

Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood's Global Affiliates:  
A New U.S. Administration Considers New Policies

*Opening Remarks by Clifford D. May and  
Keynote Discussion with Dr. Robert Gates,*

*Moderated by Jenna Lee*

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MAY: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to our conference on: “Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood’s Global Affiliates: A New U.S. Administration Considers New Policies.”

My name is Clifford May. I’m the founder and president of FDD. We are pleased to co-sponsor today’s event.

I just want to reflect for a moment. I know we’re all thinking about what happened in Manchester last night. It was not a tragedy. It was an atrocity. Let’s be very clear about that. These were young people, children, really, at a concert. In a claim of responsibility this morning, ISIS said it was a gathering of crusaders.

For 15 years, we at FDD have tried to understand and help defeat the ideologies that drive terrorism and justify terrorism, the movements, the state actors, the non-state actors that are responsible for this. I think we still have a very long way to go.

Today’s discussions are timely for another reason: Just a few weeks ago, Hamas – a Muslim Brotherhood affiliate designated as a terrorist organization by, among others, the U.S., Britain and the EU – hosted a press conference in Doha, the capital of Qatar, to unveil what it called a “Document of General Principles and Policies.”

Many applauded Hamas for its newfound “moderation.” My colleagues at FDD, by contrast, translated the document, analyzed the document, and since then have been attempting to make clear that this was not a new Charter, it was not a revision of the existing Charter, and it does not represent a turn towards anything vaguely resembling moderation.

Instead, it demands Palestinian control of all the land in present-day Israel and advocates “all forms of resistance,” a familiar Hamas euphemism for terrorism.

Qatar hosts Hamas and helps support it, as it does other Muslim Brotherhood organizations throughout the Middle East.

Financiers of al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups “operate openly and notoriously” in Qatar, as the former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Department for Terrorist Financing publicly confirmed at an FDD event in February.

Islamists such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi have been routinely featured on al Jazeera, which is a state-funded and state-owned television network. Last month, Qatar broke a

pledge to keep a noted hate preacher off its state television channel, Qatar TV, on the same day that Secretary of Defense James Mattis was visiting Doha. That hate preacher had previously declared on Qatari TV, from Qatar's state-controlled Grand Mosque, that God should "destroy"—his word—"the Jews", "the Christians," "the Alawites," and "the Shiites."

But, at the same time, Qatar hosts the largest American military base in the Middle East. So it's complicated. I am confident that today's conference will help bring some clarity.

As we've crafted today's agenda, it's become clear that there are those who would prefer we not discuss Qatar's activities. A verifiable chorus has attempted to influence today's speakers.

But we believe that an open and honest discussion of Qatar's activities – some of them nefarious, some of them illicit – is not only healthy, but vital to U.S. interests and, ultimately, to the America-Qatari relationship.

As for the Muslim Brotherhood it is not a force for moderation, it does not stand for freedom or democracy, but it also is not necessarily a homogenous movement that qualifies for a blanket FTO – designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

We want to explore this question today as well.

We've included speakers with a range of viewpoints and backgrounds because we at FDD believe in spirited debate. We think such debate is edifying in a way that simple speech-making is not.

We think that in Washington and across the country these days—not least on our campuses—there is too much yelling, too many people turning backs and showing middle fingers and not nearly enough rational discussion and argumentation.

Now is the moment to restore civil discourse because we have a new administration that is considering and will be implementing new policies.

I want to take a moment to thank our co-sponsors, the Hudson Institute and George Washington University's Center for Cyber and Homeland Security. We are grateful to have you as colleagues and partners.

I also would like to greet and acknowledge our distinguished audience of foreign policy and national security professionals.

We are privileged to have with us current and former ambassadors, as well as representatives from the departments of Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, State, and Treasury, and staff from key Congressional committees and offices.

We're pleased to welcome members of FDD's National Security Network, the next generation of national security practitioners, as well as members of the Board of Advisors for our Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance. We also welcome the many members of the press, domestic and international alike, who have joined us here today.

And of course, our heartfelt thanks to FDD's valued friends and supporters, without whom none of our work would be possible.

It is now my privilege, and my pleasure, and my honor to introduce Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

Mr. Gates served for 26 years in the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council. He was Director of Central Intelligence under President George H. W. Bush. He served under 8 presidents.

After leaving the CIA, Gates became president of Texas A&M University.

He was nominated by President George W. Bush as Secretary of Defense after the 2006 election and was confirmed with strong bipartisan support.

He is a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest award.

And he has written "Duty," a marvelous memoir of his service which I heartily commend to you.

Secretary Gates, it's an honor and privilege to have you with us this morning. We thank you for your service, your leadership, and your commitment to America and to American ideals.

Secretary Gates will be interviewed today by Jenna Lee.

We are pleased to have her from New York where she is, as I'm sure you know an anchor on Fox News Channel's Happening Now. At Fox News, she has provided live coverage of the violent protests in Cairo, Egypt following the removal of President Mohamed Morsi, and has contributed to coverage of major stories, including the Boston Marathon bombing and the death of Osama bin Laden.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please welcome Secretary Robert Gates and Jenna Lee.

LEE: Good morning. Dr. Gates and I were just speaking in the back about his first official retirement that happened 25 years ago.

(LAUGHTER)

Is that right?

GATES: I'm pretty much a serial failure at it.

(LAUGHTER)

LEE: How is retirement serving you?

GATES: Well, this was actually an occasion by the fact that people are always coming up to me and saying well, do you know so-and-so at CIA? And I have to look at them and I say, you have to realize that when I retired, they were probably in grammar school.

(LAUGHTER)

So, age does matter.

LEE: Well, a remarkable 50 years in service. And we thank you for your time today, and we appreciate the time in front of this great crowd as well.

To echo Cliff's remarks, this is definitely a period that's high in emotion but short sometimes on time to really dig into the issues. So, you'll find that a lot of the questions that I have for Dr. Gates today will be simple. And hopefully, we just have the opportunity to listen.

Let's just start with some of the news that has transpired over the last 24 hours. Just before we came out here, as Cliff also mentioned, ISIS is claiming responsibility for what appears to be a terrorist attack in Manchester. What's your reaction to that news?

GATES: Well, I think, first of all, his characterization that it was an atrocity as opposed to a tragedy is absolutely on the mark. And I think the speed with which ISIS took credit – there are people more expert in the audience on this than I am – but I think the speed with which they took credit lends credibility to their being responsible for it.

And whether they planned it, whether they encouraged a self-radicalized person or group to do it is kind of immaterial as long as they were the spark if you will. And I think it's just a – I think it's a continuing reminder that as the forces close in on Raqqa and on Mosul, winning those cities back has very little to do – I mean, it is a defeat for ISIS, there's no question about it. And not – Taking away from them the caliphate and all that that represented in terms of messaging, the Muslim world, and so on, I think is obviously a huge victory.

But I think it would be a mistake to think that this represents the defeat of ISIS itself. I think you will – just as we have seen al-Qaeda metastasize subsequent to the killing of Osama bin Laden back in 2011, to Africa and North Africa, and elsewhere in the Middle East, I think you will see ISIS become more active and more aggressive in a

variety of places in the West having lost the caliphate and these cities like Raqqa and Mosul.

And I think sadly, Manchester may be a harbinger of more such activities in the West as they – as it basically – as people leave, scurry away from those sites. And that doesn't mean they're defeated individually or that they've lost their commitment to attacking the crusaders, or whatever they want to call them, it just means they'll change their tactics.

LEE: So, the question then becomes how do we better protect ourselves? The Pentagon announced just last week that part of their strategy inside Syria is to not allow the diaspora that you just mentioned, to surround all the terrorists that are there and kill them. What do you think of that strategy? And if diaspora is going to happen, what do we do to prevent other events like Manchester?

GATES: Well, you know, I mean, I think that that's a logical strategy, but when you have the magnitude of the refugee flows that you have coming out of Mosul, coming out of Syria and so on, I think the ability to identify ISIS terrorists in the midst of those refugees is going to be incredibly difficult. I don't know how you do that.

LEE: How do you think we should?

GATES: Well, I think, you know, I suppose there could be a some kind of a vetting process, particularly borders and so on. But I mean, these refugees are not going necessarily to regular border crossings, and, you know, they're not picking up a ticket and going someplace. They're fleeing and trying to seek shelter, or seeking out family members or whatever.

I think until you can get them to a given place where they can be vetted, it's going to be very difficult to separate members of ISIS who are fleeing from regular refugees. And my guess is that a substantial number of them have already fled.

LEE: A lot of questions there. Let me just ask you about another news item of the day.

We just found out overnight about a raid that happened in Yemen to target al-Qaeda there. Just switching terror groups for a moment, part of this raid included numerous air strikes, not just by UAVs, but jets and via helicopters as well.

And under the new administration, there's already been 80 air strikes or drone strikes in that country, which far surpasses the level of air strikes during the previous administration by year. And here we are, we're only in May.

What do you think about that strategy in Yemen?

GATES: Well, I think Yemen has, in many ways, become a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. And I think first of all, it's important for those in the region to know who our friends are, and to support them.

I think that, you know, when I first joined the agency, there were two Yemens. And the Soviets basically controlled one, and the West controlled the other more or less. And then we had the unification.

But it's a very complicated country. And frankly, I think that it is important that we demonstrate to our allies in the region that we will support them. And so, I think the idea of greater flexibility of our operations is important.

I mean, I wrote in "Duty" about the frustration I felt with the interminable micromanagement of military operations by the White House. And so, you know, it seems to me that the way it ought to work is that the president decides what the objective is, the mission.

The military tells the president the strategy that they intend to use to accomplish the mission. And the broad parameters of what it'll take to accomplish that mission, and if the president approves that, then the military ought to be allowed to go do the mission.

That's basically the way it worked in the first Gulf War. President – the first President Bush basically was hands off. And I would say that so was the second President Bush when he said, you know, go do the surge. I told him it'd be three brigades and it would be 20,000 people. Then the military came back and said oh, by the way, we forgot to tell you there are all these things called enablers like helicopters and stuff like that.

So, I went back to the president. I said, Mr. President, it's going to be 30,000 not 20,000. Then he said if that's what it takes. And we just – and so, we did it.

And I can't tell you the hundreds of hours that I spent, and thousands of hours that the joint staff spent managing numbers and specific questions from the White House that got down to the level of moving helicopters, and this, that, and the other thing in the Obama administration, and it was very frustrating. And my successors wrote about the same problem.

LEE: Who are ...?

GATES: So the bottom line is, if the president has decided that we should help the Saudis in Yemen, then I think the greater freedom and flexibility for our forces to actually do that and accomplish the mission is the right way to go.

LEE: And according to the initial reports, at least our team at the Pentagon by Fox News, apparently that is the framework that was provided for this mission. Interesting that you mention that.

Who our friends are and how we define allies is one of the topics of today's conversation in relation to a few different topics. And we're going to be talking about the Muslim Brotherhood. We're going to be talking a little bit about Qatar.

And I'd like to start with the Muslim Brotherhood because that's been the topic of a lot of conversation over the last several weeks, and in light as well of the president's trip to the Middle East. Is the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization?

GATES: Let me put it this way. Because these things first of all have legal ramifications and legal definitions, and then there's the political definition.

So, I think that – you know, I think – I think of the Muslim Brotherhood in the context of science fiction shape shifters.

(LAUGHTER)

They will look like whatever they think that you want them to look like. And so, before the events of the Arab Spring, and in the early stages of the Arab Spring in Cairo, the Muslim Brotherhood was at pains to say – to basically portray themselves as moderates. We will have an open democratic process, we will be a part of the regular democratic process here in Egypt, and so on and so forth until the day they assume power.

And the day they assumed power, it became quite clear that Mohamed Morsi intended to become a dictator, an authoritarian. And the Muslim Brotherhood would establish an authoritarian government in Egypt. And it didn't take very long until they also changed the constitution to embrace Sharia Law.

So, the one time we have seen the Muslim Brotherhood actually come to power, it put the lie to all of their claims about being a moderate force that was accepting of democratic norms, if you will.

Now, the other aspect of it is Hamas is a direct offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Muslim Brotherhood is generally regarded as the ideological forerunner of both al-Qaeda and ISIS, Daesh.

And so, it seems to me by and large, going back to the old saying, if it looks like a duck and it walks like a duck, maybe it's a duck.

LEE: Do you think then that the Muslim Brotherhood should be designated a terrorist organization?

GATES: I think that that's one of the things that this conference ought to look at because I think there are some geographical and generational differences within the Muslim Brotherhood. I think it would be a mistake to see it as a solid block if you will.

And so, I think part of what a conference of experts like this really ought to do is begin to pull that apart and say no matter what they call themselves, and no matter what their age, and no matter where they're located, they are either directly or indirectly supporting terrorism, and then designate those that where that can be shown, or whether you designate the whole movement. I honestly don't know the answer to that question.

LEE: And getting back to your first point, if it walks like a duck, talks like a duck, then it is a duck, then is there a risk to becoming too academic in your analysis of the group?

GATES: Yeah.

(LAUGHTER)

Just like I think we've gotten a little too academic in trying to figure out the words used to describe these guys who carry out these atrocities. I think...

LEE: Why are we still there, by the way? Why are we still debating some of the terminology?

GATES: Well, I think President Bush and President Obama were very sensitive about being misinterpreted as condemning Islam in general. If you use the words radical Islamic extremist, or jihadist, or whatever.

I think that – I think – frankly, I thought that the way the president put it in his remarks in Riyadh was pretty good in terms of, you know, let's forget all of the academic details. This is good versus evil, and you know who these people are, and drive them out.

They're not – they shouldn't be a part of your societies. One of the things that I liked about the speech was the onus that it put on Islamic governments of Islamic countries, or predominantly Islamic countries, the onus on them to act against these groups. That it's not just the United States who's going to come and try and get rid of these people, but they need to take steps internally and be more aggressive in terms of rooting these people out and getting rid of them one way or another.

LEE: Were you surprised by how much you liked the speech?

GATES: Well, I think it was – it clearly set us on a different, and in my view, better path than President Obama's Cairo speech, which basically sort of took – put the responsibility on the United States for things that had gone wrong. Where I thought that this president's speech really was pretty direct in putting the responsibility on the governments of all those countries that were represented there.

LEE: Does it make you want to go back to work?

GATES: No.

(LAUGHTER)

LEE: Just curious. In order to counter the ideology that's perpetuated by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, you have to have an understanding I'm told about their long-term goals. What are the long-term goals as you understand it of the Muslim Brotherhood?

GATES: Well, I don't think that – I mean, I'm no expert – but it seems to me that the goals have not changed since the brotherhood was founded in what 1928. And that is to reestablish the caliphate and impose Sharia Law, period.

That's not what I would call a modest set of goals.

(LAUGHTER)

LEE: And in that set of goals, where do you see the Muslim Brotherhood at this time wielding the most power to achieve the goals as you map them out?

GATES: Well, not in Egypt anymore. I think that – you know, I mean, let's face it. In terms of the context of this conference, Qatar has long been a – has long had the welcome mat out for the Muslim Brotherhood.

And I can't think of other countries in the region where that welcome mat continues to be in place in the same way. And, while they may from time to time and usually under great pressure from their neighbors, expel some leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, I think that there is a long history of Qatar welcoming the Muslim Brotherhood and for all practical purposes allowing them a safe haven.

LEE: Just curious, we're going to talk about Qatar in just a moment, I'm just curious if you could do a quick assessment for us about how effective you think government, our government is, specifically countering the Muslim Brotherhood growth and ideology? One of the reasons why I'm asking this is that the -- the panel we have upcoming, Jonathan Schanzer of FDD is going to be speaking on it. And he along with others has talked about what we just discussed which was dividing perhaps the Muslim Brotherhood into different groups, designating some of them as terrorist organizations and not others, and by that designation allowing our government a certain amount of power to counter that particular branch. So how effective is our government, if you could give us a report on what you've seen in doing that? Is that the right path?

GATES: Yes. By the way, I meant, before I answered my first question to offer my thanks to FDD and the Hudson Institute and the G.W. University for sponsoring this conference. I'm really happy to be here. Well I think, first of all, I've got to be honest about the fact that I've now been out of government for almost six years, and I don't have any access to intelligence information. So what you're hearing are my reflections on

what I read and what I hear but no access to any kind of special information. I think that the United States, based on my experience, has not much ever targeted the Muslim Brotherhood per se.

I think we target terrorist organizations. We target terrorist networks and so on, but I think that potentially one benefit of this conference is if you can do what you just described the next panel is going to do, which is, are there chapters, if you will, of the Muslim Brotherhood that we can show are involved in sponsoring terrorist activity, in one way or another, directly or indirectly, and designate them, then you have the basis on which to act against them.

But I don't have the sense and certainly not when I was in government, up through 2011, did I ever have the sense that intelligence agencies and others, ours or others were necessarily, at least in the West, going after the Muslim Brotherhood in and of itself.

LEE: So should we be concerned about that?

GATES: So it's been -- so it's been, I think, if you will a neglected target.

LEE: A neglected target. OK. Let's talk a little bit about Qatar, because one of the, as you mentioned, one of the --

GATES: -- and I would just add, I think, one of the things that also needs to be explored, is given its relationship with Hamas and some of these other organizations, I'm not sure, at least I don't remember from any briefings I got when I was in government. I'm not sure we've investigated potential financial channeling from using Muslim Brotherhood resources, not just money, but their networks to channel money to terrorist groups. And I think if that's not already being done, that's a potentially lucrative intelligence target.

LEE: But to your knowledge, based on your experience, it hadn't been done while you were --

GATES: I don't remember it being done.

LEE: You don't remember it being done. Speaking on Hamas, speaking about the Muslim Brotherhood, the tie in there to Qatar is the funding, which you were just talking about. The funding and also the platform that's given to these particular groups. Again, looking back on your 50 years of service, what's been your experience with the nation of Qatar?

GATES: Well I would say when I -- I didn't have much -- we weren't much involved with Qatar when I was at CIA, but obviously, very much so when I became Secretary of Defense. And I must say, when I joined the Bush Administration at the end of 2006, the relationship between the United States and Qatar was very poor. And, in

fact, no senior American official had been to Qatar in quite some time and there were a variety of reasons.

First was Qatar's perceived support of our adversaries. General Abizaid was convinced that Al Jazeera was working against our troops and actually providing information to our enemies. There was concern about -- broader concern about Al Jazeera providing a platform for terrorists for the most militant kinds of people to use it as a platform. They would glorify the killing of American troops.

They would describe Palestinians who killed Jewish settlers as martyrs, and they were funding groups that we regarded as problematic. So there were a lot of issues associated with Qatar. And the neighbors considered Qatar really a pariah because they believed that Qatar's policies and Al Jazeera were fomenting instability in the region. And, I asked -- persuaded Secretary Rice and President Bush to allow me to go to Qatar. We obviously had this huge base at Al Udeid and said, you know, I know the Emir, because as President of Texas A&M I had agreed to put an engineering school at education city in Doha.

So they agreed and I went and I met one on one with the Emir and I had a long list of the issues that had troubled the Bush Administration. I said, we can't get this relationship back on an even keel until you begin to deal with some of these issues. And I have to confess that there was a good deal of nodding and explanation but we didn't see much change. And so, we have had this peculiar relationship in which there have continued to be political issues with the government of Qatar. Even as we have been strategic military allies and they have, not only invested a lot of money in Al Udeid, but given us a lot of freedom of action for operations. That said, you know my attitude toward Al Udeid and a variety of facilities that we have in other countries is the United States military doesn't have any irreplaceable facilities.

And so, you know, the Qatari had signed -- had just signed on to this GCC Accord with President Trump in the last couple of days to go after financial networks supporting terrorism and so on and so forth. They also signed the Jeddah Communique in 2014, agreeing to do exactly the same thing. So, I guess the place where I have a problem with them is, when we go to them, as I understand it. If we go to them and say these accounts are run by Hamas for fundraising, shut them down. They'll shut them down. If we say we want this guy out, they'll put that guy out. But, I don't know of instances in which they take the initiative, in which they aggressively go after these networks, do the investigative work themselves, identify people on their own that are involved in these networks. Figure out exactly what the Muslim Brotherhood is doing from there, exactly what the Taliban are doing from there, and so on, on their own.

And I think the thing that needs to change is, given the fact that our intelligence is always imperfect is to go from, sort of, responding minimally to our requests when we put something on the table, which they have done, is for them to pick up the ball and to be as aggressive as some of their neighbors have been. Look, a lot of countries in that region, from time to time, have played both side of the street, let's be honest. But once

they've been attacked themselves, or once they see the danger, they have become aggressive and unambiguous in their willingness to take on the terrorism problem, and I think that's what we need to expect from Qatar. And it would be nice to have it happen before Qatar itself is attacked.

LEE: Interesting. Let's go back to the issue of the base that we have there. You just said that there's nothing that's irreplaceable and that's been on the table about whether or not the United States should consider moving that base as part of leverage to get more from Qatar when it comes to the war on terror. Do you think that's something that this kind of administration should take up with Qatar and consider moving that base, based on our relationship?

GATES: Well, I think, frankly, the outcome of this conference and some of the conclusions that you come to provide an opportunity to begin that discussion within the U.S. government. I don't think anybody should underestimate how complicated that would be. Like I said, it's not just the facility, it's the freedom of operation. Qatar's the only country in the region that allows us to land B-52s and put B-52s at the air base at Al Udeid. We have run operations out of there for a dozen years. So, transitioning away from there would be expensive and it would be very complicated operationally. And you run the risk, if you say, OK, we're going to shut down part of Al Udeid. You run the risk the Qatari government basically says, OK, then why don't you just get the hell out altogether and then what do we do, because it will take time to build any alternative facilities.

So it is a complicated matter. But it seems to me there are ways to signal that our patience is coming to an end by first, not adding any additional capability to the air field, or the base there, and then, perhaps beginning to move some elements away from the base. So there are some things you could do, but I just don't think anybody should underestimate how complicated it will be.

LEE: And in the meantime, the groups that we are bombing using that air base, whether it's Al-Nusra front, whether we're targeting Hamas. In fact, the Wall Street Journal, there was an op-ed piece that put it best this way. I'm just going to read this line. This op-ed was just from a few weeks ago. "The host nation, meaning Qatar, supports some of the groups the base is used to bomb." So, is it worth waiting, more time, given the complexities while we do have men and women of the military that are on the ground confronting this enemy face to face? We know that we're using an air base that again is targeting groups that the host country is supporting.

GATES: Yes. Well if the answer was a black and white answer, we'd probably have done something by now.

(CROSSTALK)

LEE: Do you think we should start at –

GATES: What I'm saying –

LEE: – you mentioned at the beginning, do you think it's worth it, even now, you said these are some things we can start to do. Should we, all things considered, do those things now? Should this something we do in 2017?

GATES: It seems to me that the first place to start would be for the president to send somebody to Qatar, following on his trip, perhaps following on this conference, with a list of expectations and concerns. And basically tell the Qataris that it's time to fish or cut bait. That you've got to decide whether you're going to continue to do – pay ransom to these people that we're trying to attack, whether you're supporting Hamas and so on. That if you're unwilling to change these things, then we're going to begin to change the nature of our relationship. I don't think you come right out of the box and say, we're going to do X, Y, and Z to the base. I think you basically have a dialogue with somebody from Washington, from this administration, that says, here are the things you're doing, that basically resumes the conversation that I had with the old Emir in in early 2007 and says, here's our lists of particulars. These are the things we know you're doing and we want you to stop. If we know you're doing them, we will know if you are continuing to do them or if you stop. And if you don't stop, then we're going to begin changing the nature of this relationship and that includes usage of our base.

LEE: You mentioned who to send and how to negotiate. Do you think it should also be a secretary of defense as you were? And if you could advise that person on what to do differently to get a different result, what would you tell them?

GATES: Well I think it could be any one of several people. It could be the national security advisor. It could be any one of several people. I don't think – I actually don't think it should be the secretary of defense, because this is not – I think that couches it too much just in the military context. But, because this is a – the problem is outside the military relationship. The military relationship, as we know, is very good. It's everything outside the military relationship that's a concern for us. So I think would not be appropriate to send somebody from the Defense Department.

LEE: How much leverage do you think we have, based on that negotiation?

GATES: Well we basically, I think, between – particularly given the commitments that are just been made in Riyadh. I think that's actually the starting point. You've just agreed to do this. We know you're doing this. So are you going to live up to what you just signed up to in Riyadh? Or are you going to continue doing something else? So, I think actually, the agreement in Riyadh is a great starting place against which to judge actions versus words.

LEE: Do you believe Qatar is an ally?

GATES: As I say, I think they definitely are a military ally. They have flown with us against Libya. They have flown patrols in the operations against Daesh. So yes.

LEE: Interesting, I'm just reflecting back on a conversation we had on the air yesterday on Happening Now. We had a member from the West Bank. And we were talking about Israel, Palestinians, how do we negotiate, Leland Vittert was my co-anchor yesterday and he was doing this interview so I want to give him credit for this. One of the questions he asked our guest is, you know, why should Israel negotiate in good faith, if you're going to be naming street squares after terrorists? And the guest said, well simple, they're not terrorists. And, it brings in – if we can bring our conversation full circle to the meaning of the words, because we could say something to Qatar, potentially in these negotiations and say, do not support these terrorist organizations. They're clearly plotting against our own interests and our own people. But if they don't consider them terrorists, then will we ever come to common ground?

GATES: I think that in many ways you can use their own words against them. I had a number of disagreements over the years with Bibi. Netanyahu, but when it came to negotiating with the Palestinians, I thought Bibi had a point. And the point that -- that -- that I would make to people is, so who is Netanyahu to negotiate with? The West Bankers, who have one political agenda or the Palestinians in Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas, which has sworn to destroy Israel. Which Palestinians is Israel supposed to negotiate with? So it seems to me you don't have to get into a war of words when you can use people's own words, of their own goals and say this is what they say they're going to do. Then, it seems to me you can tell a government like the Qatari's or somebody else, that is terrorism.

LEE: And you think they'll agree with it?

GATES: I don't care whether they agree with it.

(LAUGHTER)

LEE: Well then, and then we get in the conversation of the air base –

GATES: What matters is that we believe it –

LEE: Well that apparently also –

GATES: – and then that determines where the conversation goes from there.

LEE: – and also unity on our front to understand whether or not we're unified on what that means as well. I have two final questions here. I want to again ask you a similar question to the Muslim Brotherhood. We have to understand the long term goals of Qatar, as well as the long term goals of America. What do you think is the long term goal of Qatar? Why do you see them supporting these various organizations, but also giving us the military alliance that you're mentioning? What is their game? What is the long term play?

GATES: Well, I think that, I'm no expert, but I think –

LEE: You keep saying that, but I'm not sure who is.

(LAUGHTER)

GATES: Well, yes. You've got a room full of people here who devote their lives to studying these groups in great detail, but – and these countries. But I would say, I mean, from my perspective, Qatar wants an important place on the world stage, and they want an important place in the region. And so, they want to have a good relationship with Iran. They want to have a good relationship with the Gulf states. They want to have a good relationship with us. They want to have a good relationship with Assad. They want to have a relationship with everybody, so that they can maneuver and I think, play this role on the world stage that is the contrast dramatically with the size of their country. And I think that – and it may be that the family sees this kind of an approach as one most likely to assure the longevity of the regime in Qatar, but that would just be my opinion.

LEE: A final question here. Just a reflection of what's happening this week as far as the president's trip to the Middle East. I'm curious your observations on that trip overall and how you're seeing it so far early as it is. We're three days in or so to a nine day trip. But also, this reoccurring theme that's emerged from Saudi Arabia and in Israel, that Iran remains the number one priority of our administration when it comes to the Middle East, and also a way to bring two, at times, antithetical sides together.

GATES: Well, I think the president has been successfully making two points as he's gone along in this, at least at his first stop. One is, our willingness if – even though we may continue to abide by the provisions of the Iranian Nuclear Deal. He is doing what I thought President Obama should have done when he signed the Nuclear Deal, which is to say, this doesn't change anything on the ground. In terms of U.S. opposition to what Iran is trying to do in the region and its meddling and in its interference and so on, and we will resist you in any way we can. Pretty much the same bargain we made with the Soviets when we signed arm control deals with them. This is about the nuclear stuff. Everything else is fair game. We should have said that two or three years ago. I think it's important that the president is saying it now and we're going to work with our allies in the region.

I think, the message that he delivered to all of those participants around terrorism was another important message. And the fact that they have to get in the game, and that's really the message in spades, it seems to me with Qatar. You've got to get in the game. You can – you've got to quit playing on the sidelines and making us think that you're doing more than you are, and we've got to make sure your left hand and your right hand actually have a good idea what each other's doing. And I think the third and most useful, well, both of those, but equally useful is the message to our allies and friends in the region. That the United States is not leaving, we are their friends and allies and we will stick with them. I think that in the last few years, there have been a lot of questions about

that, in that region. I think the president's message provides a lot of reassurance that we're not walking away.

LEE: Very interesting. And as you mentioned, I think, just one way to bottom line our conversation is that the events of the last several days may have changed some of the variables in the environment to negotiate differently with Qatar. Specifically regarding an opening to considering what to do with the air base if they do not fall more along some of our own goals and priorities.

GATES: Absolutely, but it has another impact and this is where being old comes in. The West opposed convening the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe for 30 years. Soviets wanted it very badly. We finally gave in and President Ford went and the Soviets thought they'd had a big victory. But basket three of CSCE, basically, the Soviets agreed to certain standards of civil liberties and political freedoms in Europe. And those agreements, because they had signed up to them, gave us leverage and gave dissidents leverage to force them to try and live up to their own words. It seems to end and Václav Havel and Lech Wałęsa and all the rest will tell you how important that was for them. So it seems to me that what has been agreed in Riyadh, these countries have agreed to do certain things. It now gives us a baseline from which to measure their behavior and take it – and take steps if they don't fulfill the commitments they've already made.

LEE: Fascinating. PhD in Russian by the way, just so we know. That's where he gets the history, not the old age. Dr. Gates, thank you very much.

GATES: Thank you.

LEE: Appreciate your time, thank you very much as well. And we'll continue.

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