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HIGHLIGHTS FROM SESSIONS

Session

The New Narrative: Who Authors the Future?
A Town-Hall Conversation

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Session Video

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May Chidiac, Founder and President, May Chidiac Foundation, Lebanon

We can look at the future in a positive way in the Arab world, but at the same time there is still a lot to do- especially since we are in a turmoil situation everywhere and in many of our countries. Maybe in the gulf countries, most of them are enjoying stability, which is not the case in the Middle East, especially in a country like Lebanon surrounded by countries that many consider, in a way or another, enemies.

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Syria now is witnessing a very terrible situation because it's where we have the war by proxy. We used to have Lebanon as the land for wars by proxy. Now it's Syria. It's a shame for all the Arab countries to see that big powers are fighting on our ground, because we are not so strong, and we don't have powerful governments. We don't have stability unless it's imposed by foreign countries and big powers from all over the world...The youth are trying to change this situation. We witness revolutions, but I don't know why it didn't succeed in many countries except Indonesia. So, what we need now are governments without corruption that can get inspired by western countries where you have accountability...In the MENA region, we need help to really have stability. To have good governance, to have accountability- this is something that we have to work for ourselves- all of us.

**Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, Professor of Political Science, Emirates University,
Advisory Board Member, Beirut Institute, UAE**

The touching moment was [at the Beirut Institute Gala Dinner] when I saw Adib and Dana, where they addressed clearly and gave me the answer to the question of who will shape the future of the region, and the simple answer to that question is: the future is made right here- in the UAE, in Saudi Arabia, right here- in this part of the Arab world. The most prosperous and most stable part. And now, they are ready to shoulder their responsibility towards the Arab world.

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The UAE is a role place, a role model, and a trend-setter country at the moment for a lot of Arab nations. This is a place of hope for the one group of people we keep talking about, the youth. They look up to the UAE. For the first time in its 47 history, the UAE is ready to shoulder responsibility towards this chaotic region, the Arab world. This is a country that is determined to confront extremism by a moderate moderation, tolerant narrative, and confront Iran's influence in the region with Saudi Arabia next door and with the United States- probably the new administration. So, the future is made right here.

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There is also something very profound and historically important happening next door which is Saudi Arabia. There is new Saudi Arabia in the making, and if Saudi Arabia is to pick up and fix the region, the new Saudi Arabia is leading automatically to a new Middle East. A more stable, a more moderate, and a more liberal Middle East.

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We talk a lot about the youth and we ask this question: if the young generation comes to power in the Arab world, as though it's a hypothetical question. No! There is a real case of a thirty three year old leader who has taken over in Saudi Arabia. He is in the seat of power. And, believe it or not, that is how the youth and what the youth is capable of- changing the name of the game, changing the society to a better one. So, if you want to address the question: what the youth in the Arab world could do? You need to just look up to what Mohammed Bin Salman is doing. He is the hope for Saudi Arabia and the hope for the whole region.

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The six Arab Gulf states live in a very tough neighborhood. They have been living in this red zone for the past 50 years, and it is not getting any easier. It's a red zone, a difficult zone, with a difficult neighbor next door, which is getting more difficult by the day. So, we need America, just as much as Japan and South Korea and Australia and Europe need America. But for the first time, there is a qualitative change in our relationship with America. The first indication is that we are no longer the little duckling of the 20th century. We have managed to come a long way. We are much more independent today than ever before. We are not only much more independent, but we are much more, at this moment in history, more confident of our resources. We are capable of fighting in Yemen for three years, mostly on our own by the way, with a little help coming from the United States of America. So confidence is the key. When you come to Abu Dhabi, you go to Riyadh, these guys today are much more

confident of their resources than they have ever been. In the Arab context, the Gulf states combined, with or without Qatar, today have more influence over the regional affairs, over 16 Arab countries than the 16 Arab countries combined- including Egypt, Algeria, including whoever, is in the right shape these days- have over the six Arab Gulf states. This is the Gulf moment in contemporary Arab history, and it's going to be here for a long time to come.

Ambassador Richard Murphy, Adjunct Scholar, Middle East Institute, USA

Where is the leadership going to come from to rebuild, reorganise, redirect, and revitalise the area? ...People want a better life, and a better future for their countries- but when I ask: is that going to be Arab League leadership? Is that going to be UN leadership through Aqua for instance? I don't get a very positive reaction, not yet at least. No one seems to be ready to say that either the UN or the Arab regional organization is going to be acceptable generally across the Arab world. Yet the needs, the needs are so deep. When the hundreds of billions of dollars were estimated to get Syria back on its feet with comparable sums for Iraq. Yes, it might come from the members of the GCC, but I doubt it. It's going to have to be a much broader and vital leadership which will involve the outsiders, but I think the outsiders are becoming more humble about what they can do.

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When I first got to Damascus as an ambassador, I think it was 1974, and my soviet colleague was the dean, and he showed it. He had been in Damascus for several years, and he said very simply: "I know that I welcome you to Damascus, and I know that you've come with the view that this country is a soviet puppet. Well, it's true." And he spoke about it deliberately. "It's true that Syria accepts from the Soviet Union aid, loans, student exchange, and military programs. When you think about it, it accepts everything from us." Then he paused and said: "except advice." I've never forgotten that, and I have to think that somewhere in Moscow today, the same thought survives. But as far as we're concerned, we are standing back. Maybe too far back right now, but we're listening and I think we will be a positive contributor to the future in the area, but we want more guidance from you all.

Baria Alamuddin, Award-winning Journalist and Broadcaster in the Middle East and the UK, Editor of the Media Services Syndicate, UK

I see the challenges are huge, but I think they all lie within us. First, we have to work on ourselves. We're Arabs, we're nationals, and we love our nationality. Let's look at Europe- they work perfectly together. Sometimes they hate each other, and have completely different cultures, but they can make business together, they can travel to each other's countries easily. We should try and look at the outside world. We are global citizens. I'm Lebanese-British, I'm an Arab, but I'm also very global. So, we should not look at the world only to take from them and to ask them to help us. First, we should look within ourselves, get confidence in ourselves. Education, education, education! So the challenges are huge.

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I must point to a challenge that I always address from this area to the outside world which is called Iran. I think we always underestimate the strategy of Iran. Iran is not

only about reaching to the Mediterranean. That would be too little for Iran. Iran is trying to change the demography in Syria. Look what they're trying to do in Iraq. They fight with our own people, they control more Arab lands than Israel. I grew up with Israel being my enemy because they are the ones that have driven refugees to my country Lebanon and have robbed the rightful people of Palestine from their own country. So, I think what we should do first is identify, stop looking at the past and the history. History is great, but let's look at the future and then move on. I think we should have, together as Arabs, a strategy. Leave each and every country to their own. We can do that. Just look at Europe!

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We in the Arab world specifically need to talk to the outside world, and the Arab world. Our media institutions are pathetic, weak, irrelevant, and ineffective... We need to have something done to this, and I leave it to you guys to do it.

Dr. Hani Shennib, Founding Chairman and CEO, National Council on U.S. Libya Relations, USA-Libya

We have one of the best experts on the region, and yet there is a disconnect as far as coming to very concrete conclusions of some of the very serious problems that we have in the Arab world. And as a result, as an impact, obviously I'm very interested in Libya. So the question is: when you have nation states, what takes priority? Is it the nation state or is it the region? What I see here and when I visited here the first time in 1975, it was a very different region. And what has transformed is groups of nations that you can classify very simply as the 'haves' or the 'have nots'. And then when you develop your relations forward and you look at where you position yourself globally, you have to ask that very important question: Are we going to progress as nation states or within a larger regional context? There were some that tried to reach out and tried to address this issue but most have not really made the link. I'll give you a very example as it relates to Libya. In Libya, it isn't about the matter of that small state. It's not really small, it's 1.8 million km. It's all about what is the impact of Libya on the region? And you cannot separate the two in answering the question that you raised. I'll give you an example: there is 1.4 million Egyptians that were working in Libya. That is a huge return. That is a huge fund for Egyptian Economy. Can you actually separate the subject of building a state again in Libya from that regional context?

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When we talked about national security, I was very intrigued. I was expecting somebody to come up with the matter of the dam in Ethiopia. If there is an impact of the dam of Ethiopia in Sudan and Egypt, a hundred million people live in Egypt. Is that a matter of a national security of Egypt? Or is it a national security of the region? So those are very pertinent questions. They have a washout effect on addressing the issue in Libya.

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The issue in Libya is that there is an assumption that Libya is exactly the same state that was designed in 1950-1951, and it should stay as a unity. Now there is no question that there is a rationale for keeping Libya as a unity. The question is: in what form will you develop the new state? Is it going to be a federal state of three? Is

it going to be a state of six or seven provinces that are geo-economically fitting with each other? What is the contribution not only from the inside? What is the contribution of the international community as to how do you structure where Libya is going from there? And that is part of the essence of trying to solve this because everybody is driving Libya now towards an election. Nobody is talking about the morning after. How is it designed? How these institutions are going to be built? How do you decentralize and so on...? Those are very key issues, and unfortunately, it cannot be addressed unfortunately through a Libyan-Libyan thing. There is a key essential element which is Libya-Libya, but the designers on these should be international contributors to it.

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[On the role of Russia in the region] Sometimes it isn't about the vertical technology that Russia can bring to specific areas or states in the region. It's about those conflict transitional zones and the gaps that exist, whereby it no longer is about transfer of technology as more than a militia or an army or a faction that needs to advance its own local objective. And a very good example is: US have very clear position on Libya, even though we say there is no position, there is a position, the position right now is we were just going to follow UN resolution. These are the things that we could do and we stop right there. So, by ignoring completely what is considered to be a sort of a riff raff, very weak army led by Haftar. What does a sort of a master of that region want but to assert themselves, position themselves strategically for the next level of where do we go from here from Libya? And how do you do this? You do this by looking for an alternative power to support you. The same thing we see in different regions, whether it's directly or indirectly, whether it is of good or not, it is a fact that there is Russian presence and it fits into that kind of puzzle of where does Libya go. And the impact of this is very serious, because it either will lead to more stabilization or less stabilization. The absence of a more active engagement of the United States in Libya leads naturally to more and more involvement and positioning by other powers.

HE Mohamed Dayri, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Libya

[On Libya] This is an aspiration for a decentralized country, for one country, because there are threats to our national, our territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Libya in the future. I think there is a consensus around those issues, but we didn't come up as yet with the 'how'. We are talking about the broad principles that we have agreed to for the future of Libya.

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There is an issue that has not been talked about adequately which is terrorism...What I would like to say is that there has been a military response, a security response in the region, we have got to embark on a strategy which would be comprehensive, which would touch up on education about the religious discourse and about economic reform that have to come through in the Arab world so that we can strategically address the issue of terrorism in our region.

Badih Moukarzel, Managing Partner, Huqooq Legal Practice – HLP Law Firm, Member of the Board of Directors, Beirut Institute, UAE

We're all focusing on the conflict in the Arab region and the Middle East, and I noticed that the conflicts are technically and fundamentally related to sectarian cleavage or conflict, whether ethnics, religious or communitarian. If we have to go deeply inside, I'm not seeing any solution from all over these conflicts if we're still thinking in a sectarian way. In other terms, I have also noticed two speeds of thinking [during the summit sessions]. First, there is the old school, we're still talking about the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iranian-Arab conflict, the US-Russian conflict, which is a very fundamental conflict but at the same time, if you listen to the outspoken young people, their concerns are different and in another camp. They are talking about new world, new age, new generation, digitization, society, globalization, artificial intelligence... I think if we're still focusing on these ethnical and sectarian conflicts, we're not going far away out of this. The only hope is that the new generation will try over a new change, not regime change, but new change fundamentally in the society, to get rid of all these principles and try to build a new democracy based on freedom, transparency, and anti-corruption. Then, I think we can talk about a real Arab Spring.

Mireille Korab Abi Nasr, Corporate Communication Officer, FFA PB, Advisory Board Member, Beirut Institute, Lebanon

I was really happy to see that the young people from different Arab countries have the same thought and the same aspirations. You see young people from Yemen, from Sudan, from Lebanon, from Saudi Arabia- they have the same aspiration. We're not talking sectarian anymore. We're talking how our country will prevail through a common ground which is sustainability, connectivity and above all, how technology can help our countries really step and go forward and beyond the old guard talks and problems. There are problems, but I believe, if we start by looking at this common ground, these common values that are shaping the emerging future, it will be no doubt that peace will prevail because we will all be busy thinking about how we will make our country more competitive. It's all about competitiveness. We are in a global world. You need to be competitive, you're not alone anymore, and you're not confined within your own borders. You need to be competitive in order to attract investments, to attract tourism and to attract attention for the world to look at you. This is, I believe, a great leap forward if we are to get the young generation to speak their mind. I'm not saying let the young generation take over. We need wiser, we need the wise, the experience of older people and older leaders, but we need this combination- because, if we look 5 years ago, 10 years ago, no one used to listen to the young people. Nowadays, if we start by listening, if we start by engaging, if we start by really appreciating that these people have a bit more of knowledge of the new wave, the new economy than the older guys did, I believe this will lead us to the brighter future, to a more peaceful Arab region. All the conflicts that we had inherited are still there, and it's really sad, they're still there. The Palestinian conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still there, definitely the ethnicity, the conflicts within the ethnic groups are growing more and more. So, I do not see any way out other than this common ground, common values that are trying to take over and that we should give them the way to shape our mind and our aspiration.

Dr. John Duke Anthony, Founding President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, USA

Where are we going? What do we need? I will start with empathy. We in the West, North America, Western Europe, we're not in surplus on empathy. We're in massive deficit there, and along with that comes a degree of humility. If we put ourselves in the shoes of what has been described, almost, by every speaker of the youth, we have to realize that we're in the United Arab Emirates, where employment is not so much an issue. The jobs are here and the population is not massive. It's the same for Kuwait and the same for Qatar, but for Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, it's a serious issue. Places like Somalia, which engage in piracy. Put ourselves in the shoes of these young people there, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, you want to get married, you want to begin to have a house, and you want to have access to affordable houses. Who is going to marry you? Or want to marry you if you have no means of employment? And if you have no means of employment, how are you going to get a house, where you can live? And if you cannot get the house where you can live, what bank is going to loan you any money? So this is at the heart of indignities and humiliations and pain in people's hearts.

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In the 2016 elections for presidential in both houses of congress in the US, I've never seen something so sad and sickening in the realm of Islamophobian and Arabophobia. This has to stop. And it will stop but not by accident, not by coincidence. It will stop through a combination of education, information, knowledge and understanding, more critical understanding, and the ability to analyse. But it begins with not seeing this region as a collection of gas stations, but of countries. Not as a mountain of money, but people who belong to a rich culture, a rich civilization, that has contributed much to the civilization of others in humanity. And it's a region too, where on the empathy side, from the west, maybe the majority are looking at this region with apprehension and fear, and wanting to intimidate, wanting to control, wanting to coerce, to influence and that's because so many look at this region as objects. So few look at this region as actors, with their own legitimate needs, their own legitimate concerns, their own legitimate interests and goals. And for those of you who match with what I just said, don't give up, stand your ground, and fight back with the facts. You have them. At least 500,000 in this region alone are graduates from America's institutions of high education. Are they organized? No. do they have potential? Yes. Again, not by accident, or by coincidence. They can be organized, they can be given internships. We've had 28 interns in the last month, 18 of them Saudi Arabian women and men, all of them are going back to the Kingdom, with great essence of self-confidence and talent and skills and experience that are relevant.

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World war two would have certainly been longer had the Soviet Union not withstood Germany's invasion of it. We work together on that, lesser of two evils for us, but it was victorious. There was six million Jews killed as it was. Had the Soviet Union not done what it did, how many more Jews would have been killed? Some 25 billion Russians were killed. People are not familiar with that particular number.

Firas Maksad, Director, Arabia Foundation, USA

There was a sense [during summit discussions] that the future is being written right now with hands that are not Arab. And there was a fatalistic approach. That wasn't unanimous. There was an active discussion in the room, and there were others who felt that the initiative has to be regained, particularly by the youth, by the new generation. Many who found a voice post 2011, many who have become disenfranchised since. And we got into a discussion of how then do you go about doing so, and I think the best way to describe it is to describe a pyramid of needs. We started by talking about security, particularly when we were talking about what's happening in the Levant, what's happening in Syria, in Iraq, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. People at the most fundamental level need physical security and there was a focus on physical security. The importance of being able to regain that, for people in conflict zones. But then we moved up to talk about broader issues that have to do with economic security; sustenance, being able to cash a pay check, and it was our entry way to talking about the broader issue of governance. And I'm bringing that up because the title of the conference is a forward-looking one, it's about how to construct the future of the region and its engagement with the world. And so issues of governance came up and there was no escaping the repeated sense that there needs to be greater decentralization, that the rich tapestry of the region has worked to its disadvantage so far and there has to be new modes of governance that actually takes advantage of that rich tapestry. Issues like decentralization, federalism, confederalism, consociational democracies, all came up in the discussion. I think we need to focus on that issue of constructing new modes of governance, not just fighting corruption which is important and liberalizing our economies, but what mode of governance are best suited for the region.

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I grew up in Beirut and I grew up in a political environment where those who did not share my views, constantly reminded me, that your friends are here today, the Americans, are here today, they'll be gone tomorrow. Assad and the Baath are here to stay. Iran is here to stay. I think we also ought to talk about the political will and I live in Washington DC, I've been there for sixteen years, and I've seen what happened to America's will to fight wars in the Middle East. It's virtually nonexistent. It's something in fact that President Obama and President Trump have in common. An unwillingness to go on yet another adventure in the Middle East. And so it puts forward a very important question for us here in the region, a particularly one that seeks to address the question of energy for security; something that has been particularly relevant especially here in the Gulf. And I think that equation has come to change. In our conversations, in which Iran was prevalent, all throughout the threat of Iran, there was almost a kneejerk reaction where everybody wanted a confrontation with Iran and need to push back before we can accept any kind of a political settlement with the Iranians in the region. But when the question was posed of who exactly is going to push back against Iran? We were left with very little answers, and the assumption is that is the United States that's going to be doing the heavy lifting. I'm not too sure about that.

HE Marwan Kheireddine, Chairman and General Manager, Al Mawarid Bank, Former Lebanese Minister of State, Member of the Board of Directors, Beirut Institute, Lebanon

We can learn from countries or regions in the world that have gone through what we're going through today. We can look at areas like North America, like Europe and learn from them. We do not need to reinvent the wheel all the time. We have to adjust the wheel for our culture, we have to make sure that you know what we're looking at actually works in our region. For example, you cannot expect that people will behave in a certain way unless you ask them to behave in that way. And I give an example in the United States, until recently, you had toilets for colored people and toilets for white people, and that necessitated laws to be enacted; laws of equal opportunity. And only when you outlawed certain behavior, the people and the masses behave in a different way. You need to lead people to where you want them to go to development. In the Middle East, we are plagued by racism, we do not admit it, but we are most likely the most racist people on earth. We look down at other people, we look down at other nationalities, we look down at one another, we are tribal before being nationals, we are very taken by our religion, and not only our religion, our sex within religions. How do you manage that? You outlaw it. You come up with laws that create an equal opportunity environment. You come up with laws that distinguish people based on their capability, based on their education, based on their output, their performance. Not based on their race or color or gender. I see a lot of hope out of the summit, I see a lot of people that are speaking the same language, that are pushing in the same direction, and I'm quite frankly leaving [this summit] with a lot of hope; with a lot of hope for the future, realizing that there's a new generation that is eager, aggressive and wanting to change. What I'm saying is add some laws to that to expedite the change, otherwise it can take a lot of generations for a new culture to set in.

Abdel Wahhab Badrakhan, Journalist and Writer, Montr Carlo Doualiya's Radio, UK

الكثير من الأفكار لها علاقة بالمستقبل، ولكن الواقع لا يزال متأثراً بالماضي. لا يزال متأثراً بالحاضر. وهو حاضر قاسي جداً عشنا فيه تجارب إنسانية قاسية تخطت كل المعايير التي نعرفها. جميل أن نتحدث عن المستقبل، وأفهم جيداً أن في هذه المنطقة هناك نموذج، ولكن إذا كنا نتحدث عن العالم العربي، فهناك دول حالياً مأزومة، هناك دول بين بين، وهناك دول يمكن اعتبارها أنها مستقرة، وبلغت مستقبلها. يمكن لمنطقة أن تقول إنها تعيش مستقبلها حالياً في حين أن دول أخرى تنتظر هذا المستقبل. المستقبل بعيد، لا يزال بعيداً جداً لأن ما تكشف عنه هذه الأعوام السبعة التي عشناها، أننا مضطرون إلى إعادة بناء كل شيء من الصفر، على مستوى تكوين الدولة، على مستوى تكوين الاقتصاد، على المستوى الثقافي، على مستوى كل شيء. حتى لم يبقى إلا الدين الإسلامي وبالكاد، وبالكاد. وبالتالي، حتى هذا الدين أصبح وسيلة للمتطرفين ولقاع المجتمع العربي كوسيلة للاحتجاج وللوصول إلى غايات سياسية، بنفس الوقت هو أيضاً استخدم كوسيلة لعودة الاستعمار بأشكال جديدة، بنمط جديد، تحت ستار الأمن، تحت ستار إعادة تنظيم المجتمع السياسي في بلادنا.

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كل ما نرجوه من هذا المجتمع السياسي الذي لا يزال في سدة المسؤولية، هو أن لا يزيد الأخطاء، ولا يزيد الإخفاقات، ويحملها إلى الجيل الآتي والذي لديه الكثير من الآمال والكثير من الحماس للتغيير. وبالتالي لا بد أن نضع في توجهاتنا المستقبلية، أولاً وأخيراً التعليم، وأن نضع أيضاً تحسين مستوى الحياة من حيث الطبابة، ومن حيث الخدمات، هو أيضاً يساعد في التنمية ويساعد في تحقيق الأهداف المرجوة في المستقبل. لا شك أن الجيل الجديد ستكون لديه أفكاره، سيكون لديه وسائله المختلفة، اعتماده أكثر على التكنولوجيا الجديدة، ولازم أن نحنا نشجع الامل لدى هذا الجيل الجديد.

Farah Atassi, President, Arab Information & Resource Center, Syria-USA

They're not exaggerating that the stability in Syria, all roads lead to Syria, if we want to achieve peace and security in the region, we have to achieve peace and security in Syria. I know there was a sense of pessimism the past two days [at the summit] about the faith of Syria. I felt the sense of sadness, the pain. A lot of people feel helpless, what can we do? How can we help? Well, I would like to give you some glimpse of hope. The Syrian people are resilient, the Syrian people will not give up. I know the media and the TV's are not really shedding lights of a new revival of a new civil movement coming right now in Syria. After 8 years of suffering of countless deaths, of refugees, of detainee, of destruction, the Syrian people did not revolt to re-elect Bashar Al Assad, they did not revolt to recycle the Assad regime and they did not revolt to re-write the Syrian Constitution. So they are aiming for change. Now, the voice of the bullets somehow, is not that strong in Syria. There is a new movement coming out, and I would like to tell you, and you will hear it in the coming months, when the Syrian people started to get out again to the street, in a civil movement. Because the excuses that the regime was saying that we're fighting terrorists, we're fighting Islamist, we're fighting ISIS, we're fighting... all of that excuses somehow, they say you know what they're not in Ghouta anymore, they're not in Douma. All of them left. So, right now there is a new reality on the ground in Syria when it comes to what the Syrian people want. You will be hearing about more disobedience, more civil movement in Syria. I'm not saying that the regional or the proxy war in the region will end soon. We don't have saying of what the settlement will be between the Russian and United States or between other power players in Syria, but there is a new determination within the Syrian people. At least those of us, as political leaders who failed for the past eight years to give a strong alternative to the Syrian regime, at least to reorder our inner house, to come back again with the Syrian solution for Syria. We want to take back the destiny of Syria, to take it back to our hands. The Turkish have an agenda, the Iranians have an agenda, probably the international community has an agenda, but they need Syria to implement that agenda. So, I think to achieve stability and to achieve peace and security in Syria is the road that will reflect positively in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region.

Konstantin Truevtsev, Senior Researcher, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia

Some dimensions of Russian policy, foreign policy are profoundly misunderstood. I can't go into details, but actually there is a very big difference between the Soviet and the Russian foreign policy. And we are trying to get rid of the toxic heritage of the Soviet policy, and at the same time, we are going to keep what was positive in the Soviet policy in the Middle East. So, of course, to some extent Russia is searching for its new partners in the region, and I quite share what one of my colleagues said about the searching of exit from Syria, meaning not to stay in Syria- in that role, that Russia is playing now. But if the situation in Syria and the whole region will turn to better, then there is a very important need for a new role, both for Russia and for cooperation between it and many, if not all the countries in the region.

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What is happening in the world in terms of coming from past to future, is building global logistics of trade between the two most important production clusters in the Pacific and Southwest Asia on the one hand, and Europe on the other hand. So many of these ways would lie through Russia. But there is a danger; if the conflict will be still prevailing in the Middle East, the entire region might be excluded from this perspective of development. So that is one of the points we are thinking about in Russia now.

Dr. Elliott Abrams, Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations, USA

Russia brings nothing useful to this region. It doesn't give economic aid, it doesn't bring the high-tech, it's got no Belt and Road initiative, it's got nothing. It is protecting narrow military interests in bases, in bases in Syria. Period...Russia's a declining country, its demographic and economic situation is clearly declining. China is in a completely different situation. China is going to be, it was already, but will be increasingly, a big factor in the world. And if the Arab world is thinking about how do we move to this high-tech future? There are many places to look for help; one of them Europe, United States, China, not Russia.

Gen. David Petraeus, Member, KKR and Chairman, KKR Global Institute, Former CIA Director, USA

Any relationship between China and Russia is going to be a very transactional one. China will buy the natural gas when the price really drops as it did, it'll make Russia build the pipelines. I don't think China sees Russia as offering it all that much, and I don't want to sound too pejorative, but the view has been at times that Russia is a gas station with guns, actually with nukes, and I think that's what China generally sees. Again, it could be a partner in some cases, it could be useful certainly. They are on the UN Security Council together. But at the end of the day, China is very conscious of what it is doing, and it is far outstripping economically in terms of technology, in terms of, again, building the sinews of logistics that will bind all of Eurasia to it. Some of which will pass through Russia, and so be it, some of which may actually provide crude oil or natural gas from Russia to China, but I think it sees the relationship very differently.

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Russia has a leader who's willing to commit the assets that he has, and Russian air power completely tipped the balance in Syria. If he ever decided to get behind Haftar, he could do the same thing. So again, there's some real capability here. But from China's perspective, what it needs from Russia, is not that, but can Russia play a significant role in the world, not just in the region? Absolutely, sure it can. And especially because it has a leader who's willing to use what he has, and doesn't get all that upset if a hundred of his countrymen, who are militia not wearing a uniform but militia, get killed you- the price of doing business I guess- east of the Euphrates.

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It's important to recognize that there's been a bit of a revolution in how the US has learned to use its military capabilities. And it was enabled by the dramatic increase in the number of unmanned aerial vehicles that have the so called unblinking eye, particularly the highflying, the Reapers provided by the air force, each has about a hundred and fifty people that keeps that one up there and of course that's multiple platforms to keep one circling. Just by reference point, the US can keep about six times more of those than all of our possible allies and partners put together, and many of them won't shoot from that platform. This has been a transformative capability together with precision munitions, together with the abilities that we've gradually developed, learning a lot of lessons the hard way about how to provide advice and assistance and training and equipping and enabling, but not doing. So you still have a comprehensive approach. You can't counter terrorists or others with just counterterrorist force operations. You have to have a comprehensive approach. But what we figured out, how to do is to enable host nations and host nation forces to do that. That addresses the importance of a sustained commitment which we have demonstrated in Afghanistan. The previous administration would have liked to have gotten out- Yes, they did get out of Iraq. Yes, they also went back having learned that you can't just pull out of something and lose all of your influence and capability. So there is an ability now I think, on the part of the US to have a sustainable sustained commitment, and sustainability is measured in the expenditure of blood and treasure. And we have reduced that so dramatically, that the American people really aren't thinking about the commitment to Afghanistan the way we were when I was privileged to command there and we had dozens of casualties every month, or at Iraq where we had a hundred and twenty casualties at the height of the fighting during the surge. And of course, it's a professional force every member in uniform has raised his or her hand and volunteered. And this actually produces a dramatically different reality where we can, as a democracy, fight a long war if we have to. The truth is we've had forces in the Korean Peninsula for many decades and the American public has accepted that. They realize there's an important mission we're not taking casualties. We had hundreds of thousands on European soil during the height of the Cold War- now it's still tens of thousands there as well. So it would be very premature to say that the US can't hang tough. Yes, there's an issue of political will- that is pretty big deal. But the capability is there in a way that it never was before, and that gives US political leaders, presidents, opportunities that they didn't have before.

HE Ambassador Abdullah Bishara, Former Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council

In 1981, the GCC was born in this very city, and the reason behind the creation was how to avoid, to pre-empt threats, either from radical Iraqis or from the Iranian Revolution. And how to avoid, pre-empt threats? That is to build what we call the principle of self-reliance, and second, economic integration. Now, after maybe thirty five years, we still look on the horizon, some frame of the Gulf exists on the horizon, may, at the crisis with the eruption of Al-Qaeda, they may come. This is a big shortcomings of the GCC narrative. The narrative of GCC is to have this principle of self-reliance obtained, achieved, implemented. Second is the economic integration. My share, my fear, my feel, my worries is that with the uncertainty of American diplomacy globally, not only on the Gulf, I feel that we may be railroaded to a program which is not to our liking, not in line with our political and ethical ethos, and maybe something an ambush and not necessarily a contract, an ambush. We should rely on ourselves and build a deterrent. We have not achieved that.

David Ignatius, Columnist, The Washington Post, USA

You would not realize that within the last year the United States and its allies in the Arab world won a significant victory against an extremism that four years ago had swept across much of Syria and Iraq, and was devouring those two countries. Three months ago, I was in Raqqa, and I saw what American power, backed by its allies, because this was a coalition, did to extremism. It's horrifying to see. But the idea that the United States is a pitiful, weak, irresolute ally that doesn't know how to use military power, my friends, I invite you to take a trip to Raqqa and see what American power does when it's determined to win. We don't win enough victories, any of us, to ignore one when we have it, and the victory over the extremism that was represented by ISIS was extraordinary and it should be noted in a conference like this...The US has made so many mistakes. I just want to note that [as General Petraeus said], the United States learned how to use power in this campaign, in a way that was sustainable, and was successful, and it's worth noting.

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal, Chairman of the Board, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Member of the Board of Directors, Beirut Institute, Saudi Arabia

I want to shift the conversation and talk about Beirut Institute. This discussion is the essence of Beirut Institute. It's soliciting from you and from everybody here their minds and their thoughts, their ideas. And I think this is the measure of the success of Beirut Institute. And any of you who have any say in governments or institutions or so on, the next time Beirut Institute calls for support from you, I hope you will give it.

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The UN is not working, and we need to fix it. How to fix it is not clear, but there is recognition it seems that something must be done. The Arab League is not working, and that needs to be fixed, and we heard the secretary general say, rightly so I think, that it depends on the Arab states. If they provide the assets and the capabilities,

financial, and otherwise, then the league will work, and that is something that needs to be thought of in our area here very seriously.

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I learned a lot about Libya that I hadn't known about, whether it is the complicated tribal fractions in Libya or the mismanagement of the world community of what happened in Libya, and the lack of attention at one time, a lot of attention at another time. That sort of unhinged some fabrics in Libyan society, not to mention, of course, what Qaddafi himself left behind in terms of unhinging Libyan society. But there was a promotion that I heard for the first time about return to the monarchy in Libya. I hadn't heard that before. Period. And I don't know whether that is a viable situation or not, but at least what came to my ears is that there are some Libyans who are thinking in that, and being a die-hard monarchist- I'm all for that, and hope that if there is any reason or capability for such a situation to develop, hurray for it and should be supported and developed- if it's going to work.

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[On Syria] After seven years now, we're still going to see a few more years of bloodshed, and that to me is totally unacceptable. Russia, America, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Europe, the rest of the world community, France etc, who are contributing to the military campaign in Syria, have the capability to impose on all of Syria- a ceasefire. And that's what is needed- stop the killing. Doesn't matter who is winning or who is losing. Just stop the killing, because it's the Syrian people who are paying the price. And the world community is not doing that. And I think that's not just shameful, but it's criminal. That this capability is available; militarily it's there, but yet because of whether rivalry or ambition or lack of interest or whatever reason, no one is willing to come together and establish that kind of mechanism that will simply stop the killing. And I think that is something that the world community should be taken to task for.

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This wonderful congregation of young people, who have contributed to the discussion in our sessions, and with enthusiasm and with clarity of thought, which is very encouraging and very heartening to someone who considers himself senior citizen, and if you like, on the way out rather than on the way in. It's very reassuring that there are such young people around us who can carry us forward in the future.

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[About America and its role] It takes two to tango, and we say in Arabic, it takes two hands to clap, or one hand does not clap. If we in the Arab World and particularly the friends of America want America to be constant, and to be always with us, there is much for us to do in America and we're not doing it. I see Israel doing it very effectively. In the last four-five years, Iran has tried to do it quite effectively through their agents, through their spokesmen, spokespeople etc in America and so on. But what I see happening in America, unfortunately, is especially now, Qatar is downplaying what Saudi Arabia's doing in America, and we in the UAE, are downplaying what Qatar is doing in America. That is so mindless and unnecessary. What we should be doing is reaching out to the decision-makers in America, and to the persons who make up opinion in America, and that goes for Europe as well; if there is Islamophobia in Europe, I think there is a big deficiency in what we Muslims

can do in Europe to overcome that issue of Islamophobia. So, these are thoughts I think that we should task ourselves as Arabs and as Muslims to engage in, and to promote and so on. The same with Russia, there is a deficiency in how we're reaching out to Russia. I see some Russian papers and media organs that have very negative views of the Arab World, and particularly countries like Saudi Arabia, and perhaps some other countries in the area as well. So there is much for us to do.

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People like Abdullah Bechara could be a wonderful guide for us to approach this course in appealing and reaching out to various people. Because of his experience; he was at the United Nations- I don't know how many years- and he was the longest serving Secretary General of the GCC, saw it from the beginning until- I think he was there when Kuwait was invaded, and so he knows all the intricacies. So, here's a vote of confidence and support to elect Abdullah Bechara a leader of a campaign to take us forward with all of these countries.

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I think someone like Raghida Dargham, my goodness how relentless and how energetic, all day she's been moving around, and if it weren't for her, we would not be here, so I just thought I would leave you with these thoughts.