

XIAOSHENG GONG

China's Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue

Thank you, Mr Chairman and everyone. Over the past 30 years, I have worked in practically every country in the Middle East. I was based in Cairo, Palestine, Jordan, and Turkey. I have some experience but I could sense the feelings of the people in this region. Today, I just want to talk about a few points. First about the region. Everyone talks about the worries and problems but as an outsider, a foreigner, I feel that during the last 30 years there have been great changes in this region. When I first worked in Cairo, I flew from Beijing to Karachi and then to Cairo. I had no choice but to wait 10 days in Karachi for the flight to Cairo because there was no direct flight between Cairo and China. When I flew from Beijing to Karachi, I felt that I was going from the countryside to a city. Then flying from Karachi to Cairo was like going from the countryside to the city. Cairo was a very beautiful, modern city compared to Beijing at that time, where all the buildings were grey and everyone dressed in blue or green.

After 30 years, I have seen great changes in China; everybody knows that, but also in the region. When we talk about the problems and the crisis in Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, I feel very sorry for the people, the war, and killing and fighting. However, at the same time coming here to Doha, I was shocked to find a miracle, a desert city that has become a very modern city, and even better, one more beautiful than New York or Paris. Therefore, I believe very strongly that this region has a very bright future because, where they used to create very great history, I believe they can also create a very bright future in maybe the next 10 years, or even longer.

Secondly, my work. Before I was named special representative for China in the Middle East, I was the ambassador of China to Palestine. I spent a very difficult time in Gaza and the Ramallah. I was the last Chinese ambassador to meet former President Mr Arafat, just 20 days before he passed away. I then worked in Jordan and Turkey. I have worked in this region for more than 10 years and I found there were great changes. A lot of people talk about Chinese rule and interest in this region. I think I should introduce people to Chinese thinking. What are the Chinese interested in? The Chinese are interested in the stability of development in this region. We have no special interest other than this. We hope that this region can be peaceful and stable, with development. For this region, we try very hard to talk with everyone, with almost every country. Over the last two years, I have visited forty countries, visiting one, two, or three countries every month, attended international conferences and meetings. On Chinese policy in the Middle East, what I could say to emphasize first of all is that we strongly believe that the Middle East needs a comprehensive solution.

There are two parts to that: first, passing initially through Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, those four hot spots in crisis should be considered together. The international community should not emphasise the crisis in just one or two and forget others, especially Palestine issues. Secondly, when we talk about the peace process, political dialogue, and political solutions, we should also consider economic development, security, and stability. Those issues should be considered together.

I think that the third element of Chinese policy is to have very good friends in almost every country, so we have very good relations with almost every Arab country and with Israel. We hope that we can be a 'cooperator'; we would like to cooperate with everyone. We hope that we have even better relations with every country and every side and everybody knows that in recent years our President has developed the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Silk Road initiative. I think this is very important, not just for China or the region, but for the world in the future. One Belt, One Road is not just an economic initiative; it also has special political meaning because when we talk about those problems we should not forget that the argument may be the most useful key to those problems. China would like to be more positive, more active in the future in this region.

Thank you.