

## FAREED YASSEEN

### Ambassador of Iraq to the United States

First, thank you all for being here. I want to start by talking about the place we are in. A couple of days ago we all noted three reasons to celebrate and congratulate the UAE: the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their national day, the Expo and, of course, holding the WPC. In itself, that is a remarkable achievement because, as was mentioned earlier, it is the first major intellectual event that has been held in-person.

I am the Iraqi Ambassador to the United States and today is also a very special day for me. Iraqis now have two reasons to celebrate, the first is that in about a week we will be holding elections. They are important, our second post-ISIS elections and all signals indicate that things are going if not ideally, reasonably well for us to be quite hopeful. The second reason is that the Council of Ministers has decided that today should be Iraq's national holiday. It marks the adhesion of the Iraqi state, freshly out of the post-World War I mandate into the League of Nations. That happened 99 years ago. I mention it because very shortly thereafter Muzahim Pachachi became the representative of Iraq to the League of Nations. He eventually became Prime Minister. I mention him because he is the father of Adnan Pachachi, Minister of State of Abu Dhabi and a friend of Sheikh Zayed, and also the person who raised the UAE flag at the United Nations. I mention this because I was one of his close advisors and it is with him that I went back to Iraq after an absence of 30 years, onboard a UAE plane. If I am here, it is partly because of that so when I say thank you to the United Arab Emirates, I really mean it: thank you.

So far, we have had two days of very high value content and we are all the richer for it. I would like to highlight the fact that such meetings show world complexity as it is: there is the interplay within globalization, and that we need to work together to solve these real problems, one of which is the impact of the pandemic. There is the question of addressing the digital world. We have covered regions of tensions between the EU, the US and China, problems of finance and we have spent time talking about issues that need global governance for them to be addressed, such as global terrorism. Note that the anti-ISIS coalition led by the United States, counts some 83 countries, of which the UAE and Iraq. There is the financial crisis, and you all know the G20's role in addressing it. The pandemic and the World Health Organization and Covax have been discussed. Then there are the major threats to the environment, which are existential. To give you a number, I think at this point we have 190 adherents to the Paris Accord. There are other issues that I think need to be addressed globally. For example, corruption is one of the elements that sponsor global terrorism.

However, we are here today to focus on the Middle East and its relationships with external powers. This is not a new subject because the Middle East has been the focus of external powers for quite a long time. All I need to do is to mention Napoleon's expedition to Egypt,



followed later by the colonization by several European powers of the Middle East in the wake of World War I, the League of Nations mandates, the discovery of oil, etc. Our friend Arnaud Breuillac reminds us that TotalEnergies was born many years ago in Iraq, as for that matter was OPEC. The famous Quincy meeting, which exemplifies the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia, the creation of the state of Israel, then the Cold War with the Baghdad pact and other groupings, the Kuwait war, George H.W. Bush, the Global War on Terror with George W. Bush, including both Afghanistan and Iraq. More recently came the pivot to Asia by the Obama administration, the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in 2011, and their return because of ISIS. Then the JCPOA. And, of course there is the emergence of a global consensus of the need to address climate change with COP21 and its Paris Accord.

Then came the Trump administration, with a diplomacy that could best be characterized as very personal. The Trump administration pursued the war on Terror but withdrew from the Paris Accord and the JCPOA and that ratcheted up tensions in the region: remember the killing of General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad. The Trump administration also started negotiations with the Taliban and pursued a policy culminating with the Abraham Accords that were mentioned earlier. This was very controversial in many countries and an emotional topic in the Middle East. Some countries have adhered for reasons of their own, others will not. I can hardly imagine that Iraq will adhere to the Abraham Accords but in fact, this can be seen as an expression of national interest. Morocco adhered for its own reasons, as did Sudan.

Now we are dealing with the Biden administration and their focus is on China. It is quite clear that our share in the global mind space of Washington is going to diminish. The focus will shift towards the Pacific. And there is the withdrawal from Afghanistan, which Renaud Girard, who is present here, called “the first geostrategic defeat of the United States”.

So we have a stage that is set: a region where you have an interplay between global powers, the ambitions of emerging regional powers and national interest by countries who want to assert their sovereignty. That is all under the umbrella of global concerns that we need to address all together. I mentioned climate change but water is another important issue, as well as food security and global terrorism.