

HUBERT VEDRINE

Former French Foreign Minister

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The tone has been pretty positive so far. Now we come to the Middle East, and I think that while it is generally conceded that this area of the world has enormous problems, the outcome to those problems is increasingly accepted and pretty clear, that is, two states living side by side in peace. Therefore, we will discuss the Middle East, but we will also discuss it in the context of how we get to that solution, and the context of the Persian Gulf, particularly the Iranian opportunity, or problem as you see it. I welcome the comments of our speakers on that as well. Setting the framework for the comments for our participants from the Middle East, I would like to introduce an old friend, one of the world's great strategic thinkers, Hubert Védrine, the former Foreign Minister of France.

Hubert Védrine

We all believe that the suggested topic is central, yet completely deadlocked. We are all overwhelmed. To bring a bit of fresh air, I would like to outline for you a small and quick political fiction scenario: which is a peace scenario.

First of all, the Israeli Prime Minister tells the President of the United States that he would like to move, but cannot. He is the prisoner of an absurd electoral system. But Israeli public opinion is open to the idea. The Palestinian President, meanwhile, says he can't grant any more concessions, and that he's already given away everything he has! The President of the United States maintains that it is no longer possible to remain in this absurd situation, which is a major problem for the West. Make things happen. The peoples expect it. And this is not where tomorrow's world real challenge lies.

What's more, everyone knows what the solution is. So the US President says to the Israeli Prime Minister: let's go! If the Prime Minister hesitates too long, the US President will tell him in private: I'm ready to exert some pressure. I won't say it publicly, but I'm prepared to see it through. So are you with me or not? Either come as you are, or change your majority. Sort yourself out. Or hold an election.

Together, they find a solution and commit to it. The US President goes to Israel. He stands alongside the Israeli Prime Minister and says: we are going to make peace. The terrorists are not going to stop us. As Yitzhak Rabin said, "I shall pursue the peace process as if there were no terrorism, but I shall, of course, fight terrorism as if there were no peace process." This applies to everyone, in every camp, including those external powers that might want to torpedo the policy. We need to proceed quickly.

They go there together. They speak directly to Israeli public opinion to make the most of its openness and political maturity. At this stage, they're not concerned with the Palestinians. That will come later. Then they turn to the Jewish communities outside Israel, in particular the lobbying organisations in the United States and Europe, which have focused on holding a firm line for the last 20 years, but which are now beginning to be challenged to some extent by more liberal organisations and those in favour of peace. Together, the Israeli Prime Minister and the US President address the most reluctant groups. They tell them that they will not stop, that they will go so quickly they will not be able to stop them, that they will get results before anyone can stop them.

They also talk to the Iranians and a few others, and also tell them they will not be able to stop them.



The negotiations are held on neutral territory. Not at Camp David, which serves as a reminder of great achievements, but also failures, and which is in the United States. They need to be somewhere else, somewhere neutral.

The United States are in control. There are the Israelis. There is the Palestinian Authority. Hamas is told that it is welcome to rejoin the process if it wants to. As a result, Hamas is divided, between ideologists and politicians. There is a split between those who want to be part of the process and the rest. They are not excluded on principle. Around them, not far away, there are delegations from the European Union as a whole, one from those European countries which have cards they can play with the Israelis, like Germany and the Netherlands, and those who take a broader approach, like Spain, France, Great Britain or Italy. There is also Turkey. Saudi Arabia. There is the Arab League, Morocco, Qatar, etc. There are all the partners, all those who might be needed at a particular point, who aren't directly involved in the negotiations but aren't far away.

The negotiations are successful quite quickly, because everyone knows what the solution is. Solutions for the most complex points, such as Jerusalem, or refugees, are found at the last minute. Initially, both sides are crippled by mistrust and by the past. No one will put its cards on the table. But in the end, they find a solution. Immediately afterwards, a kind of gigantic Marshall Plan is triggered. This would be pointless without a political solution, but once a solution is in place it becomes extremely useful. It not only benefits Palestine, including Gaza, but the whole region. These prospects are presented to public opinion in advance. "This is what we're going to do together." Money is found in the United States, in Europe, in individual European countries, in Jewish communities around the world, many of whom are wavering at this point, and agree to contribute to funding and supporting a two-State solution. The same happens in the rich Arab countries, the Emirates and others. The US President has long promised the Israelis that they would take care of their security for as long as necessary in both military and technological terms. Let's remember what John-Paul II said about Eastern Europe: "Don't be afraid of peace. Together we are going to create a completely different kind of Middle East."

The negotiations continue. A mechanism for a periodic bilateral relationship between Israel and Palestine is put in place immediately. They will meet every two weeks, or every month, and they will examine the problems together at regional summits.

Negotiations with Syria can then begin on a firm footing. And naturally, the relationships between Syria and Lebanon and Israel and Lebanon are transformed as a result. A special plan is put in place for Gaza.

In the meantime, Hamas has re-formed. It has not been able to keep refusing: the dynamic was too strong. There has been a complete shake-up. A kind of "international monitoring" scheme is put in place for Gaza. Effectively, the Israeli sticking point comes first and the Palestinian problem is further downstream. We need to reduce the divisions which have been systematically created on the Palestinian side and are now deep. The aim is that within three, four or five years, a young man in Gaza, in despair because his cousins or his friends have been killed by the Israeli army, ends up thinking that it makes more sense to open up a pizzeria than to blow himself up at a checkpoint. It will take time. It needs donor countries to act reasonably and be patient.

At that point we will see a new Middle East, which will bring Jordan and other countries in its wake.

Together they will be a kind of emerging dragon.

That's all I wanted to say. Now, you can compare it with reality.