



## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM SESSIONS**

### **SESSION**

#### ***Is America Firmly in the Lead or is it Delegating to Subcontractors?***

With the Trump Administration's change of course from that of its predecessors, what impact is this American reset having on the Middle East and the Gulf region? Did the inconsistency in American foreign policy change the dynamics of regional conflicts? Is there an American master plan for the Arab region in the next decade? Or does the US want to delegate extensively to subcontractors?

**Date-** Sunday | October 13, 2019

**Moderator:** Sohaib Charair, Senior News Presenter at Al Arabiya

#### **Panelists:**

- H.E. Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Member of the PLO Executive Committee
- Raghida Dergham, Co-chair of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi Edition III, Founder and Executive Chairman of Beirut Institute
- General David Petraeus, Former Director Central Intelligence Agency, Chairman of the KKR Global Institute
- Sir John Scarlett, Former Chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service
- H.E. Hoshiyar Zebari, Former Finance and Foreign Minister of Iraq
- Dr. Irina Zvyagelskaya, Head of the Center Institute of World Economy and International Relations

#### **H.E. Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Member of the PLO Executive Committee:**

The Arabs perhaps were used to saying 'leave us alone' but there are continuous relationships with the US government. And if we say there is a difference between this time and the previous leadership during the Cold War era for instance, there was a clear leadership role but today, the US has adopted a new approach which is more withdrawn and isolated. We experience a total disregard for human rights, for international legislation, we hear a language of extremism, violence, of populism, especially with regards to the Palestinian cause. Such an approach is harmful to the Arab situation in general. It makes the US a partner that is unreliable. Any relation built on mutual respect, we are ready to go ahead with it.



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In terms of the Deal of the Century, the US started with Jerusalem and gave a big slap to the Arab and Islamic world, and the world in general. They gave Jerusalem to Israel, it is our cause. The US has disregarded all the causes and if we will continue with such a US approach in the region where the Palestinians will be the only one to bear all the penalties, the Arab world will be disregarded, neglected and marginalized. This approach is what has impacted the position of the US and the value of its role in the credibility of the US.

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

If I were in government still, I would be seeking a bit more clarity on some of the objectives in various locations in the Middle East. US foreign policy isn't just established by a US president or the Executive branch, there are co-equal branches, states and private sector entities that have considerable influence as well. Clearly, the US president is very important, and we are seeing that right now, especially with respect to northern Syria today. The current Administration has pursued policies that differ from those in the past which generally believe in multilateral organizations. In other respects, there are still some continuities, there is a desire in this Administration to end endless wars, that is understandable as difficult as it is to rebalance and focus more on the Asia Pacific where the future of the world will be written.

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The question is how much less is the US in the lead and willing to lead and how much is the US delegating? I don't think the US can reduce all of its actions in the region, or delegate all of its responsibilities to other countries. It cannot withdraw from all locations, unless a stable situation is established.

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The truth is that the US leaving the Middle East is an objective, but it is virtually impossible.

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

The US' role has retreated in the region and in the world to a large extent, specifically in Middle East regarding the Palestinian cause, Iraq and many other regional issues. We feel there is a kind of US retreat. The US is a superpower and can play a very positive role in settling many matters. After the withdrawal from Iraq, the achievements made from this



respect retreated. With the withdrawal of US from northern Syria, it gives a message that the US can challenge other regional players, they can fill in the gap and vacuum. Others will be encouraged when they see the US is retreating and they could fill in this gap.

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

I think there is such a “career” of the US for decades, it’s called the legacy of betrayal. People in Arab region have been talking about it but they didn’t take lessons learnt from this experience. It’s very useful to investigate and read carefully the US promises. There is a kind of provocation here, we have to now learn lessons in this region and go deeper in other alternatives. You may not have other alternatives. It’s a very important aspect in this matter.

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I don’t want to drop the relationship with the US but we may ask for better identification. The nations in this region started to expand their own alternatives, with Russia for instance. It’s necessary to urge friendly nations, those that take provocative things in the region, like Turkey, Iran, the Gulf – why don’t we tell Russia to play this role in the region and be at the forefront of these countries and provide support to these countries?

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Russia was a part of the war in Syria and there was overwhelming Arab anger over Russia’s role in Syria and a number of Arab countries that reevaluate the relation with Russia and China only after they saw a certain hesitation in Trump’s relationship in this region. Trump put some rules and sanctions, he doesn’t want the region to go into war and he said it many times. Let sanctions play the role instead of wars. Everybody turned a blind eye to Erdogan and let him go ahead with his plan and many of the Kurdish see this as a US betrayal. It wasn’t the US alone who betrayed, the Europeans became afraid of the threat of immigrants and Erdogan opening the door for immigrants to go to Europe. We know there is a red line that was announced to Erdogan as well.

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We tried in the past not to shoulder the responsibility and now we have a necessity in this region to face, confront and think of what we have done in the past decade and what we should do in the next decade. Why don’t we try new things, capitalize on capabilities of our brains and benefit from the communication of these brains from Russia, the US, the UK and



Germany? There is a possibility of making use of that. I heard some practical suggestions on how we can consider different attitudes and approaches, it's important to think outside the box, especially when it comes to maritime and political security, which is of international importance.

**Dr. Irina Zvyagelskaya, Head of the Center Institute of World Economy and International Relations:**

When Trump decided to withdraw from Syria, he didn't think about Russia at all, it was mostly motivated by national interests. George Washington used to 'stay clear of permanent alliances' so it's not just invented by Trump. Obama also wanted to cut down US commitments and Mubarak, who was a real ally of the US, was dropped down like this. I don't believe this is for the sake of making the Russian role greater, Russia will probably be asked by local players to express its attitude as to what had happened but I'm not sure Russia will show more commitment.

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Russia's role in the Middle East now is very much appreciated by many countries. It proved that it can be effective when it stands behind its partners, it can keep good relations with absolutely different actors. If you look at the Middle East in general, this is a very important characteristic of Russia's policy right now.

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If you look at history, you will find a lot of tyrants and very rigid leaders who were friends of the US or of Europe so it's not the issue right now. What is important is that Russia has been trying to stabilize Syria.

**Sir John Scarlett, Former Chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service:**

As a non-American but as a long-standing ally, I am inclined to push back a bit on some of what I've been hearing. I am always hearing talk about the US withdrawal, the decline of US power, and I often think if that is the case, why does everybody talk about it all the time? Because, of course, it's an overwhelmingly powerful player and remains so. Russia will play a role and it can be quite a constructive role and that's up to them, but there is no substitute for US power, and there won't be.

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We are very much thinking about what has happened in the last week in a dramatic way, but the fact is this hesitation about being a global policeman is quite long-standing. It goes back a very long way. What happened after 9/11 may be an exception to the rule, rather than the rule. It's reasonable enough for people to be asking questions about that expenditure and deployment, is it fully recognized.

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We talk about withdrawal and in this overall region, there are currently 60,000 military US personnel deployed, there are four major bases and access to a lot of other facilities. It doesn't quite sound like withdrawal to me. The more dramatic policies, which were announced last week, are clearly not universally supported throughout all the US establishment and that's the way the future is going to go.