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Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, I think we are all very happy to be here. I am now very happy to be with Dr. Anwar Gargash, who had an extremely distinguished career as a university professor in international law and international relations. He served for more than 10 years as Secretary of State and is known as the Kissinger of the United Arab Emirates. He is now the Diplomatic Advisor to the President of the United Arab Emirates and the Diplomatic Institute here bears his name, which is a unique honor. I know you find it a bit embarrassing Anwar, but it is the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Institute of the United Arab Emirates. If I may, I will just say we are friends and this conference would never have taken place in Abu Dhabi, as it is the case these days, if we had not discussed this project and other subjects, over the last two years.

It is a great privilege to have you with us today and I will start the discussion immediately with a simple broad question. In the last two years since we started to discuss the possibility of having the conference here, the world has changed in several major ways. Obviously, there is the pandemic, which is not yet over, and we had some interesting discussion on the subject this morning. Also, there is the acceleration of the Sino-US rivalry, with the new President of the United States, the Afghanistan withdrawal and more recently, the shock for some of us of what is now called AUKUS, etc. I have a very simple question; how do you assess the consequences of these major changes on the regional geopolitical situation?

Anwar Mohammed Gargash

Thank you for your kind words, Thierry. I am really happy and pleased to be here and I see a lot of friends, so I say hello to all of them and I wish you all a good conference. To start the conversation and from the perspective here in the Gulf from the United Arab Emirates, we really see several dimensions to the changes in the international system. On the one hand, I think the pandemic makes it very clear that our geostrategic priorities should not only be political priorities but can also be about other issues. These other issues include, as we have seen, the pandemic with all its effects on the economy, people's lives, working habits, etc. I think this brought to the UAE, and I am sure to many other countries, a reorientation of priorities. Suddenly the priorities that were important for us in the UAE, but perhaps not as persistent, such as for example, food security, the logistics chain, etc., became extremely important. I think we need to concentrate on this dimension of the international and not allow politicians to forget it because concentrating on it brings about what I would say is positive change rather than going back to the old ways. I would say that on one level, non-political priorities taking precedence over the political priorities is something totally unprecedented and new. There might have been moments in the international system where this was the case but

certainly nothing in our current media, where we live, how we travel, etc., has been affected like this. I can tell you that through its very concerted effort to deal with Covid-19, the UAE has learnt many lessons. I think the important thing is that our memories should be longer rather than shorter on this issue, here in the UAE and in other areas.

I think the second important issue is the multipolar nature of the political system. Clearly, this has been an ongoing phase in the international system. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the international system witnessed a very brief American moment. Although the United States remains dominant and most important, the international system is clearly not unipolar. What we have very clearly today is the presence of China and I think that Chinese economic, political and technological presence in many regions in the world will stay with us. I think we are all very worried by a looming cold war and I think for countries, like for all of us present in this hall, that is bad news because the idea of choosing is problematic in the international system. This is not going to be an easy ride but clearly, China will continue to become extremely important. It is sometimes easier to understand America's direction than China's direction because of the nature and openness of the debate. While America's direction is something that you can glean from various readings, conferences and discussions, I think understanding China's direction is more opaque. However, fundamentally, I think this is going to be a big challenge for all of us. For us here in the UAE, the United States is our predominant strategic partner, but China with India is our number one or two economic partner. I also do not think that the issue is only about America and China. If you look at our country, the UAE has what I would call core economic and strategic relations with India, Korea, Japan and all these countries have their own rivalry and problems with China. It is not just about recalibrating Chinese-American relations or American-Chinese relations, I think it is also recalibrating many others. For example, India is our closest large neighbor, or largest neighbor, and it is in competition with China on how much trade we do and also, India is on the ascendancy at the same time. I think for a country our size, we are very concerned about this looming cold war and I hope it does not come to that, although realistically, all the signals are not very encouraging.

On the third level, which is the regional level, and this is directing a lot of our current foreign policy and policy movement, the region is not much better currently than it was two years ago. I think the areas of potential confrontation have not lessened so it will actually need from all of us an understanding that it is communication not confrontation that is the way forward. It does not mean that we will be able to change Iran's or Turkey's perceptions of their roles in the region, or how we see the Arab world and how it should come back to a livelier regional system. At the same time, I think we also need to understand that it is extremely important that we avoid confrontation and even though the road to communication is longer and frustrating, we really have no other option.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. I think for most countries represented in this room, the problem of avoiding being forced to choose is really a fundamental concern. Many of us, including for example the members of NATO, consider the United States to be more predictable than China because we know more about it. However, the direction is clearly that they will try to force us

to choose and for example, to transform the Atlantic alliance into an anti-Chinese alliance, even if those words are not used.

It is a very big challenge, but for the Middle East and the Gulf in particular, it seems to me that there are two apparently opposite trends. On the one hand, logically they should try to push you to take sides, but on the other, there is another trend which is the withdrawal or partial withdrawal from the Middle East, which paved the way for more active policies on the part of Russia and Turkey, for example. In analytical terms, how would you balance these two trends, one pushing you to take sides and the other becoming more indifferent, if I can use that word?

Anwar Mohammed Gargash

I think we have several problems here. I think the first is that we really have no Arab discussion on all these things. Really everyone is on their own except for bilateral discussions that we may have with Egypt or Saudi Arabia, as two of our closest friends. In general, I think the Arab political system has really decayed over the last decade or two and these important issues need to be discussed and I do not think any of the issues we have spoken about have been discussed. I think that is a problem. I would also say that we have to understand that the United Arab Emirates is a medium-sized country in its political gravitas and economic weight, so we really have no option other than to explain ourselves, communicating. For example, we need to use our time in the UN Security Council over the next two years to make sure that a rules-based political system is the one that governs this international system. I do not think we can definitely change the course of the big players, the United States or China, but I think communication is extremely important. If there are concerns and worries, we need to address them. As you also understand, at times these political cold wars or confrontations happen with very little thought, positions are taken, and it is really only later that people start rethinking their thought processes. I would say that we need to communicate with our partners and friends. We need to emphasize the rules-based international system, because it is in our interests, as it is in the interests of everybody else.

Yet, you raised something very important, and this is really about the presence and commitment in the Middle East. I think that Afghanistan is a big test. In the coming period we will really see what is going on with regard to America's footprint in the region. I do not think we know yet, but Afghanistan is definitely a test and to be honest, it is a very worrying test. I think Europe is different because the United States has more of an internationalist, Atlanticist and NATO view on Europe. The Far East is different too because the United States see that tilt to the Far East, so you have this grey area in the middle. I think part of what we need to do is manage our region better because, as I said, there is a vacuum and whenever there is a vacuum, there is trouble. It is essential for us to avoid vacuums. It is essential for us to talk and communicate, and to also understand that doing so does not necessarily mean we will change certain policies, but that we do need this de-escalation. I see that as a major issue.

Thierry de Montbrial

When you say us, sometimes you say the Arab world, sometimes the Middle East, sometimes the Gulf countries, so can you elaborate a bit on who 'us' is?

Anwar Mohammed Gargash

I think that using 'us' in these different things tell you the sort of issue we have here. I think we start with the national state, because to be honest I do not really see the level of collective openness and discussions beyond the nation state, but we need to push that forward. We need to say that these levels of analysis are changing the international system and because of that it is really too big for any single country to address where its place in this international system should be. I do not think it is about seeking to challenge anybody, I think it is about securing this area that a lot of people see as the source of half the world's issues. Some people say we have wasted too much blood and treasure on it, and we should move on. I think the Middle East will not let you go away and that is really the lesson from the region. You might want to go away but the Middle East will not let you leave, either because of national issues or thematic issues. I think that is a major issue.

Thierry de Montbrial

I have another question. You stressed the rules-based international system, but last time Xi Jinping went to Davos he appeared as the great defender of the rules-based system. The problem is who sets, not the rules but the changes of the rules? Today, the great challenge is that the Chinese, to take that example, and the United States do not share the same views about what the rules should be. How do you think, using communication and the other moves you are describing, we the in-between, can cooperate to have some real weight on how the rules will be adapted?

Anwar Mohammed Gargash

I think this is a very good question. To start on the conceptual level, in the Biden administration you have an administration that actually comes out and says that it wants a rules-based international system. The Chinese are saying the same and the Europeans are also arguing for that. I think it is in the interests of countries like us in the Arab world and other areas, in Africa and Asia, to call for that. I think that conceptually there is agreement on this religion, this rules-based international system. I think that, as you said, drilling down is the problem and here, we need to speak out. We need to say the world is not ready for another Cold War and I think if this message gets across to the Chinese, the Americans and others. I think in itself this will create what I would call a moral collective and that would be something very positive. It is not easy, but I am saying what other option is there. Is it to allow the international system to continue on its current trajectory and end up where we are all afraid it will end up, without too much thought or control? Or is it something where we can all come collectively and say it is in the interest of everyone? We understand that a big confrontation is coming for international system dominance but let us at least try to control this trajectory. I do not know if that answers the question.

Thierry de Montbrial

You know, Anwar, because we have discussed it so many times, that the real purpose of the World Policy Conference is precisely to develop this kind of dialogue within the in-between world, that is all the middle powers, not the superpowers of the day. Therefore, our challenge is precisely to elaborate on these sorts of things.

Having spoken of 'us' or 'we', I would like to slightly enlarge them to explicitly include Europe, restricting ourselves as a first step to the European Union. I am hesitating as I say that because I am also thinking of the UK, which makes it slightly more difficult. Nevertheless, what do you expect from us as the Europeans?

Anwar Mohammed Gargash

I would say two things here. I would say that the collective European policy should be more pragmatic and realistic. In my opinion, because it includes so many countries, Europe has not always been able to produce what I would say are cohesive, collective policies. I think, looking from here towards Europe, the voices of pragmatism should be the main voices, for what is possible rather than what is a very high ceiling that is impossible to reach. I think that is extremely important. I think this will depend a lot on Franco-German cooperation and synergy over the coming two or three years and whether this is going to produce a more realistic, cohesive policy. Again, if you look at our policy as the UAE, we are doing very well on the bilateral level. We are doing very well with France, the UK and many other European countries, but I think there is a huge gap collectively between a policy that is propagated and one that is ready to apply on the ground. I think reducing that gap would be very good for Europe, but also for Europe's traditional partners such as the UAE. That is extremely important for us.

We also look at the recent rift, for example, between Paris and Washington and we are not happy about this. We would also like to see more cohesion among our traditional partners because we do not really want to play them off against each other because our partnerships are extremely different. That is extremely important. Also, a more realistic, pragmatic approach from Europe is required in the coming period.