



2020 Hindsight. 2020s Foresight A Town-Hall Conversation

Moderated by Raghida Dergham, Co-chair of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi Edition III, Founder and Executive Chairman of Beirut Institute

Mireille Abi Nasr, Corporate Communication Officer at FFA Private Bank:

I've noticed that education took a big chunk of the discussions. I believe dearly and firmly think that with education, we can do the changes we need, embrace the 2020s as we wish and we can practically try and implement the visions and ideas in the knowledge economy, fintech, even on the political scene, that we wish to see coming through in the 2020s.

General David Petraeus, Former Director Central Intelligence Agency, Chairman of the KKR Global Institute:

I don't think there is a potential war between a US-led group and Iran. It's pretty clear to me that Trump doesn't want it and the Supreme Leader in Iran doesn't want war either with a US-led coalition. It doesn't mean Iran won't continue to feel the edges of a US restraint, and to try to figure out where the red line is but at the end of the day, the US has very put Iran into a box into a corner for which it has no exit. To a slight degree, we have put ourselves in a box as well and we will have to end up back at the table.

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My takeaway from this is I am reminded that Las Vegas rules don't apply in a place where extremists as are active, which means that what happens there does not stay there. Rather, what happens in north eastern Syria and the US withdrawal is that, clearly, Isis will be resurgent out of this and there will be, once again, another tsunami of refugees, instability and extremism flowing from Syria, which will have bad consequences, not just for the neighbors but very likely for our Western European NATO allies as well, which is deeply concerning and reminds us that if you don't do something about these situations, that this is the result. Counter terrorism isn't enough to counter terrorists.

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I am confident my successors at the US Central Command have worked through a whole set of different scenarios and I am sure that they have worked their way through them, but I don't see this escalating completely out of control. I see Iran forcing us to take action. We must show we don't accept what they have done.



H.E. Abdullah Bishara, Former Secretary-General of Gulf Cooperation Council:

Two heavy issues absent from this seminar are Yemen, which is a strain, and Palestine without which there is no tranquility in this region. Hopefully, they will be tackled in the future. In terms of Iran, it is not suicidal. It has a huge inventory of notoriety and mischief. They are going to make noise but they will stay far away from confrontation. The Gulf region is safe and solid and its solidness is confirmed. Iran will outwit everybody with their patience.

3rdspeaker (American, need to get his name):

I am a bit more pessimistic. Iranians' grand strategic objective is to get the US out of the region and to weaken our place in the region. We are withdrawing from Syria now; they will be calculating and they know they don't want a war and neither does Trump and they will keep with these provocations here in the Gulf. If anyone believes there is a strategy throughout the process, they are mistaken.

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They want to try to paint us as a paper tiger and I think right now they have some initiative; we are in a very high-risk window over the next six to eight months.

H.E. Amr Moussa, Former Secretary-General of Arab League:

What if the US and Iran emerge from this crisis with better relations? Even an alliance? Not war but alliance. At a certain stage, we have to think of the same, mentioning Turkey and Israel. There will be no war between the US and Iran. The question is what kind of relations the US has in mind to promote with Iran, in particular with Turkey.

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

The likelihood of a US-Iran alliance is about as likely as me being young and handsome. It is exactly where we should start because if there is a war in the Middle East, it will change everything we talked about for the past two days. The dangers of complacency: try to think of a war since 1914 that the US conducted that they thought they would fight two years earlier, Vietnam, Iraq, we never predict where we are going to fight next and when, so I urge people to not be complacent.

Salman Sheikh, Founder and CEO The Shaikh Group:

On the question of Iran, we have been running a dialogue on mutual regional security for more than a year. I agree that we are in a very dangerous moment, but it is really the various parties positioning themselves in a game of poker for the best position in a dialogue



track. There are informal talks and bilateral talks going on between Iranians and others. My bigger worry is what the Iranians have learnt with Syria. If you work with a sovereign state, your act of resistance becomes that much stronger and that's what they are trying to do in Lebanon and Iraq.

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I believe in a much more multi-polar world where US leadership cannot be taken for granted by itself, we will need a multilateral effort and there is a fear that if regional rivalries are exploited by big power competition, this will only exacerbate.

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

We have two Irans: one is Iran of Rouhani, and the second is the one of the Revolutionary Guard and it doesn't mean that the first level Rouhani will be much stronger in his political decisions than the Revolutionary Guard. I am expecting much more growing pressure from the Revolutionary Guard on Rouhani in the coming two months. In two to three weeks, we will face a new provocation in the Gulf, like attacks of ships. The problem is that Iran is now feeling itself as a winner in the current situation because everything which it did in recent months was left unanswered and that's why Iran has a feeling now that it could try to make a clash between the US, Russia, the EU and will try to blackmail all the sides to be a winner again.

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

Much of the description and analysis thus far have found a long line of rational reasoning. This is itself is dangerous. It just takes one skyscraper to be hit in Dubai, imagine what would happen to the international stock market. But this place is secure, stable and prosperous. You won't find others in this region as such, despite death being at their doorstep.

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A back channel is the best way to go about addressing Iran.

The Rt Hon Alistair Burt, Former Minister of State for the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

The long- and medium-term aim of Iran is removing US influence and continuing its aim as a regional power. The long term is about selling its oil because it's being strangled. They have been very carefully calibrated on their responses, and the question is what are they probing for? If we work on the assumption that no one wants war, then everyone can talk – but who spoke at the UN in New York? We need to think it through from that point of view.



Dr. Mahmood Sariolghalam, Professor of International Relations at the National University of Iran:

Iran's behavior is one of an unsatisfied state in a region where it has no strategic relations with any country. It's like China in the 1960s. The only way to go about this is engagement with Iran. But with whom? Everybody has learnt that it may not produce any results to have an engagement with Iran. I have a presumption in proposing that because of the lack of communication between the deep state and particularly Arab officials, there is a bit of misunderstanding. The other thing is that very few people understand the domestic structure in Iran, as though Iran is a collection of a few politicians and there is not much understanding of the landscape, people, music, entertainment, educational system – there is so much going on that needs to be understood and Europeans did a good job in that.

Mahmoud Mohamed Ali:

War is already there, and one of the main differences between version 1 or 2 of the summit. In this summit everybody is okay

with the idea it's going to get worse before it gets worse. On the deep state issue, I don't agree with the fact that it is left to our imagination.

It is clear that there is a US strategy, a Russian strategy, a Chinese strategy and even a European strategy of not doing much.

What is called on is a real formulation of a strategy then what we have spoken about before.

Hezbollah is now trying to attack Lebanese banks for being responsible about the economic situation in Lebanon.

H.E. Dr. Srgjan Kerim, Macedonian Diplomat, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Macedonia

Multi polar world about? Does it require new forms of multilateralism? Are the existing ones becoming dark like the security?

Council or others?

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

The right of self-determination is right for all the people of the world, including the Kurdish, Palestinian. It is the right which is enshrined.



In Iraq, we have formalized our rights in the federal constitution.

Mr. Salman Sheikh, Founder and CEO The Shaikh Group

Too often we have worked with Syrians in this case, since July 2017, it was a conversation about more inclusive governance.

That track over the last 9 months have developed into serious track.

A lesson for 2020, It is for the international community to pay more attention (for Syrians development)

On Sudan:

A remarkable transformation over the past few months. Everybody should make sure that the deal is honor and we need the international community to monitor and honor this deal.

Realized that their interests are more aligned with the Sudanese people that doesn't harbor terrorism like Bashir.

Tunisia:

We had a presidential and legislative elections. Everything went peacefully and we witnessed a new form of revolution, whereby someone from outside the regime reached the presidency.

We will build our country and democracy will be one of its central foundations.

Shady Qubaty, President, Yale Arab Students Association Yale University

We speak about Iranian influence not on Yemen. Iran in control of Sanaa, the capital. We might wake up with the time where Yemen could be completely in control of Iran. If we don't pay attention to the region, we could see a whole decade of disintegration.

Philip Gordon, Former White House Coordinator for the Middle East



There was an effort for why we did not oppose a war which we have questions about.

Abdallah Beshara:

I expect that this assembly here will endorse a call for backing the effort for the representative of the security council. Then endorse a constitution then of course election. The revolution in Yemen failed to endorse mechanism for pushing forward.

Shakher Khazal

There should be more activities between the people of Jerusalem, Ramallah and the Arab world. You cannot distance the nation and hope the dialogue there. We need new blood, negotiators. We need less psychological complexes from the past with qualified people.

Hanan Ashrawi

While the Arabs and westerns can come, the Palestinian cannot engage with each other. There is a need to repair the status of Palestine in the Arab region. Palestine has to be in many ways reinstated within the political discourse of the region. Isolation is very serious. American policy is a fragmented policy, there are no policy to count on. There is always a risk on an inadvertent war in the region.

H.E. Mohammed al-Dairi, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Libya

I would like to demystify two things, the conflict in Libya is between two agendas. Two narratives:

A national stream narrative. Would seek to establish the authority of the state.

On the other hand, you have the political Islam which associated itself with extremists which are in Tripoli.

The decision making and the margin of maneuver and the dependence of the decision in Libya has continuously and critically decreased.



Badih Moukarzel, International lawyer and Board Member of Beirut Institute

It seems like there is no solution for what is happening in the region. There is a clear disengagement from the American.

It seems that people should find other solutions (the Kurds found their own solution). I think we are heading to another tragedy in the region.

The only hope which we can is the youth and the new technology and the new era that is to come to the region.

On Russia:

The idea of collective security in the region.

Facilitators:

Nick

Grandeur stuff; overarching problem that we have identified. I am struck by the thought that things are going to get worse before they get worse.

I am very struck particularly the president of Microsoft. While all this are major challenges, there are things happening particularly culturally. These things are going beyond immediate issues such as Iran and Syria. It is that the scale and nature of problems and challenges. The legitimacy of those in power and those in corporate power, they are not unique to the Middle East but they have to be thought about. These are huge things that are affecting stability.

Srgjan Kerim

Rapid transformation is terrifying people in the world. We kept coming back to the question of Iran, I think because in a way people find it difficult, as it is to handle those are actually problems. The question of treating people in human capital rather than a burden on society.



Firas Makhsad

There is a concern about the lack of trust between the US and this part of the world. Ancient notion of trust and loyalty.

However, I believe there are open channels with Iran.

Christopher Dickey

One of the things we looked at whether democracy is dead in the Arab region. It depends very much on where you are in the

Arab region. In Syria, they are looking to replace a dictator.

Sudan, Algeria these are societies that are struggling to establish democracy. In Tunisia, its stage 2 of democracy.

Can the Gulf states live with Iran? I was struck by how little conversation on what Iran might want. Climate change will have a huge impact especially on cities and societies here on the shores of the Gulf; or any cities on the edge of the sea.

Ragheda Dergham

Contributions in the policy circles, together with the papers what to expect and how to prepare for 2020, received over 50 papers

All of which is going to be put in a set of recommendations by PwC.

‘The conversation continues’

The complexities that categorize this region are no trivial and they require to be addressed.

Rich stimulating discussions that touched around a variety of topics technology, geopolitics, etc.

- Reimagine how we deliver education-- empower next generation
- Inclusion of youth
- Equally important is the role of women.
- Technology naturally remains important
- Mastering the tools and techniques of the digital age will be central
- New tools and techniques also provide new avenues
- Arab countries will need to accelerate their robust cyber security measures



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ABU DHABI • EDITION III

- We need to engage strategically and selectively with foreign power
- International players must abide by laws
- Rebuilding our public institutions
- Find technical and economic solutions