Special Address delivered by H.E. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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A very good afternoon to all of you, delighted to be back here and thank you for that gracious introduction. Let me try to share with you some thoughts, maybe scattered, not very wellorganised as you presented it. You presented something that you have said I said and I thought it was much better organised what I have ever said. Maybe you had more time to think about it than I did. But thank you for giving me this opportunity to be back here and share with you some thoughts and then we start with that very fundamental concept that we all need to accept. It is easier said than I actually believed that we live in a world where you cannot gain at the expense of others. Unless we understand that we will not be able to combat any global menace and basically all menaces these days are global in nature. But unless you understand and we all understand that it is absolutely impossible to gain at the expense of others whether it is the climate that we are talking about or economic prosperity or terrorism and extremism we are absolutely incapable of making moves ahead of gaining while others are losing. We all need to realize that there is no gain even short term from terrorism. These may be truisms for many, but is actually exactly what is being practiced. People are trying to make short term gains hoping that at the end of the day and I am quoting an unnamed source, a source not to be named, that terrorists, extremists and Syrian forces will kill each other off in the battlefields of Syria. That is to believe that you can in fact use terrorists in order to counter-balance a regional force that you do not like. That mentality, this zero sum mentality that has been so prevalent in our days has prevented us from moving forward to deal with these issues.

I want to use this opportunity to see if we can in fact look at these problems not as only practitioners but as observers to see what has gone wrong. It is easy to blame others. For us in the developing world it is easy to blame the West. For many it is easy to blame societies that are not ruled by democratic governments. For many it is easy to blame a different ideology, a different religion or a different belief system. But if we start looking at the problem from a comprehensive approach then we see there is a lot of blame to go around and let us see if we can in fact look at it seriously and it is easier to start with us so I start with others. We are faced with a menace in our region in the Middle East which is caused, not fully but partially, by the fact that people in certain areas of the Middle East feel helpless, powerless, intimated, humiliated by outsiders whether it is in Palestine where for 70 years people of Palestine have been deprived of their home, not being able to live in their homeland. See the most basic human rights violated on a daily basis. Or whether in areas we have occupation by outside forces have brought more extremism and more terrorism to the region. Just look at the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq. Nobody can question my sincerity on this issue because the interventions in Afghanistan and in Iraq we moved two of our mortal enemies. So if I present a critique of what happened in those areas it is not because of lost friends there. It couldn't happen to more deserving people, but it is the logic, it is the logic of occupation that cause extremism. I didn't need to have a crystal ball to say before the Security Council in February of 2002 that there are a lot of uncertainties about the future of a possible US invasion of Iraq, but one future is certain, extremism will gain. You didn't have to be a nuclear scientist to say that. Everybody among my colleagues from the Middle East shared that feeling and fear. Few, I don't want to say, had the courage but were able to say it in front of the United States because of their bilateral relations with the Americans. But

I want to step one step further and simply share with you the thought that the era of hegemony is now gone.

We are paying the price for the past, what 27 years or more, for the misplaced perception in the United States the Cold War was won by the West and that historical gain had to be institutionalized through military force in order to make that a constant feature of decades to come. That misplaced perception that you could fact have a new, what they called it new American century, has brought us a lot of misery in our region and I hope that people do not try to revive that thinking. I hope that having learned that lesson the hard way in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Syria people do not attempt to make American great again because that perception, that perception is intrinsically wrong. Time for hegemony is long past. No country can exercise hegemony globally, no country can exercise hegemony regionally and that is why we believe that Iran nor any other country in our region should even try to exercise hegemony in this region because that is impossible. The theoretical reason for that not being possible is simply because of the realities of the transitional phase in international relations. The transitional phase in international relations is characterized by its fluidity, by the disbursement of power, by the multitude of actors that are now plying on the global scene be it non-state actors, newly emerging state actors, even individuals. Look at what happened in Tunisia. One single individual started the entire process of what is called the Arab Spring or by others Islamic regime. It is the era of the power of the individual, the era of the loss of monopoly of state. States have lost their monopoly even to exercise control over the means of mass warfare from the negative perspective or even the means of provision of security from a positive perspective. I mean, this would be a geopolitical heresy to say that in order for you to be a security actor in today's global environment you do not even need territory. Anybody, because those who have studied geopolitics would say that if you do not believe in the force of geography you should not even enter any palace or hall of power. But today we see in our global environment that people with no territory can in fact, both deprive us of our security, and to some extent, even provide security.

So in this era where the state has lost this monopoly on the exercise of force, of military force, of being a security actor it is impossible to have hegemonic tendencies. Hegemonic tendencies are doomed to create disaster and if we want to look partially, not fully, because there are a lot of explanations and I will get to some more explanations which would be selfcritical, but if you want to look at one of the most important factors contributing to the process of extremism, what is called radicalization in our region, you need to look at what has happened in 2001 in the US invasion of Afghanistan and 2003 in the US invasion of Iraq, has created the dynamics for forces that use these feelings of alienation and deprivation and humiliation among the masses in order to motivate a young kid to wear a suicide belt and go, blow himself up in order to kill a few innocent human beings. That is a very deep rooted feeling. Not trying to be apologetic, not even trying to justify, certainly not. As a victim of terrorism I will never justify any act of terror. But we need to understand what is this feeling that gives such a sense of helplessness and hopelessness that motivates person to do this. So certainly what has come from outside has played a role. But we shouldn't stop there. As I said, it is always easy to blame others. But we should not neglect it. If we want to have a comprehensive global approach we cannot neglect the forces from outside. But we need to look internally. There is, I am very sorry to say, a failure of the nation-state system in our region to address the fundamental needs of the people of our region. That failure is deeprooted and that failure has caused a lot of anger.

Now, here in India you have the largest democracy in the world. People, at the end of the day, can vent their frustration at the ballot box. Thankfully, in Iran we have the same possibility. We can differ with each other on the procedures, rules governing elections. But the fact is anybody who has a cause or a grievance can hope, expect that in two years' time, in four years' time we can go to the ballot box and express that grievance, even through negative votes because some of the votes that people exercise are not positive votes, they are negative votes. They are just saying I don't like this. It happens even in the United States. It doesn't have to be in the developing world. You want to analyze things that happening. Many votes in the western countries are negative votes. But that is a possibility for people to express themselves, to vent out their frustrations. In many societies in our region that possibility is basically non-existent. No opportunity for people to express their views. I don't want to start bashing anybody but it is rather ridiculous that people whose population have not had elections are now calling for elections in Syria, or elsewhere. But what in itself is a cause for resentment, a cause for anger, a cause for reaction and that cause is being used by demagogues. Demagogues are using that in order to motivate the younger generation, people who are disgruntled to take to violence. But it is also used by the targets, i.e. those who can consider themselves to be the ultimate targets of this feeling of frustration are trying to divert the attention, divert the focus of the resentment and anger to other phenomena. In our region it is called Arab versus non-Arabs, or Shias versus Sunnis. The anger that is driving Daesh and Al Nusra into violence is not an anger from the Shias or non-Arabs, it is an anger against the Arab state system but is being attempted to divert that anger into a form of violence so that at least temporarily they feel secure. But the problem is from this zero-sum mentality you cannot gain security, through diverting insecurity to your perceived enemies. That is simply impossible because insecurity is a global commodity.

Last time I was here I said security is a global good, insecurity is also a global phenomenon. It is not containable. In today's age most radicalization is taking place through the internet. You cannot contain radicalization in a certain segment of the territory of Syria or Iraq or Afghanistan. It is a global phenomenon. It can attack you in North America, it can attack you in Australia, in the streets of Paris or Brussels. So, the mere illusion that some statesmen in our region have that they can divert this anger to a perceived enemy is nothing but an illusion but a dangerous one because it basically feeds into the very serious organisations that are using advanced communication techniques, advanced internet possibilities in order to attract new followers from the people who feel a sense of resentment, alienation and deprivation. Now it becomes very easy to say that that is because of ideology. Some of us would very much like to accept that.

But let me ask you a question, why is it that some people who behead innocent human beings in Syria and in Iraq speech English and French with a perfect accent? Were they produced by dictatorships, were they educated in ideologically motivated schools, or is it something else? The person who conducted the massacre in the Kosher shop in Paris was there with his girlfriend and if you know the most basic elements of Islam, you know that you are not supposed to have girlfriends if you are an ideologically inclined Muslim. So, what is it? What is it that is being used by these demagogues in order to create monsters, absolutely monsters out of young people. Is it the feeling of alienation, is it the feeling of hopelessness, is it the feeling of marginalization, is it the feeling that you are not being respected. A demand for respect is the most fundamental requirement of every human being. This demand for respect is lacking in many parts of the world and that is why it does not matter how you are brought up, it does not matter in what school system, that feeling of marginalization, that feeling of deprivation, that feeling of alienation of lack of respect and all of these in my view

emanate from the same zero-sum mentality whose time has long gone, that we see everything in terms of us versus them, of people who can share all the benefit and people who can share all the blame. That is who we have tried to look at the world.

Just see how these patterns of alliance work, that is why last time I talked about security networking because coalitions and alliances are doomed to failure because they are based on a zero-sum approach. They divide people into us versus them and that is why they create by definition a feeling of alienation, of exclusion. We need to move away from that. Otherwise we find all sorts of excuses for ourselves in order to explain phenomenon that have multitudes of reason and we are simply trying to look at some of them in a rather non-theoretical scattered ways, not theoretically sounds the way I am dealing with this, but I am just trying to find reason to think about the causes that we find in this rather global menace that we deal with. There is the element of ideology, it is not all ideology but there is an element of ideology. The same element of ideology that attributes all the faults to your enemies, that creates enemies and attributes all the faults to them.

We were the enemy along with the communists. So, an ideology was developed or was advanced and promoted in order to exclude the enemy. That ideology worked in Afghanistan, produced the Taliban, worked in Iraq, produced Saddam Hussein, worked in Afghanistan again, produced Al Qaeda, worked in Iraq, produced Abu Musab Al Zarqavi, the father of Daesh, worked in Syria, produced Nusra, same ideology, ideology of blame, exclusion, what we call in the Islamic terminology, [unclear] ideology, simply rejecting anybody who does not feel or believe like you as infidels and thereby anything can be justified against it. Again, the same ideology of attributing every blame to the other side, trying to accept anything that comes from friendly side and then rejecting anything that comes from the other side.

We see that ideology promoted through a lot of money, with a lot of money. Go to any mosque, unfortunately you see some of the financing where it is coming from. It is geared towards advancing a particular misreading of Islam that in our view is antithetical to the entire message of the Islamic face and it is important to continue to say that because now some people are saying that these attributes are actually part of the Islamic face. They forget that for 40 years they actually tolerated, even promoted this ideology. I find it very interesting that in the United States some of these new people who are being talked about are saying that this is an attribute of Islam. No, this is an attribute of a perverted version that you promoted. It was because this was the ideology of your allies and since the world was broken into friend and foe based on exclusion and zero sum approach, anything that came from your allies was tolerable, anything that came from the other side was to be rejected. So, there is a mixture of elements both internal as well as external that contribute to this menace that the entire international community finds itself in.

If we want to rid ourselves of the menace, we need to accept the premise, again going back to what I started with, that in this world we either win together or lose together. We cannot win when others are losing. We cannot be secure when others are insecure. I think I mentioned this example last time I was here, you would laugh at anybody who would come and tell you that I am going to erect a wall around my country so that I have a safe environment. I am going to protect my own environment. Everybody will say you are a fool, environment is global, we will either have global warming all of us together, now people are questioning global warming, but we will either have global warming all of us together or we can combat global warming, again all of us together. We should not consider this a bargaining game.

The same is true with security and with insecurity. But the first outcome of exclusion is to create feelings, sensitivities, frustrations, that present themselves in what we see today as extremism and terrorism, particularly when we glorify military might.

Once you start saying that international law is only a tool in our toolbox, once you start saying that might is what counts, once you start saying that global ethics does not mean much, once you start glorifying human losses on television schemes calling it military victory, and when civilians die conveniently calling it collateral damage, then you are removing any boundary on the use of mass violence. The immediate outcome is those who do not have symmetrical means of warfare would resort to these perverted asymmetrical means of terror. We all need to wake up to the consequences of our own action, all of us. As I said there is a lot of blame to go around, no single society, no single group has a monopoly over blame. As soon as we start monopolizing either voice or virtue then we will go into very dangerous territory. I think the first needed required starting point for all of us to be able to move in that direction is to recognize that we all need to do a lot of soul searching to see why, how this came about. When we have this cognitive realization because I believe much of the problem is cognitive. Once we make this cognitive move then I think finding a solution is not that difficult. Happened in our nuclear case, once we make the cognitive move forward that you cannot simply win at the expense of the other side. That was the first most important step for resolving the nuclear issue. I think we now need to have a common understanding of the problem. As soon as we have a common understanding of the problem, as soon as we realize that nobody will gain from terrorism, nothing is to be gained from terrorism, once we make that realization then I believe the future is much brighter than many of us in their times of misery believe it will be and I think that future is ahead of us because choices are limited. We do not have many choices and I surely say this, we diplomats always make the right choice after we have exhausted all the wrong choices and I believe we have. Thank you very much.

Q&A Session

Ms Indrani Bagchi, Times of India: Excellency, I have a question about the recent election in the US and the new administration that will take over in January. What do you see are the prospects of survival of the nuclear agreement and in your view what would be the red flags that you would be looking out for in the coming months?

Gen. Ramesh Chopra: Excellency, my intervention has been triggered by your remark, it is easy to blame others and gain at their expense. Following Indrani Bagchi, during the build-up to the election in the US, there has been much talk of Iran being the biggest threat to peace in West Asia, and number two, there has been talk of rolling up the Iraq nuclear plan. I want your comments regarding these brandishments. Are they rhetoric, are they meaningful. My own view is this is music to the ears of the terrorists and will get you closer to the nuclear bomb.

Maj. Gen. Chakravarty: My question is regarding Syria. You have found that of late the United States is keeping its hands off Syria and Russia as well as Assad have been carrying out their offensives in a big way. Do you feel that the ISIS as also the other elements who are opposing Assad will now see an end. Next, I look at the present administration becoming much more friendly to Russia. Do you see that the Syrian problem will see an end and Iran also possibly will see very different from what Indrani Bagchi has said because of the close connections between Putin and the President elect despite 'Mad Dog' Mattis being appointed

as the likely Defence Secretary once approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Mr Sidharth Varadarajan: Thank you for a very good speech. Your Afghan colleagues will likely bristle at the suggestion that their country today is under foreign occupation. I have heard it from many Syria-Afghan officials that they don't consider, notwithstanding the presence of foreign forces, they don't consider Afghanistan to be an occupied country today. So, I would like your response on that but more importantly, is it your suggestion that if foreign forces were to leave and do leave without due preparation, the fight against the Taliban, the way it stands today would be easier or do you think that there is some merit in the current strategy that the Afghan government is pursuing of negotiation, dialogue and some kind of a phased withdrawal of foreign forces after the Afghan security forces have built up their own capabilities.

Mr Ericsson: I am a professor of International Law at Jindal Global Law School here. Before I became a professor, I was involved in the issues that you were mentioning. I am very pleased to hear your sophisticated analysis. Frankly I never thought I would see the type of rapprochement that now exist between Iran and United States. So, my question to you is a very personal one, could you look around the world and identify one of Iran's foes and speculate whether you personally could be involved yourself in the way you did in the US situation to solve that problem as well.

Iranian Foreign Minister: Let me try to see if I can deal with some of these issues. I think four or five issues were mentioned, one is what would be the impact of US elections on the nuclear agreement. Let me try to deal with that. I think that nuclear agreement is a multilateral agreement, it is not a bilateral agreement between Iran and the United States. It is an agreement that came about after everything else failed. As I said, I really believed in the mantra that we diplomats make the right decision after having exhausted all the wrong decisions. Why did the nuclear agreement come about? What is that all of a sudden people became different species or because they found out that sanctions did not work simply. The sanctions did a lot of harm to Iran. I will never argue with the fact that economically sanctions had a huge impact. We went from a positive 7% growth to a negative 7% growth. But what did the United States gain from that. That is the question that needs to be asked. They gained a net total of 19800 centrifuges because when they imposed sanctions on Iran we only had 200, and they were hoping to bring that to zero. When we started the negotiations with the Americans, we had 20000 centrifuges. So, the net gain for the United States from these sanctions were 19800 centrifuges. So, they have a choice actually, go back to that failed policy or see the benefits of an agreement that in our view is in the interest of everybody because it seeks to address a common problem in a common way, in a joint way rather than everybody doing it unilaterally. It is always possible to do it unilaterally but the result will not be better than before. I think people will learn from that experience. So, I believe that like the decision by the Senate a couple of days ago, these will undermine the credibility of the United States as a partner in any international setting, that this feeling of exceptionalism in the US pushes them to be actually exceptional. Everybody else will go their own way because as I said the era of hegemony is over. I think people will learn that after a few days or weeks or maybe months in office. So, I do not believe that the nuclear agreement is in jeopardy. Of course in Iran we have options for every alternative. Those options are clearly stated in JCPO...We have said that if they go back to sanctions, then we do not consider ourselves bound by this or other agreements. So, our options are wide open. We prefer this mutually accepted way of dealing with this issue. It requires sacrifice on our

side. No agreement is sustainable of one side gains everything. Agreement is give and take. That is the nature of an agreement. Well, some people are not used to giving. They used to have different type of approach. Anything that would border on compromise would be unacceptable for them. But I think they will realize that this is the best way, that of course there have been some concessions by the United States, concessions by Europe and concessions by Iran obviously. Otherwise, you will never have an agreement. If everybody wanted to stick to their guns then that would have been the way that things worked for 7-8 years before. So, in a couple of sentences I believe there will be attempts, there will be like a resolution that was adopted, legislation that was adopted to extend the sanctions. But I don't think they have the capability of undermining the agreement because it is not the first time United States has tried to impose unilateral sanctions on Iran. Last time it had the opportunity of creating and international consensus, I don't believe that through intransigence they can create an international consensus. That does not work anymore.

On Syria, I believe the time is long gone for any power to resolve the Syrian question, to resolve any global problem. We have seen the United States and Russia tried together to resolve the Syrian issue. It simply cannot take place. It requires everybody to chip in. It requires participation by all and most importantly by the people of Syria. So, we need in our view to move away from focusing on a problem on definition of the problem in a way that is not amenable to a solution. Let me explain what I am saying. If the problem is about the future of one individual, it can only be 100% gain for one and 100% loss for the other because we cannot cut that individual in half. If we say whether President Assad will stay or President Assad will go, there are no other ways. Either he will stay and that would mean everybody else loses, or he will go and that would mean he loses. So, the way we define the problem makes it either amenable to a solution or impossible to resolve. Now, we can impact Can there be a power sharing system in Syria through pose a different question. constitutional methodologies, through other methods, that would make everybody a part of the future of Syria without trying to exclude anybody other than those who want to exclude themselves. It is a free vote. Anybody who wants to exclude themselves through terror, through violence, through extremism, fine they can exclude themselves. But anybody who wants to find peace in Syria must have a scenario that they can participate in. Once we have that, then certainly the role of Russia, the role of the United States, better understanding between the President-elect and the Russian President, better understanding in the region would certainly help. But they cannot produce miracles. The United States and Russia without a feasible scenario out of this stalemate in Syria will not be able to produce miracles. So, I believe Syria is resolvable. It is not a stalemate provided that we pose a different question. For five years the question posed has been whether he will stay or go. That is a zero-sum question. By definition that question cannot be resolved amicably. We need to refine it, If we define the question in a way that it can be resolved in a non zero-sum way.

Here I want to answer the Professor's question. Here I think Iran can in fact work with other players in the region, including Saudi Arabia, as we did in OPEC meeting. In order to find a solution that is acceptable to everybody, I believe all players, all actors in our region need to work together in order to put an end to this nightmare in Syria, to the nightmare in Yemen, to the nightmare of terrorism and extremism that is actually not only menacing these countries but the entire region and the world. So, I have to respond to that, yes, it is possible to address that and the OPEC meeting showed that it can produce beneficial outcomes that benefits everybody, including consumers.

On Afghanistan, we respect the decisions of the Afghan government. What I presented to you was an analysis of the dynamics of how people react. What we believe that in order to resolve the problem in Afghanistan, we need to go much deeper than simply a law and order approach. Here I think Iran and India are working together in order to address the fundamental challenge in Afghanistan and that is the fact that Afghanistan has failed, and this is I am quoting Ashraf Ghani, I am not being an analyst, has failed to turn its economy from a war economy, from an informal economy based on drugs, corruption and trafficking and warlordism into a formal economy. Iran and India during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Iran when we also invited President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan signed an agreement to develop the port of Chabahar which provides an outlet for Afghanistan and other countries in the region to import, to exprt their iron ore, other minerals to the international markets. I think that is capable of changing the root causes of terrorism and extremism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan. We have gone through many different methods and all have failed. But I believe working with the Afghan government in order to find the best opportunity for Afghanistan to develop a formal economy is the way to deal with this problem.

Mr Surajit Mahalanobis: Your Excellency, thank you very much, I am a retired journalist of Times of India and currently I am a research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University. My question to you is on the volatility, on the Strait of Hormuz that currently which is often reported. I just want to learn for the sake of the research keeping the facts straight, what exactly are the reservations of Iran in allowing the British, the US navigation into the Straits of Hormuz.

Mr Brij, Youth Forum on Foreign Policy: My question to you is you did talk about how hegemony is being used to proliferate hate among western minds and my question is on a larger context. What is the State government's response, is it educating people, is it proliferating through media because media is somewhat a new phenomenon in the Middle East rather than other western and other eastern countries of the world. So, what is the State's response to hegemony, the western ideology which is being proliferated to instigate hate.

Mr AK Jain: Thank you for your views on radicalization to terrorism and extremism, especially when it is coming from an Islamic country. I was wondering whether Iran, which has excellent relations with India and Pakistan, can mediate on Kashmir issue.

Iranian Foreign Minister: On the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf is our lifeline. Other than the port of Chabahar which is being developed, our entire international trade is basically done through the Persian Gulf. So, when we talk about the need for stability and security in the Persian Gulf, the need for freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf and through the Strait of Hormuz, we are not simply making a slogan. This is our basic national requirement. It is in our national security interest to have a secure region, to have secure Persian Gulf. Now, Persian Gulf is right there in our neighbourhood and it will be interesting for somebody thousands of miles away to say that you are bothering us in the Persian Gulf. That is home for us. That is our vital lifeline. For them they have defined it as strategic interest. But, we have not targeted nor have we attacked or bothered international shipping in the Persian Gulf. But we believe it has to be recognized that it is our neighbourhood. We are right there. People coming from thousands of miles away have to understand the fact that this is very close to our home, actually it is our home. So, we don't have any fights to pick with anybody. Rules of engagement for our navy in the Persian Gulf are clear. We don't get closer than a kilometer or more than a kilometer to any foreign naval vessel in the Persian Gulf. But it is again our neighbourhood and we want people to respect that, it is our security.

On how to deal with ideologies of hate, I believe we need a comprehensive approach. Part of it is law and order. We cannot neglect law and order, but we need more than anything education. You cannot deal with these ideologies by simply alienating them further. You need to educate people about the real true nature of Islam. Believe me ideologies of hate, if you look at Europe, ideologies of hate are not particular to one religion. Ideologies of hate in Europe unfortunately are a common feature of many societies, even societies which claim not to have any religion. Xenophobia, Islamophobia are sorts of problems that are very much present in Europe. So, education is an important part of the approach to deal with them. Providing hope probably is the best approach, that people have hope in the future, hope in participating in the future of their own societies, bet it in the West or in our part of the world that people should have a stake in the future. Hopelessness is a very dangerous phenomenon. When people lack any hope for the future many things can happen.

On Iran, Pakistan and India, we have excellent relations with both India and Pakistan. Pakistan is a very close neighbor to us, India is a very close partner for Iran with whom we have historical ties, cultural ties, ties of literature. Many Indians and Pakistanis of a bit older generation than most of us here recite Persian poetry. We cannot lose that bond. That bond is too important for us to lose, both with India and with Pakistan. We hope for the best for both countries and if Iran can be of any help to any of them we stand ready. We are not volunteering. But we stand ready if anything is asked of us we will be there because these two neighbours are extremely important to us. We share common ideals, we share common vision for the future of international system. We believe that the future of international system is one that should be democratically governed, should be a place for the non-aligned where India, Iran, and Pakistan are all active members to have a major say in what happens in the future. So, we all hope that we move forward to a better relations between our two very dear friends in India and Pakistan.