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***Transcript of the talk by:***

**Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif Khonsari**

**Minister of Foreign Affairs, Iran**

*“What Role now for Iran in the Middle East and the World”*

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Time: 5:30pm-6:30pm

A very good evening, good afternoon to all of you. It’s a great pleasure and honour to share a few moments and few thoughts with you and thank you for that gracious introduction. And thank you for giving me this opportunity to be with you. I want to share with you some thoughts about how if it is possible for us to make the change in the nuclear negotiations and whether we could use the model that we use for the nuclear negotiations and apply it to the situation in our region and maybe even if we are not too modest draw larger lessons for how we conduct diplomacy in the international arena.

Let me begin by giving a preface to that discussion, by addressing the reality of our today’s world. We all talk about globalisation, mostly not knowing exactly the dimensions of what we are talking about. By globalisation most of us mean our environment is globalised. We cannot protect our environment when there is degradation going on everywhere. We cannot protect the environment if greenhouse gas emissions everywhere are on the rise. We cannot erect a big wall around our country or our city or our neighbourhood to protect this environment. That’s globalisation for you. We also talk about globalisation that we cannot have prosperity when others are in dire poverty because we lose markets, we lose consumers. That’s again globalisation for you. But we all neglect the fact that we cannot have security when others are insecure. We cannot establish countries or regions that are immune from threats be it by deflation or terrorism or violence or inequality where it’s raging elsewhere in the world.

If we all needed a wakeup call, I think we all got it without waking up and that was September 11<sup>th</sup>. September 11<sup>th</sup> showed us all that even the most powerful country on the face of the earth cannot do the fundamental thing that any nation state is supposed to do and that is to secure its own citizens. A few like me had lived in New York for many years and went to New York after September 11<sup>th</sup> and saw the faces of the New Yorkers frightened; by the looks of any stranger, particularly if he looked like a Muslim as I did. Then you would know the feeling of insecurity. Even insecurity of the citizens of the world's most powerful country which has the capability of destroying the rest of the world in itself, many times over.

And here let me make a pitch to you – As New Zealand which has been an active member of the New Agenda Coalition calling for a world free from nuclear weapons. I think now is the best time to push that agenda and you will have a lot of people supporting you.

But going back to my old argument, we live in a globalised world. In a globalised world you cannot gain at the expense of others. It's impossible. It may be possible to make temporary gains. But at the end of the day, if you opt for a zero sum gain, you'll end up with a negative sum outcome. That is we either win together or lose together. And that's an argument, that's a prediction that you can almost apply everywhere. And I can assure you, you'll come with the same answer - You will either gain together or lose together. And if we apply that to various international issues, you'll see the merits of that argument.

Let me apply it to the nuclear case. In the nuclear issue Iran had an objective we found to be fully justified. We said - *we are an abiding member of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and time and again the International Atomic Energy Agency has indicated, in spite all of the publicity to the contrary, that not a single gram of nuclear material has ever been diverted by Iran from peaceful activity to non-peaceful use.* The worst IAEA conclusions

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about Iran still make that finding, the worst of them. They may say Iran had done some studies, but not a single gram of nuclear material was diverted from peaceful to non-peaceful activity. And that's all what NPT is all about. And that's all what IAEA safeguards are all about. All the propaganda notwithstanding, IAEA safeguards are not there to make sure that people are not studying. IAEA safeguards are there to make sure that people are not using nuclear materials for non-peaceful purposes.

And Iran never did that. So we thought since we never did that, we had the right to develop our own peaceful nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. Particularly because of the fact that any avenue that we sought to use international assistance in that area was blocked to us. So we thought that we had the right to try to develop it on our own. Maybe discreetly a bit because we didn't want the sources to be closed out by the United States. So in our own mind we had every right. And anybody else who was questioning our programme, well they had no foundation for their argument, so we shouldn't pay any attention to it.

On the other hand the United States equated our nuclear programme with a nuclear weapons programme. And said all along that Iran should not have a nuclear weapons programme and believed that anything, that has anything to do with nuclear, can be a nuclear weapons programme. So they said that objective, Iran should not have a nuclear programme period. Peaceful or otherwise. I am not making an assertion that I cannot support. President Obama said in 2013 in a speech that he made in the Saban Centre of the Brookings Institute in Washington that – *“If I had a chance I would not have left a nut and bolt in Iran's nuclear programme standing”*. So he didn't say weapons or anything, any nut and bolt in any of Iran's nuclear programme.

These were the two objectives which led to a zero sum outcome. The United States believed that if Iran had any gains in its nuclear programme it was a loss for it, because it would lead Iran to weapons. We believed if we gave up any of our right to the United States, then would abandon our rights because the United States wanted none of nuclear programme. Those objectives were mutually exclusive, were both zero sum at the end of the day. And

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what did it gain us? Let's do some calculus. I mean very simple math. When the United States started to impose sanctions on Iran on the nuclear issue; the United States as you know imposes more sanctions on more countries than any other country; probably the United States unilaterally imposes more sanctions on more countries than all other countries combined. But since the United States started imposing sanctions on Iran for its nuclear programme, Iran had 200 centrifuges, hardly operating. When the United States started to negotiate with us in a serious way in 2013, we had 20,000 centrifuges. So, a net loss for the United States zero enrichment policy of nineteen thousand eight hundred centrifuges. Simple arithmetic.

What did we gain? When we started the programme or when we started resisting US pressure, we had a positive 7 percent growth. In 2013, when we started the negotiations we had a minus 6.8 percent growth. So while sanctions did not change our policy, did not bring Iran to its knees, it was capable of putting a lot of pressure on our economy. At the end of the day nobody really gained. None of us really gained. And if we had continued to define the problem in a zero sum perspective, we would've continued to fail to find a solution. Because you cannot find mutual solutions if you define the problem in a way that is mutually exclusive.

So the beginning of the new road for a resolution was to re-define the problem. And in a meeting on the side-lines of the security council, where New Zealand has had the privilege of sitting in that room now for the past year and a half; and we are grateful to New Zealand for having played an active role including for the foreign minister to be there on July 20<sup>th</sup> to adopt security council resolution 2231 presiding over the security council.

We went to that room on the side of the Security Council and I proposed that we re-define the problem. In a way that we define a common objective for all sides, so that we could have a common approach to settling the problem. And the common objective from Iran not having a nut and bolt in its nuclear programme because it will lead to nuclear weapons, to Iran having the right to advance as much as it wants in the nuclear arena. We defined the

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objective as it is reflected in the first agreement JPOA and in the second agreement JCPOA was that Iran will have a nuclear programme that will always remain peaceful.

So a simple redefinition of a problem; understanding that our world is no longer amenable to zero sum outcomes, enabled us to look together for a solution that either side could claim to be victory for it. That is why I don't mind if the United States says - *we close four Iranian paths to nuclear weapons*. Because we had closed before them all the routes to nuclear weapons. Because we believe that nuclear weapons need not augment our security. We believe they never have for anybody and never will. They don't even give you regime security. Did they give regime security to former Soviet Union? They had enough arsenal to destroy the entire world. But did it give them regime security?

So all that in my view is simply nonsense. Doesn't give regime security, doesn't give national security, doesn't give external security to any country. In a world where non-state actors have now become the primary threat to international peace and security. So it's just ridiculous to think about nuclear weapons, as sources of security. Now we all need to be concerned if these non-state actors get a hold of the nuclear weapons that are available. So all of us could face Armageddon if they actually did.

And as long as nuclear weapons exist on the face of the earth, there is no guarantee that these people will not get a hold of it. And that is why I believe the New Agenda Coalition and New Zealand are very right in demanding the removal of all nuclear weapons. So we never wanted nuclear weapons and the United States can claim that it closed four routes, five routes, ten routes, a hundred routes of Iran achieving nuclear weapons. At the same time we can claim victory because we are maintaining our nuclear program, or be it in a more transparent and limited way.

Moving in a more economical way to advancement of our nuclear program, peaceful, making it transparent and at the same time removing the smokescreen. For those who hid, have hidden behind the smokescreen of Iran's nuclear program to justify their policies in

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the Middle East and in our region. And that is why you had so much resistance coming from certain players to a nuclear deal. That is why you had so much resistance in the US congress, pressured by certain external players so that they will reject the nuclear deal. Because they wanted they wanted to keep the smokescreen of Iran being the trouble maker, the threat. So that behind that smokescreen everything else would be justified. So we were able to define the problem in a way that everybody could claim victory.

Somebody in the speech that I just made in Thailand on the same issue, the lady who introduced me gave a beautiful example and let me give you that example because I think it's very pertinent. A boy comes home thirsty and sees his sister having used all the water in the home to make jam. And sees a nice orange sitting there and he says – *I can quench my thirst using this orange*. So he grabs the orange, running in order to eat it. And the sister, the younger sister runs after him, takes the orange back; *I want it for the jam*. And he takes again using his greater power, takes it back and the sister goes to her room crying. Mother comes in, says – *you got to go talk to your sister*. And the boy says – *Why. I can cut the orange in half, give half to my sister and keep the other half and everybody will be happy*. Mother says – *No. Go talk to your sister*. Boy goes talks to the sister. Turns out that the sister only needs to peel the orange, so that she can use the peel, to add zest to the jam. So the boy not only gets the entire orange, he gets somebody to peel it for him. So not 50 percent but a 110 percent. So that's what you can gain if you define the problems in a non-zero sum gain, in a non-zero sum outcome.

And that's what we did. We defined the nuclear issue, keep or believe that it will never be resolved. Keep or believe that it was impossible to bring these two contradictory objectives to some sort of a marriage. But we did. We resolved it, we implemented it and I think it would be a lasting solution because it's based on a different definition of the problem. Now I think it can be applied to our region. Now people in our region are trying, some of them are panicking that Iran is gaining influence in the region. So they want to maintain a crisis. Look at what has happened in our region over the past two years. The price of oil, partly due to economic factors but partly due to political considerations have been driven down to

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hurt Iran. Now we are standing here, but those who had the biggest role in bringing the price of oil down are now queuing behind international monetary institutions trying to borrow money.

People said Iran had too much influence in the region. So they helped create ISIS. And look what's happening now. ISIS is becoming a menace, not only to the Bashar al-Assad government in Syria but to all its neighbours and even beyond the region. From Sydney to San Bernardino and anywhere in between, you see ISIS is wreaking havoc in the entire world. Because in a globalised world you cannot contain threats. I mean you cannot for god's sake even contain a disease. You remember what happened to SARS, you remember what happened to other diseases, you cannot contain them in one region. It's only a matter of time Ebola, other diseases, it is only a matter of time that it would spread and the time is very short.

Now just think about the danger of these hardened criminals, demagogues or their recruits, who have gone to Syria from all over the world. And I always ask my western friends to think of what went wrong that people who are beheading innocent individuals in Syria and Iraq are speaking English and French in a perfect accent. What did go wrong? That's the subject of another lecture maybe next time I come here. Just imagine, the refugee problem that Europe is facing today would be miniscule in comparison to the threat that one day these people will go back home. Hardened, more sophisticated, both in public demagoguery through the internet because they are very sophisticated savvy users of the internet. And more hardened in their ideology and much better trained in the art of violence. What will happen? It will truly become a global menace, if it's not already.

So we need to recognise that we cannot, we simply cannot, it is impossible to gain at the expense of others. Impossible to gain security at the expense of others. We have to learn in our region that ISIS is a threat and not a bargaining chip. And unless we understand that, unless we define somebody's security as our insecurity and our security as somebody else's insecurity and give it the nice word deterrence and unless we recognise that, that no longer

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makes any sense, we will be faced with the same problem, over and over again. We can now start building on our commonalities and I believe certainly in our region, when we call each other brothers and sisters, belonging to the same faith, hopefully if people do not have the ability to excommunicate the Shias out of Islam; which is unfortunately something that some people are doing. But if we could do it, in a world where we called each other enemies, you remember Axis of Evil and Great Satan, it was possible to gain common ground. We didn't resolve other problems, but we were able to redefine one problem and resolve it.

So in a region we call each other brothers and sisters, we certainly can redefine the problem, redefine our security in non-zero positive sum gains. And achieve them. We all need stable oil markets. We have now learned the hard way that bringing down oil prices will not benefit anybody. May harm somebody more than it harms others and actually it's harming us least, interestingly enough. We've been able to bring our dependence on oil from 50 percent to 34 percent. Better for our economy.

But it's hurting others really bad. But hurting everybody. We have to go through austerity in order to be able to maintain our economy with reduction of our revenues by 70 percent. We can all accept that we need free flow of oil and other commodities through the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, This is for prosperity of all of us. We can all understand that if a sectarian divide in the Muslim world takes root, then nobody is safe anywhere in the Muslim world or beyond. We can all understand that if ISIS takes over Damascus or Baghdad, then nobody will be safe anywhere in the Muslim world, that instead of a terrorist organisation you will have terrorist state. With all the instruments of state power.

If we all understood that, nothing in there is a gain for one at the expense of a loss for another. And it's either a gain for everybody or a loss for everybody. Then we can redefine the problem in a way that we can resolve it. Then we can redefine the problem in a way to prevent ISIS from getting new recruits, from getting new money, from selling its oil. And all of us getting together, working together, preserving territorial integrity of Syria, preserving territorial integrity of Iraq, helping all of our friends in the region to fight

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extremism. And let us not forget that today our friends in Turkey lost many people due to the same terrorist violence. Our friends in the entire region are vulnerable to this threat. And we all need to get together and I was very happy to have this opportunity to have a long conversation with our Turkish friends, the Prime Minister who visited Iran and we had a good chat about how to redefine the problem in a way that we can all appreciate.

Now in Syria, in spite of having differences of views, we all have shared objectives. We all want to see territorial integrity of Syria. We all want to prevent the break-up of the country and Iraq and other countries into smaller mini-states. We all want to see the people of Syria deciding about their future. So there is enough to join us, rather than a single issue that divides us. And we can find a formula to resolve that single issue that divides us, if we looked at it from a non-zero sum perspective.

And I think it's possible. And not only it's possible, it's absolutely imperative. Unless we did that, unless we started looking at our problems differently and defining our problems differently, then we would be left with a world that would be very difficult to live in. I think we don't have to.

Thank You.