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I am honoured to be here. Thank you everyone. Speaking about the Middle East is not an easy job. It is difficult, even for us living in the region, maybe more so than you because you can see it from outside. I have prepared a few papers, but I do not think I have enough time to present the whole subject in a way that is as well structured as I would wish, so I will go through parts regarding the events taking place in the Middle East, the Arab uprising and what is going on in Egypt and Syria and the situation in Iraq.

I just came from Cairo, where I participated in a conference about the Arab constitutions in the five Arab countries where the uprising has succeeded, which are Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Tunisia. This is our problem. The people of each country and the whole region should take responsibility. In Iraq or in the other Arab countries, we live in a region with a long history. The Middle East, land of jurisprudence as it is called, created so many things, the Code of Hammurabi, the Pyramids, all these great civilisations in the Middle East. More than that, the three religions were born in the Middle East, so it has a great history.

What took place that brought backwardness to one of the most flourishing regions of the world? Are they religious factors? I do not think so. In *Islam and Capitalism*, Maxime Rodinson said that in the 11th century, the Middle East, especially Baghdad and Iraq and the whole system at that time had united all the factors to develop from a feudal system to a capitalist system. There was an accumulation of wealth, free labour power, manufacturing and big markets. There were other factors, but in the 11th century, there was already a lot of development in all kinds of sciences, physics, algebra and mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, medicine, music, poetry. All these activities were very developed in this region.

What happened? Why do we witness this lack of gravity and loss of dynamism and initiative for reform and change in the Middle East? Why do we have such a vacuum in the Middle East? Certainly, there are some internal factors that have caused weaknesses, but also something took place around the Middle East, such as the change in maritime routes. The region was the Road of Silk, but major changes took place, such as the discovery of America and more gold came to the Middle East from abroad. The Middle East lacked gold and depended on silver, and this is a financial issue. Maybe there was a lack of development in new discoveries and contemporary sciences, administration, good governance.

A big change took place in the region and at the end of the 18th or start of the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire collapsed. In the late 19th century, early 20th century, there was a big movement in Egypt with Muhammad Ali Pasha, in Turkey with the Young Turks and in Iran the Mashrutiyat, which was a constitutional effort to do to modernize governance, but at the same time to remain faithful to one's own history. The Japanese and Chinese style. I think circumstances gave only a short time for this understanding to relate rupture with continuity to deepen its roots and build its methods. The result of this was a big historical mistake in the diversion of the historical course of the region. One example of rupture would be the divorce with the tyrannical or despotic regimes, to be substituted by democratic systems based on a very well rooted historical practices and concepts of contractual relationships between the rulers and the citizens. If you cut yourself off from your history, then you will get uprooted and lost. If you depend on external elements only without adjusting them to the internal understanding and cultures, then you will build a superficial experience. And that is what took place.

I think such things took place with Western powers coming to the region, bringing new theories on how to govern, how to administer. Of course, with ambitions of new commerce, they came as colonisers, not as liberators. When General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude entered Baghdad, he said, 'I came as a liberator' but as a matter of fact, he came as a coloniser. We did not have a French or American colonisation in Iraq at that time. In fact, Iraqis wrote letters to President Wilson about self-determination. At that time, we saw the United States as a liberating force. This changed later on.

The result of all this on the regional level was the foundation of some unconstitutional states using repression and the support of colonial powers, especially France and Great Britain to maintain power. After World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States imposed themselves. Of course, as I said, there has been a lack of gravity in the region, or what we can call a vacuum, first with the creation of the State of Israel. This presented the region as if it were empty of people and this allowed outsiders to act on the fallacy that they can give a "people without land to a land without people." It shows the vacuum in all aspects, whether it is geography, whether it is ideas concepts, administration, science and everything else

All those factors accumulated and the new uprising in the region is, as I see it, a consequence of all this. We are returning back to the late 19th century or the early 20th century, with people asking for constitution, democracy, the right for services and human rights. People are asking to respect their historical identity and cultures, and small communities and minorities are asking for protection and self-recognition. These events might have surprised many people. In Iraq, we were not surprised because we were victims of oppression for a long time and we struggled with our blood to gain our liberty. Of course, later on, the Americans came and achieved the task, but it was the Iraqi blood and suffering that made the change possible.

The uprising in the Arab world is a very positive development and we can already see the results. This is a historic change. There are no ideological slogans. We did not see them in Tunisia, Egypt or Yemen. People are asking for their rights, but this process will not be an easy one. What is required is not a coup d'état, like what took place in the 1930s and 1940s; otherwise, the issue could have been settled fast. A coup d'état would replace one governor by another, not too different. We will have to wait to see. It may take years or it may take decades, but the Middle East will probably reach that desired outcome, but it will go through difficult times in the process.

We will see some weakening of the central state itself. Maybe we will see a strengthening of local powers, de facto authorities here and there, as we have already seen in Somalia, for example, or in Yemen or even Lebanon and in my country, Iraq. We might see more and more local authorities growing instead of one unitary state with full sovereign authority on its integral territories. Maybe we will see radical forces emerging, which I think is understandable and expected. International actors and all political forces in Arab countries must look at this objectively and try to contain this. We have to work at it together, secular ideas with religious ones. We have to do it by respecting the continuity and rupture principles.

We need to cut a part from our history, but there is a part we should continue with - otherwise we will obtain a dysfunctional creature. We have to see things correctly. In Syria, there is a very bloody war going on. The Syrian people are paying heavily and I think the situation should change. There cannot be one party or one man governing the country. The Syrian people should have their complete rights, but in ways based on compromise, not in the way we see now with daily bloody clashes, destroying cities, killing people and leading nowhere.

We have to live with the uprising in the region and in each country, work on it and try to enhance it. With all the sufferings, but this environment is better than before. We need international actors to work together - America, Europe, Asia, China and Russia having common understanding, instead of each trying to take advantage for his own. The situation in the Middle East is very dangerous. With all the oil we have, the region could be inflamed. The world settled the disputes in Vietnam, Northern Ireland, the Balkan region and Latin America. But for the last 30 years, most conflicts took place in the Greater Middle East, such as the Afghan war, the Iran/Iraq war, the war in Kuwait, the American war in Iraq, the wars with Israel, the Lebanon and Gaza situation.

The Middle East is still a region of turmoil, and it could put the world in a dangerous situation, so more attention should be given there. The whole world is interested in the Middle East, so it is something in common to all of us, not only to the people of that region. That is why meetings such as this one need to take place to see what is going on in the Middle East and try to find the right solutions for the people there and for the whole world.

I must thank the World Policy Conference for giving me this opportunity. Thank you for your kind words, Mr Secretary. Thank you for bringing all these people here. I wish you Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.