

DEBATE

Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

We have a few minutes for questions. Mr. Ambassador?

Ali Al Ahmed, former Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to France

Thank you, Thierry. Welcome to Abu Dhabi, Minister Fahmy. My name is Ali Al Ahmed from the Foreign Ministry of the United Arab Emirates. You mentioned an active foreign policy. If we can take this a step further in regard to the Abraham Accords, which is the peace treaty between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. The Egyptians were the first to shake hands with the Israelis and whether it is a warm peace or a ceasefire, that is not my question. The United Arab Emirates does not share a border with Israel and have never had a war with them, so from your perspective, how can we go further without losing Arab public opinion or being provocative? It seems that it does not take much, and any small detail or celebration could be provocative to millions of Arabs. From your perspective how can we act from an active foreign policy?

Nabil Fahmy, Founding Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo, former Foreign Minister of Egypt

Thank you for the question, Ambassador. I am glad you mentioned this because you cannot overemphasize that the Palestinian issue per se is a very emotional one throughout the Arab world and therefore reactions to it tend to be very strong in either way. Any movement on it leads to one form of reaction or other. You are also correct in saying that we signed a peace agreement with Israel first and part of it was the normalization part, although it did not grow as quickly at the popular level. My point is as follows, and I have said this to my Palestinian colleagues, I understand your concern. I understand your fear but focus on building your case rather than criticizing somebody. In the case of those who signed the Accord, even if you do not agree with them, they have all committed to helping to establish and support a Palestinian state. My recommendation to Arabs is to be a bit sensitive to the steps they take, and I want to complement you for the focus on freezing the annexation activity just before the Abraham Accords. However, you will have to face the fact that this is sensitive, and you will get some criticism. I would tell my Arab colleagues and I would tell the Palestinians, focus, put out the tenants of the peace process, come up with ideas on how to move forward politically, do not let the political process die. Today, because of the coalition in Israel, which is very strange but also reflects a search for identity after five elections, I do not see significant early progress on the peace process. However, Palestinians and Arabs should not let Palestinian rights die until we find an opening here. Again, it is all a call for activism. Certainly, we have to be sensitive,

but a country decided to take a step and that is its national right, and we should take the advantages where they exist and take it as an opportunity to emphasize our case.

Thierry de Montbrial

I can take one more question before we stop.

Karl Kaiser, Senior Associate of the Project on Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship, Belfer Center for Science and international Affairs, Harvard University

I would like to come back to a problem you mentioned that is so important to the Europeans too and that is Libya. For the Europeans, it is obviously central because of the migration problem, political instability and the oil question, but it is extremely important to you as a neighbor. How do you see it evolving, also given the involvement of some outside powers, which has been very important?

Nabil Fahmy

To be very candid and straightforward, I actually feel that outside powers that are facilitating or supporting the inclusion of outside military forces are taking detrimental steps in the process. Outside powers that are trying to help push the political process are understandable because you had in Libya a failed state. They are currently trying to agree on how you create a leader and how you actually create a state. Libya will require international support to reach a political solution and I support that, but I do not believe that fighting the military battle with outside powers is in any way helpful. Without exaggerating I can say that it could very easily lead to regional conflicts of a military nature, and I do not support that. Let us try to get the Libyans to the ballot boxes and try to get them to establish a government with unified military security forces. They will stumble in that process, and we should help them but sending in more foreign troops or fighters is frankly not only illegal; it is immoral.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much, Nabil. Unfortunately, the best things have to come to an end but in fact, it is a very good introduction to the rest of the day, particularly the next session on the Middle East and outside powers. Thank you very much again.