



HIGHLIGHTS FROM SESSIONS

PANEL:

American-Russian Relations: Clash of Collaboration in the Middle East?

Is the Middle East still a contested sphere in the new American-Russian agendas? Do the US and Russia have polarizing views on the regional balance of power between the Arab countries, Iran, Israel, and Turkey? Or is the region altogether secondary to both powers?

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Speakers

- Ambassador Robert Blackwill, Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations
- Mr. Andrey Bystritsky, Chairman of the Board of the Valdai Discussion Club
- H.E. Andrei Fedorov, Chairman of the Fund for Political Research and Consulting
- Ms. Sameera Rajab, Special Envoy for the Royal Court of Bahrain
- Prem Kumar, Principal of Albright Stonebridge Group (ASG)
- H.E. Hoshyar Zebari, former Finance and Foreign Minister of Iraq

Highlights

Ambassador Robert Blackwill, Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations

The US Russian relationship in brief context: 1) it's the worst today since the end of the soviet union and the creation of the Russian federation 2) We are not with Russia or a trigger nuclear alert, it is very hard to imagine today a US Russian nuclear 3) Russia entrance back in the Middle East in a major way for the first time since 1973, Obama was deeply wrong when he said that Russia is a regional power.



All of us should be supportive of Russia's effort to end the war. So, Russia I think is making a contribution. Let's see what the issue is and then we will see if working with Russia will serve our national interests.

With respect to the Russian relationship, the U.S. Russian relationship if it's going to improve has to improve in Europe not in the Middle East.

We tried with Iraq's brothers (Arab countries) very hard to help stabilize Iraq but they weren't willing to bear the rise of Iran.

India, there are six million Indians who work around the gulf, it has a dynamic effort to improve its relations with the Gulf, not least for energy reasons.

Mr. Andrey Bystritsky, Chairman of the Board of the Valdai Discussion Club

Russia came back to the Middle East, is it good? I don't know.

We live in an extremely interdependent world.

Turkish offensive is not a result in Russian politics, it is a result in US politics especially president Trump.

Russia is trying to play a serious role in the middle east. We should understand Russia position or activity is a result of vision of the future. Russia is looking for a balance. I hope the Russian military forces can help stability in this region.

After four years, the situation in Syria has become a little bit better. So called Islamic state is not a serious threat like four years ago. But maybe in this case, Russian troops can help to solve the situation. United States troops are leaving this regime.

It seems to me that the Middle East is more perspective region than russian cooperation than Europe.

From my point of view there are no fundamental contradictions between Russia and America.



Perhaps Russia and China can create new configuration in the region. Russia and China try to create new Eurasian network for decision, for finding solutions for most important problems. The question is that it seems to me that Russia and China are very careful about their participation at this point. Unfortunately, all countries have trade check of military forces. Russia tries to limit their military presence, it's not very high compared to the presence of the U.S. Russia and China are very careful because the situation is very complicated and it's not very easy to find a solution.

H.E. Hoshyar Zebari, Former Finance and Foreign Minister of Iraq

At the moment in the current crisis, Russia is playing the role of the mediator in the democratic forces and the Assad regime for the coming back of the Syrian forces.

From my experience, this role of Russia did not begin in Syria, it began in Georgia's war, when this war happened, I think Russia since that time began to feel its power.

Russia has been in the region in the 1970s, with treaties but it didn't have stations. What happened in Syria gave her locations in the maritime and on land.

Iran has its interests and allies inside Iraq, but we would blame our brothers in the Arab countries. After the changes we told them do not give space to the other countries, and asked them to should be available diplomatically. Lately these Arab countries started thinking about cooperation so that Iraq doesn't fall completely to Iran but then the question is this late?

Iran is present strongly in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and in Gaza.

Prem Kumar, Principal of Albright Stonebridge Group (ASG)

It is useful first to step back to try very hard to cooperate with Russia. All of that came to not because Russia had a fundamentally different conception of what wanted to happen in Syria.

I think what has happened more recently, perhaps in a few weeks, it will raise real questions in the minds of many of our partners to be assured of the American support when they really need it.



We have an interest in end and dissolving the war in Yemen, finding solutions between Saudi and Iran, war on terrorism, the question is how can the U.S. solve these tensions which needs to work with the governments of the region.

H.E. Andrei Fedorov, Chairman of the Fund for Political Research and Consulting

We have two types of US/Russia relations one level is nice words between Putin and trump and the second level is intergovernmental where nothing is happening. There are very deep distance and there are no chance of moving them closer.

Putin has to end the war in Syria and find a solution, this process is very slow and there is no chance to end. In Kremlin people are only talking about 2021 and we don't know what's happening now because the current turkey actions might ruin what's happening between the triangle of turkey, Russia and Iran.

In Syria, its Russia will be the one who has to carry the weight on.

We need to discuss war case scenario, we should not speak about positive for MENA, the risk of war here is not only remaining but also increasing. We should think about what kind of mechanism should be used immediately if this should happen.

China is ready to cooperate with Russia on the Middle East but is trying to step away from Syrian problem, leaving it to Russia.

In this current situation, Russia is in a difficult position, there is a very strong will from Bashar Assad to use Russian force to protect Kurdish troops. it is a very delegate situation; Bashar is our partner from Syria and from the other side use our forces to strike Turkish force could be unpredictable (consequences).

Ms. Sameera Rajab, Special Envoy for the Royal Court of Bahrain

The issue of Iran is complicated and i noticed that throughout all sessions that there is no solution.



Wars do not solve any problem; it has never solved problems as much as it increased problems and caused catastrophes.

How did Iran become such a powerful country in the region? Suddenly after the invasion of Iraq, Iran became a primary player in Iraq. It has become a giant inside Iraq.