



HIGHLIGHTS FROM SESSIONS

PANEL:

The Security Discourse: Towards a Decade of Peace or a Decade of Wars Is there a new regional security order on the horizon in the Arab region? What does it take to widen the security discourse beyond the military dimension? How do we adapt the existing foreign policy framework to keep up with the unprecedented technological changes such as cybersecurity interventions? Is the Arab region equipped to handle the wave of change to come?

Date- Monday | October 14, 2019

Moderator- Mustafa Alrawi, Assistant Editor-in-Chief at The National

Panelists:

- Ahmed Al Shamsi, Director of Strategic Communications at Crown Prince Court (did not attend)
- H.E. Rolf Ekeus, Associate Fellow with the SIPRI Disarmament
- Admiral Robert Harward, Chief Executive for Lockheed Martin Middle East
- Danielle Pletka, Senior Vice President, Foreign and Defense Policy American Enterprise Institute
- Michael Singh, Managing Director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
- Dr. Irina Zvyagelskaya, Head of the Center Institute of World Economy and International Relations

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

Right now, it is a hard time to speak about Isis again given what is going on in Syria. Counter terrorism has never been a unifying factor. There was a certain cooperation in Syria but mostly on the conflict. But the problem is that there were other bilateral tensions which were domineering the agenda of the Middle East and Syria in particular, and if there were hopes in the very beginning when Russia got involved in Syria, it proved invalid because the global agenda, which was very negative, was still imposing its own rules of behavior.



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When we believe that Russia is ready to engage for a long time, it is not exactly what Russia is ready to do in the Middle East because a lot of things that were done was a sort of reaction to what Middle Eastern countries were longing for, which is a check and balancing system. Many aren't sure what the US is going to do next and they think Russia can be a balance to deal with the US so I believe there was no strategy to stay here, but I don't know how long Russia will be in the Middle East. If we come back to the most practical things like trade, economic exchanges, investment and oil, then I believe there is a keen interest on the part of Russia and other Middle East States.

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We see the fragmentation of actors within the context of various conflicts and it means it is more and more difficult to deal with them. Sometimes, small threats are much more important than big ones, so I believe it is not only Russia, the US or Europe, but rather the role of local powers is becoming much more important. All of us cannot solve anything in the Middle East without the participation of the local States and we should rely on them much more than we did before.

Admiral Robert Harward, Chief Executive for Lockheed Martin Middle East:

I have seen counter terrorism as a unifying factor, especially in this region, because most States here face existential threats, including rising powers like Iran. Nation States can have military cooperation to deal with this existential threat and those lifelines we built because of that expand into other elements and bridge some of these gaps between different threats and help build those relationships. I still think it is an essential component to leverage to maintain those partnerships in this cooperation, where we can have like-minded entities dealing with it so we can face any challenges beyond that.

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It is always about influence. Sometimes we forget how important partnerships are – that's the challenge, what influence do we want to have to shape the outcome? And sometimes our political process loses sight of that. We see it in Brexit. Those partnerships that influence is essential, and any great nation understands that and wants to be a part of that.

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The US presence in the region is three times the size it was at the time of 9/11 so that new norm is much more different. It's a political issue for the region.



Danielle Pletka, Senior Vice President, Foreign and Defense Policy American Enterprise Institute:

I think part of the challenge for all of us, not just the US, who have been a part of counter terrorism, [is that] we are reaching an end of that, not for good reasons in the case of the White House but because it doesn't work. It's not a hugely effective tool by itself. Counter terrorism with the limited objective of either destroying groups like Isis and Al Qaeda, doesn't work because what happens is you say 'mission accomplished', then you walk away and it comes back, as we are about to discover in Syria. These aren't sustainable strategies. This is the cycle we have been trapped in in the Middle East so far. I don't think the conversation about backfilling with any kind of soft power or economic change, is happening in any serious way in the policy community.

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Traditionally, what a country that enjoys a partnership with the US, that has US forces there, has a hope and an expectation that that would add stability. We are always back – the Russians aren't interested in coming and bringing stability unless you like the stability of the grave. They are interested in the opportunity that is afforded them and we have been very generous in giving them that opportunity through our own missteps. We don't conceptually think of competition in the region in a very serious way politically, like competing with the Iranians, and that's a problem in the region. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have actually both decided they need to compete in this sphere with the Iranians and it's a work in progress. I wish we were doing more in that, but I see the next decade as one of conflict, not of competition.

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The bigger question is how the region is going to manage in a new environment. It's a real challenge and when Obama said that Saudi Arabia and Iran were 'just going to need to learn to share the region', the reality is he was actually delineating a competition that exists and we have seen the response of countries in the region isn't very effective.

H.E. Rolf Ekeus, Associate Fellow with the SIPRI Disarmament:

The INF treaty (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty), which prevents intermediate range missiles from fundamentally Russia towards EU States – it is a remarkable thing when the US President decided to cancel that treaty, which opens up: who are subjects to these weapons? It is European allies. It's the biggest threat towards Europe and the EU reaction has been totally passive. That is obvious. The probability of use of nuclear weapons have radically increased during the Trump Administration.



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The decision by the US to reject the JCPOA is a violation of the UN Charter because that JCPOA was adopted by the UN Security Council and the binding rules. Now, it will be hardship in Iran so the security situation and the nuclear security situation has been seriously harmed and this is a matter that countries around are suffering. The situation is dramatized, we are facing a very serious situation ahead in the Gulf because of the JCPOA and it's important that US allies try to speak.

Michael Singh, Managing Director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy:

The JCPOA for the Obama Administration was both an attempt to deal with the nuclear threat of Iran but also as an exit of the US from the Middle East. I think, ultimately, what recent events show is that the US cannot really shelter itself from the effects of what happens in this region. Even if we are going to say we have priorities elsewhere, we will need to find a sustainable way, at a cost that is reasonable, of safeguarding our interests in this region.

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We've had 40 years of conflict with Iran so assuming it will continue with or without the JCPOA is a safe bet. I anticipate we will have that conflict and we will need to determine how we can use diplomacy to mitigate that conflict where we can and to contain and deter Iran where it's necessary to do so.

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European engagement in Middle East: In the past, one thing that the US leadership and engagement in the region has done is it has provided a sort of platform for engagement of partners around the world. And sometimes, those countries have engaged by opposing US policy, sometimes by joining in and supporting it, and one of the challenges that US disengagement from the region poses is that these other partners around the world are left without an American initiative to respond to. It has made them uncertain about their own engagement in the region. What has been one of the hallmarks of US engagement in the region is that our partnerships have been enduring partnerships. Some of these partners have come and go, and Russia and China have engaged more on tactical relationships.