

# ODEH ABURDENE

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## Miguel Ángel MORATINOS

We will conclude a bit behind schedule with the topic which, from a personal and professional point of view, we cannot avoid or ignore. I am referring to the traditional subject of conflict in the Middle East, the peace process. We are going to talk about the peace process. In this peace process, there is still a process, but there is no plan for peace. We have with us a Palestinian American, Odeh Aburdene, who will take the floor to explain the perspective, the Palestinian vision and afterwards we will have our friend, Itamar Rabinovich, who will briefly address us from the perspective of Israel. Without further ado: Odeh Aburdene.

## Odeh ABURDENE

Thank you very much, it's a great pleasure to be with such a distinguished panel. I would just like to comment on a couple of topics that were discussed before we get into Palestine.

First, if you look at the Arab region, you need stability. There are two ways to achieve stability- either by consent or by imposition. In the past 50 years, stability was based on imposition and we have seen that it did not work, whether you look at Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen or Libya. In my view, you need to have stability by consent.

On the economic side, I think Dr. Azour made an excellent presentation where he covered all the points. There are three points that I would have highlighted- corruption, rule of law, and education and innovation. To have economic growth, you have to eliminate corruption because corruption is rampant and the population knows it. Corruption is a form of taxation by the private sector on the whole population. Even when American companies want to do business in the region, they are very worried about the corruption aspect. The rule of law is a necessary ingredient to bring foreign investment. Finally, the Arab region has to combine good education, science, and technology to achieve economic growth and jobs for their young population.

The Arab region lacks a culture of venture capitalists. You need people who are willing to take risks on ideas and people. There is plenty of liquidity in the various Arab banks, but they are not willing to risk money on a scientist, entrepreneur, or an engineer who has innovative ideas and projects, and that is a major impediment for the region and their economies. You need a culture of risk-taking as trading and building real estate does not really create jobs.

Just before I came here, I calculated that five US multinational companies- Apple, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Amazon- have a market value that exceeds the value of all the oil of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. These companies were established in the last 50 years. They did not have gold, they did not have oil and they did not have minerals. It came from human capital that is creative and an environment that allows for freedom of information and security of thought and speech. Lastly, I have to say, human capital is the key to modernisation and innovation in the Arab world.

Now, regarding Palestine, this is a very complex issue. It has been with us since 1948. Many people have tried to fix it, starting with President Carter and then President Reagan, Clinton, and Obama, and it has been difficult. As someone who worked for an oil company, I am an optimist. I always believe there is hope. There is a way. I know that wars and peace are made by people. They are not made by machines or by technology.

Now, as I look at the situation today, I see some signs of hope and despair. My first hope is that there is going to be a Palestinian reconciliation. Whether or not it will succeed, we have to wait and see, but at least for the first time in many years, the Palestinian plane does not have four or five pilots. It has one pilot, one authority and one address. Again it was Egypt who played the role in reconciling the Palestinian factions, and I think behind Egypt, you have Saudi Arabia and Jordan



Without the US, you cannot have peace. The US is the only power that has good relations with both sides and I am told when Trump went to Riyadh in the Gulf and indicated that he is going to make the “bargain of the century,” the Gulf Arabs welcomed that opportunity. This new development, if it materialises, could be an opportunity, so the question becomes, ‘Will Mr Netanyahu seize that opportunity?’ I know there are relationships under the table and there are relationships above the table. Jared Kushner has been meeting with ambassadors from these countries, and he just went to Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region, so that is where I feel there is hope. There is hope if President Trump and Jared Kushner are serious about peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Trump and Kushner should realize that without a commitment to the King Abdullah peace plan which the Arabs have accepted, peace efforts will falter.

The Palestinians realise that peace is in their interests, however, the Palestinian leadership today will not go into negotiations unless the following is clear—they want to see a clear path to a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. It cannot be like what happened since Oslo, so if the path is clear, I think the Palestinians will negotiate. On what terms will they negotiate? There are red lines that no Palestinian can afford to take and that is on Jerusalem. The Palestinians feel that East Jerusalem, Arab Jerusalem has to be linked to a Palestinian state, which has to be sovereign. I know the Palestinians, on many occasions have made it clear that they will accept NATO forces, American forces, and Arab troops to provide security for both sides. It is not easy, but it is doable if the U.S. engages assertively and even handedly and work towards brokering a deal that will include Arab Jerusalem within a Palestinian state with the above mentioned stipulations. The ball is in Mr. Netanyahu’s court, if he wants a genuine and lasting peace.

**Miguel Ángel MORATINOS**

Thank you for giving us hope.