared in the week of the Israel war in Lebanon that the peace process is dead, and a roadmap is no longer a mechanism. New story insist on that. Have you changed your mind?

Second –

MOUSSA: Wait, wait. Let me answer this one. Yes, yes, it's still dead, but there are prospects to revive it because when I said that the peace process is dead, at the same press conference and the same sentence, I said we are going to the United Nations to try to revive it. You see? So, yes, indeed, there is no peace process, but our job is to bring back the peace to track, and we don't need a peace process that stays 15 years as the one – (inaudible) – reasonably short time, and while the administration is still in office.

Q: Did the U.N. respond positively to your request?

MOUSSA: That is the second question. (Laughter.)

ALTERMAN: You only get one question; you're trying to get four.

Q: I'll take the second one. On Darfur, you said there is an Arab-African program that is going on to settle the issue in Darfur.

MOUSSA: Yes.

Q: Do you mean that the U.S. posing an obstacle and it must keep one side?

MOUSSA: Why? Why does – I don't see the logical –

Q: Because you said that it's an Arab-

MOUSSA: Arab-African policy. We have a unified policy to deal with the question of Darfur when it comes to consolation or peacekeeping forces, or development on a policy. This does not exclude the roles of others. But insofar as we are concerned and they are concerned, we have one policy. At the beginning, if you remember, there was an accusation that this situation, what is going on – what was going on in Darfur was Arab troops or Arab tribes against African tribes. We chose totally false among the – so many disinformation, misinformation that were circulating at that time. So we decided immediately to cut this short. We met formally; we met formally, the AU and the Arab League, and they adopted one policy.

So that doesn't mean we don't need the United Nations, for example. No, it is not sidelining the United Nations; it has to play a role there. And also, others would use their good offices to help.

Q: Okay, the third one is on Somalia.

ALTERMAN: Somalia doesn't – (inaudible) – because we have a whole bunch of other people who haven't asked a single question.

Q: Okay, thank you.

ALTERMAN: Thank you very much. There is a gentleman here who has been very patient on the second row.

MOUSSA: You got two.

Q: Thank you very much. My name is Harlid Mosa, Embassy of Sudan. Thank you very much, excellency for your personal and institutional constructive role in solving the Darfur problem. Have you got any assurances from your consultation with the secretary today that the Americans fully support the outcome of Abuja conference?

And, number two is, there is a mounting concern among the AU about the pledges of the Arab League that has not materialized yet. Thank you.

MOUSSA: Again, what's the second part?

Q: The pledges of the Arab League, the funding of the Arab League –

MOUSSA: Ah, yes.

Q: -- to the AU has not materialized yet.

MOUSSA: Yeah, thank you.

Q: Thank you.

MOUSSA: Yes, on the first point, I can say that the Abuja peace agreement is supported by all of us, including the U.S. This is my impression of the talks which you are asking me about. Yes, indeed, they are.

As for the Arab contribution, we are working on that and money is now coming. It's a bit late but we worked on that, of course. Thank you for asking this question.

ALTERMAN: Can we take two more questions, maybe?

MOUSSA: Two more? Okay, fine.

ALTERMAN: Do you have the stamina? Okay, the gentleman there in the blue shirt and then the woman in the green will get the last question.

MOUSSA: This will have an extra pay, you know; two questions.

(Laughter.)

ALTERMAN: It might be late in coming.

(Laughter.)

Q: Dan DeLuce, the AFP. Are you concerned at all that there is a possibility of a U.S. tilt towards the Shi'a community in Iraq, that out of frustration or desperation that somehow U.S. policies may be abandoning efforts to include the Sunni community in Iraq?

MOUSSA: What we are working for is the conciliation that would include the Shi'a, the Sunni, the Kurds and all others. Again, I have to reiterate, that the sound position, a sound policy would be to not to fall into the trap of encouraging sectarian strife or animosity. It's not a question of Shi'a or Sunni. The Shi'a or any – as the prime minister, current prime minister – they are all working towards putting an end to this chaos in Iraq.

An Iraqi drive by Shi'a or by Sunni or by Kurds or by whoever is what we need, but you won't find here, in the Arab League, any position against Shi'a or against Sunni. We are for Iraq; Iraq alone with all its people regardless of their faith, regardless of their creed, regardless of their ethnic origin.

Again I say, that if we want Iraq to return to health and stability, we would have to put aside, to resist any sectarian conflict or confrontation or competition or plans to sidestep others. There is no difference – and I'm really sorry, very sorry, that this question of Shi'a and Sunni came to the fore and now everybody's asking us about Shi'a and about Sunni. Those who allowed this to happen, allowed such a question to come to the fore, have committed a major mistake against Iraq and stability in that region.

ALTERMAN: The last question: the lady in the green, all the way in the back.

Q: Thanks, I'm Michelle Kellerman with National Public Radio. I want to go back just quickly on Darfur.

The Bush administration earlier this year was basically saying, we want UN troops in Sudan, or else. And I wonder if the Bush administration is asking you to put any pressure on Sudan to give the UN a larger role in peacekeeping in Darfur? And then, if I can ask more broadly, also, you have conflict in Darfur, CAR, Chad, Somalia. How worried are you? How worried is the Arab League about this sort of arc of violence across Africa and what can you do about it?

MOUSSA: Well, if you call it an arc of violence, it is very worrying, I must say, so I hope that the term is not really accurately interpreting the situation or describing the situation.

The question of international forces has been considered by the AU, UN and us, including the U.S., Britain and the five permanent members in general. And we agreed

that the forces should be predominantly African. This is the consensus of Addis Ababa on, I believe, the fifth of this month – of the 28th of last month.

This is the consensus. It is a force, a peacekeeping force, predominantly African and under African command, but with the contribution of the United Nations personnel on certain logistical and other issues that are necessary for the force to be robust and work. So this is the situation. There is no difference of that.

Is there any other question that I have not answered?

ALTERMAN: It's a remarkable breadth. Elise, do you want to come in at the very end?

Q: (Off mike.)

ALTERMAN: Because Elise is from CNN she gets –

MOUSSA: That is a special privilege given to the CNN. Okay.

ALTERMAN: Can you give her a microphone?

Q: Very shortly, you've said numerous times that the United States, only the United States –

MOUSSA: As an honest broker.

Q: -- it needs to get back to being an honest broker.

MOUSSA: Yes.

Q: But, during the war in Lebanon over the summer, during the Palestinian conflict – I can't quote you exact times that you've said this but, I know many leaders in the region have suggested, at least, that the United States has lost its hand –

MOUSSA: Has lost what?

Q: -- lost its role as the honest broker and that its image in the region just isn't what it used to be and it's time for other brokers in the region, maybe, to join the United States, that it can't play that special role that it has all these years. Has it changed or can the U.S. get back to the kind of super-über-broker that it used to be? Thanks.

ALTERMAN: Is that the technical term, über-broker?

MOUSSA: What's this über?

ALTERMAN: “Over” in German.

MOUSSA: “Über” in German, yes. I hope it’s not über alles.

ALTERMAN: It’s not.

MOUSSA: So what was the question?

(Laughter.)

ALTERMAN: Can the U.S. still play the role that people call on the U.S. to play as the broker, or has the U.S. lost the capacity to play that role?

MOUSSA: I must say that, yes indeed, at a certain stage, it lost that capacity, but, still, an honest broker role is open for the United States and only the U.S. can do that. That’s why we hope that the honest broker role will be resumed by the United States. And I believe the intention is there. The capacity is there. The situation calls for that.

Okay? Thank you.

ALTERMAN: I want to thank you all for coming. I want to thank the secretary-general, not only for taking time out of a very busy day, but showing remarkable breadth. Thank you.

(END)