



BEIRUT INSTITUTE SUMMIT

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## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM SESSIONS**

### **Session**

Beyond Fear: Toward a Pragmatic Embrace of Tomorrow

In light of transformative reforms unfolding in the region, what specific, practical actions can the Arab region and its global partners take for the benefit of the people of the region and the world? At the national, regional and global levels, what are the specific steps leaders are taking and should take now to place education and technology in the service of creating the future we want?

### **Date**

Sunday | May 13, 2018

### **Duration**

51 minutes

### **[Session Video](#)**

### **[Panelist Profiles](#)**

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Moderator:

- Mina Al Oraibi, Editor in Chief, The National

Panelists:

- Ambassador Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary General, League of Arab States, Egypt.
- David Ignatius, Columnist, The Washington Post, USA
- Dr. Srgjan Kerim, Former Foreign Minister and President of the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Member of the UN PGA Council, Republic of Macedonia
- Andrew J. Tabler, Martin J. Gross fellow, Washington Institute, Author, In the Lion's Den: An Eyewitness Account of Washington's Battle with Syria, USA
- Yasser Abed Rabbo, Politician and a Member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's Executive Committee

**Yasser Abed Rabbo:**

When we speak about the current situation here, let me remind you that this is one of the longest conflicts. We are exceeding one century of this conflict, and through different stages, I represent the fourth or the fifth generation of those who were engaged in such a conflict. In a few days, there will be a celebration in Jerusalem, where the major power has unilaterally decided to annex Jerusalem to Israel, neglecting the traditional position - not only of the international community but of the United States itself. And at the same time they want to play a role, still they claim this as a mediator for starting a peace process or political process in order to achieve peace between the two sides. They gave Jerusalem to Israel, and at the same time they took one step back by declaring that they don't recognize the two state solution. They will leave this to the parties to decide, meaning they will leave this to the wolf and the lamb to decide how to divide water between them.

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We start a process of building Palestinian state institutions as if the occupation is leaving tomorrow, and at the same time we should continue the peaceful popular struggle against the occupation as if the occupation is lasting forever.

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Jerusalem is really in danger. The American administration had given full green light to Israel to destroy all the progress that we made. The progress was already limited, but the progress we made towards achieving the two-state solution.

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Syria is a very tragic moment in our history and in the history of this region, and I would say that Palestinians even have a share in every tragedy here or there. Although half a million Palestinians were in Yarmouk refugee camp, we don't know now what the destiny of 90% of these people is. Where are they? And this became a part of the Palestinian tragedy.

**Ambassador Hossam Zaki:**

In the region you have basically 5 sore points – Palestine, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Somalia. These sore points affect what is happening around them. Obviously Palestine is dominant in all of this because it affects public opinion, not only in the vicinity but even beyond and very far beyond. You also have situations like the one in Syria that is extremely difficult to handle. It is affecting not only the Arab region but beyond as well. Libya, Yemen, and Somalia are also affecting. So one angle to look at this is, well, we have those 5 sore points - what do we do in order to not to make their dangers and problems affect the rest of the region, and how do we go about in handling them? That is one constructive approach, but I am afraid this is not how people tackle them. First of all, they are tackled one by one. Each one on its own and not as a global regional problem, and that obviously is not conducive to the right approach.

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A lot of people tend to forget that in the Arab region we have 22 countries – 5 of them have serious problems like the ones we have described, but 17 are going by their daily business and the vision for their future in a more or less normal way...The agenda is there for each country to deal with. The problem is every country is looking for how to mitigate the effects of the destabilization going on in the region on its own development agenda, on its own stability, its own security.

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People tend to focus on this conflict or that conflict and not to have a global vision of how things should be. That is number one. Number two, I am afraid that if we look in 5-10 years term, and even if we were able to resolve those sore points to the best of our ability, we will be having what we call a multispeed region, meaning that you already have countries that have been able to take off in terms of development, and countries that will be very far behind. And that is a real issue that we will have to deal with in the future.

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We have success stories in our region. Those success stories are based on good vision and governance - the fact that some societies are trying to shield themselves from conflicts and their effects on them. We should focus on the other countries that are less able to affect themselves, and to try to help them whether by guiding their governance or by giving them some sense of stability...we have to deal with those sore points as soon as possible, because the more they continue, the less this region will be able to deal, as a region, with them – and I am afraid that if we have them for over 10 years, it will be extremely difficult to describe this region as a whole and to deal with it as a whole, and have something called the future of this region.

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We can all daydream about progress, but who is going to be able to achieve it in this region and under these circumstances? It's very difficult for a variety of reasons...Interference in the internal affairs of states. You have Iran, Turkey, Israel, and many of those non-Arab countries interfering in Arab affairs without any checks. That is something that causes interruption in any process. You have those dark forces that you call them, obviously those are the product of locally but also internationally aided groups that are here, and that are functioning and multiplying - viciously opposed to any talk about progress, future, how to see societies advance, and how to see women advance, and so on. You need to have a vision of where do you want to see your society. Is it a society that would be more on the side of those dark forces? Or is it a society that should be free of those dark forces? When we say dark forces, it is not only the organizations capabilities, or the fact that they resort to violence through arms and so on, but it is in the minds of those people.

**Dr. Srgjan Kerim:**

What we have nowadays is a new approach. This new approach based on the digitalized world is how to find ways and means to adjust international institutions to become a driving force of good governance. The UN as they look like definitely are not an example of good governance...the institutions have to adjust themselves. The UN is 73 years old and it works in the same way as it did 7 decades ago.

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Without private-public partnerships, nothing works today. We have to be aware of that. This is why the UN has a problem. Not only to reform the Security Council, that is a precondition for the way forward, but to reform the whole work of the organization, to involve the private sector, the civil society, the media, and all the factors which dominate the scene today.

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Economists and other analysts say that by 2030, 70% of the existing jobs will cease to exist. That's a scary perspective for the young generation. We have to create cognitive and creative. And I think the UAE is a good example for the model of development where these creative and cognitive jobs can be promoted as the base for the economic road and development. Therefore, it would serve as a role model for other countries, other regions, especially for the region here for the future.

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The role of the mediation is one of the backbones of UN's work and existence. If that fails, then there is no reason for the existence of such an organization.

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Syria, that's our tragedy. It's not only the tragedy of Syria, but the tragedy of the so called international community... The outcome in Syria will determine a lot of processes in this world.

**Andrew J. Tabler:**

The one challenge this region needs to overcome is governance. The governance in the region is undermined by how many countries have dealt with external threats... The problem is that historically, and I'm not talking about countries in this part of the Arab world, but around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the lack of progress on the Palestinian issue was used to justify some of the most horrific repression that we've ever seen. Case in point is Bashar Al Assad Syria. In the name of a cause, and that is helping Palestinian people, Bashar Al Assad's regime unleashed on its own people a system of control that is now breaking apart and has broken apart very violently. So, dealing with external issues and external threats is a challenge for any society, and it continues to be one for the Arab countries - because in way, while the Palestinian issue is not resolved, the context has changed.

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Arab countries need to work together to address external threats, at the same time not reducing the liberties of their people to pursue business, the political environment, and so on. And to carry that out, it's going to take a few things in terms of practicality – such as a vision by leaders in these countries on a bilateral level to try and improve the prospects of those who live inside of these countries. The West can work with these countries who want to put forward such a vision. But in order for the international community to rally around these countries, one of the issues is that there has to be greater contact and coordination, not just between Arab countries, but also between various countries in the region as a whole.

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The Syria conflict is probably the worst case scenario of the collective international community not responding to the greatest humanitarian disaster of this century. Therefore, we should look more narrowly at what is possible between countries, and then perhaps groups of countries. Maybe this is a good way to start and we move from there.

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The Turks have changed their calculations over the course of the (Syrian) war. I think not so much in terms of wanting to keep Bashar Al Assad in power, but due to their worry about the expansion of the YPG Kurds at their expense. And they regard that organization as an off-shoot of the PKK, their sworn enemy. They also resent the fact that the United States built up that force to combat ISIS in the country. So despite the fact that those fighters are very capable, they are politically indigestible to the Turks. This has caused them to re-evaluate their position.

**David Ignatius:**

If I look at this period that we've been living through, the first thing I would say about it is that it taught us the limits of superpower ability to dictate outcomes. That was the story for the US in Iraq and Syria – the limits of American military power, diplomatic pressure. Now the lesson for Russia as it seeks to be the dominant powerbroker in Syria. My sense is that Russia like the US is discovering how limited its ability to force outcomes has been. At the same time, this is the period of the decline of superpower ability to dictate, also it is the period of the rise of the regional powers. We see more assertive Iran obviously. We see increasingly a more assertive Turkey. We've seen for many decades an assertive Israel. I think we see a newly assertive Saudi Arabia as a regional power. I think the question that we should think about in our discussions of moving into the future is: how in this world with declining superpower ability to dictate rising regional power roles, what is the wise path to navigate?

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Some hopeful developments that I see that speak to the way the world is working now are first the security discussions that are taking place quietly between unlikely partners – from what little I know – the security discussion between Saudi Arabia and Iraq is now significant. There is a significant exchange of information that makes each country safer.

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Donald Trump is a president who likes the idea of power, but seems reluctant to commit it in ways that might repeat the difficult experiences of the last 15 years of the US and the Middle East... There is a feeling in the US that our resources and our people were used to no particular good purpose in this long period. So there is deep frustration and a reluctance to commit new power... This is a period where the president talks about being a strong assertive leader, but there's an awful lot in our subterranean political culture that says stay away.

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Syria was a model of how things have come apart in this period. It could be a model of how things come back together, and to describe that model, the Syria that will work is one that is strong at the core and loose at the edges.

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