



# MIGUEL ÁNGEL MORATINOS

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**Steven ERLANGER**

Miguel, over to you.

**Miguel Angel MORATINOS**

Good evening, everybody. Again, we are witnessing the situation in the Middle East, again a new panel about the Middle East, again listening to the war and gloomy situation in the Middle East. I do not know what our role will be, because to hear here and there what the situation is, how gloomy the perspective for the future is, which could give us a sense of nostalgia for the past but cannot help us to redefine a way to get out of this tremendous mess. In my short period of life, I am of course getting older and older every year, I have never been confronted with such a situation in the Middle East. Never, ever, I would say before the Madrid Peace Conference, we can compare with today, we have never had such confusion, chaos and lack of hope for the generations that live in the Middle East.

There is a famous quotation, my dear Itamar, from your former Foreign Minister, Abba Eban. He said that the Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity. I will rephrase this quotation and say that the international community never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity in the Middle East. Why are we in such a mess today? I will try to identify three main historical rendezvous, or three main events that have produced the situation today.

The first one was in 2000, which was the year of the new millennium and we were very happy and particularly all convinced that peace was at hand. I remember how Barack was elected, everybody was ready to help him, and he was going to have a final peace deal with the Syrians. The situation in the Middle East, the United States, European, private sector, everybody was enthusiastic. What happened? We missed this opportunity. It was not only because Barack failed in Geneva, succeeding with Hafez Al-Assad. By the way, that was the beginning of the end, how the Syrian talks in Geneva failed. Then, Barack immediately moved to say that he needed an agreement with the Palestinians, let us go to Camp David and then they failed, and everybody singled out Arafat as the one to blame for everything. Then, we tried and there were Clinton Parameters, Taba talks and at these Taba talks, everything collapsed. Sharon was elected and the traditional way to solve the peace in the Middle East was lost. There were no more bilateral talks. Ehud Olmert tried, his was the last attempt, but the traditional way to solve this Israeli-Palestinian conflict was abandoned.

The second highlight was immediately after in 2001, with 9/11, when unfortunately, we have this tremendous shock, the collapse of the Twin Towers and the new approach towards the region. Of course, it was security that was considered the main and only element in the talks, in the negotiations. It was not about peace like in Madrid, it was security, security, security. Therefore, we had to address the security concerns of Israel and then the American administration committed as our friend has just mentioned, this strategic, historical mistake, to intervene in Iraq. That becomes, you know as Hosni el Mubarak was to tell me, the major mistake in history and the whole crazy spread of radicalism, terrorism, that we are suffering today.

The third highlight is the so-called Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was considered as the beginning of a new page in the history of Arab society, with democracy, rule of law. In reality it was a covert operation. Let me be frank, it was a covert operation in order to guarantee the chain of energy from North Africa to the Middle East and to Afghanistan. The people in the region did not really understand what it was. Of course, they wanted democracy, but on what conditions and the West and Europeans were not able to really respond to this new challenge because we were not prepared.



The parties in the Arab world were also not prepared themselves and were imposed with the Muslim Brotherhood in these new elections, as you said Mona, as a consequence of that.

These three main elements give us the sense today of a really chaotic situation. What can we do? We have to go to the basics, which means number one, as our friend Odeh said, you cannot forget the Israeli-Palestinian issue. It is going to be there forever if we do not solve it, but you have to address it in a different manner. We cannot continue to do that, we cannot go back to the negotiating table as in the past. We have to have a political will to do so. Unfortunately, today neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis are really prepared to engage seriously. It is even worse than it was before Madrid. We should start to back-channels to convince them to meet again secretly. Can you imagine that after 25 years we have to start from square one? We have to get a real legitimacy to engage on both sides.

Then, there is the role of third-parties. My dear friends, it has been by conviction, the parties say that the US is the honest broker, the only one that can deliver, and my experience, not my will, has demonstrated to me that United States alone cannot facilitate the deal. Unless we in the international community, Arabs, Europeans and the Americans work together, we will not be able to solve that problem. If we continue to wait for Godot, forget Godot, Godot is not coming, and Godot is now even worse because he is not an honest broker. The Palestinians will not want to talk to them, so they will need the Europeans to have that. Why do we not get and resume what our friend Laurent Fabius tried in Paris? It was a very genuine and honest intention to put everybody around the table to find a solution. It came in a very complicated world, but you had the courage, Laurent, to make everybody work together. We have to invent a new way. Why not use energy, for instance, as a catalyst? Why don't the South Eastern Mediterranean countries instead of fighting for demarcation of the oil and gas reserves, create something like a European high authority that can share and coordinate the use and exploration of energy? That would produce something different. Why not invent new proposals so that Israelis and the Palestinians can find a way?

Secondly, we have to start to have this reconciliation in the Arab world. In the West we have a lot of responsibility, so okay, we are absent, we do not help, but what about our brothers and friends the Arabs? What are they doing themselves? Why do they not get together? After what happened with the journalist Khashoggi, why do they not take this occasion to say enough and to reconcile. After the Yemen war, why don't they have a kind of new bond with Iran? Why don't the Arabs decide by themselves to say, we are adults and we want to have a better future for our children, the future generations? We Europeans and the Americans can help, but the Europeans do not always have to be present. We have to work together, and I think we can be mates.

My last word is that finally, today the situation is gloomy, desperate, frustrating, but when are we going to be serious? When are we each going to take the responsibility to propose and act in a way that can solve this part of the problem of the Middle East? It will benefit everybody and of course, it will decrease spending on weapons, because that is the paradox, the Middle East is the region where there is most expenditure on military budgets. 5% of every national budget is for military weapons and they have increased the military budget by 60% all together. That is my proposal.

**Steven ERLANGER**

Thank you very much and thank you for trying to look ahead. It is very much appreciated.