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Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this session, The Middle East in 2030: Geopolitical and Economic Perspectives. We are here at last and it is my pleasure to introduce you to Ebtessam Al-Ketbi, who is the President and Founder of the Emirates Policy Center. Next to her is Bernardino León Gross, Director General of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy and a man who is very involved in the Libyan settlement, which fingers crossed, may work and we hope so. Then Mona Makram Ebeid, an Egyptian Senator who is always very eloquent and insulted by my determination to keep her to six minutes. Next is Volker Perthes, who is Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan and Head of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan. Of course, Sudan is a rather interesting country and has just signed the Abraham Accords. The final panelist is Itamar Rabinovitch, who is well-known to many of you here and has been a very distinguished Israeli diplomat, including as the Ambassador in Washington DC, as well as a very distinguished academic. In years past, he has spent quite a lot of time negotiating with the Syria of Hafez Al-Assad, so he has had his work cut out.

Yogi Berra, the American baseball player and manager, famously said, “It is very difficult to make predictions, especially about the future”. We are now thinking about the next nine years up to 2030. If the past is any kind of prologue, I think we are actually in for a tough decade because if you look at the past decade you really have the 10 years from the so-called Arab Spring, and it has not actually worked out very well. Even in Tunisia, which was hailed by many as a great success story, I think you now have Kais Saied taking powers that disappoint those who thought that Tunisia was becoming a fully-fledged democracy. In Libya we have effectively a civil war. Syria, still a civil war really and Idlib, for example, is not controlled by Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Iraq is evolving towards a better future, but it would be hard to say that it is really entirely pacific.

Let us define first what we mean by the Middle East. I think for practical purposes we should probably go from the Atlantic Ocean, from Morocco all the way to the Gulf here and obviously include Iran. I think the subjects we need to deal with are why we are in a pretty difficult situation at the moment and what are the germs of optimism we can find in the next decade.