

ANWAR GARGASH

Diplomatic Advisor to the President of the United Arab Emirates

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

Dear Anwar, it is a great pleasure to be with you in this format again. We did our first exercise like this last year and, as discussed in the previous session with Khaldoon Al Mubarak, the world has changed since the previous edition of the World Policy Conference. I think the conversation we are going to have is a natural continuation of the previous one with Khaldoon Al Mubarak, who focused essentially on the economic and business dimensions, and perhaps the starting point could be the following: I read with great interest, as I told you, a speech you recently gave at the Emirates Policy Centre here in Abu Dhabi. You analyzed the foreign policy of your country by formulating eight core principles.

I could read the eight core principles, but to start with I would like to focus on the very first one. The first one is: 'The primary goal of our foreign policy must be to promote the prosperity and security of the United Arab Emirates through an approach that blends our national values and our national interest'. I like this very much because in fact any serious country could start with a sentence like this. May I ask you to say a little bit more about your national values and your national interest?

Anwar Gargash

First of all, it really is a pleasure to be here again with you, Thierry, and to continue our conversation from last year. As you said, a lot of things have changed. As I was driving to come to the conference, I was just thinking that we have had this Ukraine war, the Ukraine earthquake really in international politics, which was not even on the horizon when we were talking to each other a bit more than a year ago.

Without going to the principles I outlined, I really want to say that we are really consolidating what we have started as a direction following the Yemen war, and that consolidation really is along these two principles that you spoke about. On the one hand, to not only speak about security and stability, but also to ensure that prosperity is actually an equal pillar. This is something that we have been trying to do, and I think that you can see that very clearly in the previous conversation that we had with Khaldoon Al Mubarak. We are very, very focused on making sure that prosperity becomes a pillar that is equal to what has been traditionally a Middle Eastern country's search for stability and security.

This really brings about the issue that you just asked me about: what are these principles? In that perspective I am really speaking purely about how we act in the international system. From that perspective, our position on Ukraine is a very, very clear example. I think it is very

reductionist and very simplistic to come to a country like the UAE and say the UAE is neutral on Ukraine. The UAE is not neutral on Ukraine. The UAE is affected by the crisis in Ukraine and the UAE is trying to find the right balance between our principles and the necessity for a political solution and an end to the war in Ukraine. Therefore, if you take our principles, where we are, our size, our region, number one, it tells you that the use of force in international conflict is something that really worries us a lot. Therefore, any use of force is something that we see is not part and parcel of our long term interest, and that is a major principle here.

The other issue here is also basically the idea of what is the attack on the sovereignty of a state is a real problem for us. A lot of countries have changed borders due to historical circumstances. I do not think there is a country – or if there is there is one or two or three – that has had fixed borders over the last 100 years or so. Clearly, therefore, this is another principle we can see that has an implication on our region and on our country and so forth. However, to balance this, we do not think that the crisis in Ukraine is a crisis that can be resolved through a military conflict. We have seen the lessons, for example, of World War I and the Versailles Treaty, where a country is defeated but rises again to try and change the international order. From this perspective, the idea of trying to find a solution is necessary.

In any conflict there is always a peace party and a war party, whether it is on the Russian side or whether it is on the western and Ukrainian side, people who think, 'Just give us four more months and we can change things, just give us another few weeks and we can change things'. We have gone through that same cycle in Yemen to be honest, where on the ground we always thought that three more weeks would change things and would allow us to negotiate from a better perspective. What if that does not happen? What we are trying to do, and our vote in the UN Security Council, in the General Assembly and in the Human Rights Council, shows very clearly that this country is not neutral on Ukraine. This country is trying to actually balance what it sees as its principles and at the same time a way out of the crisis. I use Ukraine as an example because I think it is currently very pertinent.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. I must say that I personally, in my own view of the world, subscribe 100% with what you are saying, but if we can spend a few more minutes on this issue because it concerns all of us. It is difficult to be balanced. For instance, in the discussion a few minutes ago with Minister Kuleba from Ukraine he stated clearly, when I asked him about his vision of victory, that victory means kicking the Russians out from the entire territory of Ukraine within the 1991 borders. In his view there is no way to start any kind of negotiation before this goal is achieved. In the last question I asked him, 'If I were President Macron instead of me, what would you tell me?' He said, 'Mr. President, thank you for this and that, but please do not give any' – I translated with my words – 'do not provide any exit, a saving face exit, to Putin'. This approach is, therefore, totally incompatible with what we are saying.

Anwar Gargash

I understand Foreign Minister Kuleba's views because he is the one whose country is being devastated and territory belonging to Ukraine is also being occupied. However, I also think from where we are perhaps we have more of a neutral view, so to speak, about conflict and crisis in general. I have to also say that the ability of the UAE to affect these effects is not very

big because we are a medium sized country in the Middle East on the Gulf, so our ability really to affect all this is perhaps positive on the margins but not really central to the main conflict. However, I would argue that the world today is much more dangerous, much more complicated, and the way that we are looking at the future is less and less assured about stability, etc. We have to centralize the idea of diplomacy and the idea of political solutions. I do not want to argue point by point on this, but I think conflicts are more likely to end through a political process than through a military process. That is just fact.

Thierry de Montbrial

Now, compared to last year, Khaldoon Al Mubarak answered the question, the comparison concentrating on the globalization aspects – business, technology and all that – looking now at the classical security dimensions, from the viewpoint of your country, what would you describe as the greatest danger, the greatest threat, a kind of worst case hypothesis?

Anwar Gargash

I think on a macro level, it is really about commitments as we go further. We are a country at the end of the day that has always had a western, and specifically an American, overall cover in how it sees the security, not only of the UAE, but the region. Is that going to be assured for the next 30 years? Is that implicit assurance of US security for the region, starting from the Carter Doctrine, going to continue and be more explicit for the next 30 years? I think on the macro level that is one of the big challenges.

If we drill down, of course the nature of the threat is changing. I think the region here today is more concerned about specific threats. We are not going to see a threat, an epic threat, such as the invasion of Kuwait, for example. I do not see that as the type of scenarios that will transpire. I see more concern about four or five more specific threats. Terrorism remains a real threat. We keep our eyes open on Afghanistan and other places, including even on Yemen because that remains a major threat. In my opinion, cyber is also becoming more and more of a threat because, as you see, as our societies become more modernized. Our dependence on all these systems also makes us more vulnerable as it makes our lives easier.

The third issue is that of drones and missiles. Saudi Arabia has been targeted by more than 1,000 missiles and drones. These are mostly of Iranian origin used by the Houthis. However, sadly, this issue has not really been catapulted into being a major issue until these weapons, such as drones, have gone into the Ukraine theatre. Then suddenly the world has rediscovered this issue, while we have seen this as a major threat in the other periods.

Then we continue with security of the sea lanes, whether it is for energy or whether it is for commerce and trade. As we move forward, regarding the commitments of our traditional strategic allies: is it still there?

Thierry de Montbrial

Including the US, as we discussed recently here?

**Anwar Gargash**

Yes, especially the US. Is it there? Is it going to be explicit? Because I think it is important. If it is there and it is explicit then this is a major cornerstone for the next 30 years, but if it is not there and it is not explicit, it means a lot of countries in the region will have to adapt.

My last point on this is that all this also shows that as we are going into this more dangerous and more unpredictable zone, there is a lot more room for diplomacy and for regional diplomacy in particular, with the understanding that I might not like what the Iranian regime is doing on certain things in the region, but I have to talk to it. I have to try and make sure that the conduit of communication is open. I have to ensure that, although there are things that I do not like, but I want the principle of non interference in internal affairs to be enshrined, because this is something that I will also benefit from. Therefore, there is a lot, in my opinion, as we move forward that we need to do regionally. I always say this is not naive. It is just the reality, and we have to get better at it.

Thierry de Montbrial

One of the developments of last year is the failure of saving the JCPOA, the nuclear agreement with Iran. Originally, unfortunately, Mr. Trump is to a large extent responsible for that, but this is the reality today. How do you assess the consequences of Iran probably becoming a nuclear power in the relatively near future?

Anwar Gargash

You need to also look at our position on the JCPOA, and by 'our' I mean not only the UAE but I think collectively Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. We were very much opposed to a JCPOA that did not take into account the Iranian regional activity and Iranian missile program at the time. I do not think the word 'drone' was in the conversation. We moved from that position with the sort of revival with Obama's signing of the JCPOA and all the drama following that during the Trump and Biden Administrations to a resigned position, meaning that this is something that has already been decided. We cannot really do much in terms changing the equilibrium, the agreement, the revived agreement.

I think we have a different situation today. We have a situation today where we see that the JCPOA most probably is unlikely. There is still a small window of opportunity, but Iranian demands, on the one hand, and at the same time developments later on internally, and at the same time a hardening really of western public opinion about how they see the JCPOA, even within Europe, in my opinion, makes that much more difficult. As it becomes more difficult, are we worried about a breakout? Yes, we are worried about a breakout. However, I think we are also more worried about the sort of massive production of cheap missiles and cheap drones within the whole region, and I think the region ultimately needs some sort of diplomacy. Once again, diplomacy is really the solution in trying to make sure that countries, and not only countries, but also nongovernment organizations and militias and so forth being actually owners of cheap missiles and cheap drones.

I do not know where we are going right now. I know that most probably the JCPOA as it stands is not going to be done, so we have to wait and see. However this is an opportunity for all of us really to come and revisit the whole concept. I always say that using the five plus one



format is a positive thing because then you ensure that whatever concept you have is then backed up by international force and legitimacy. In my opinion, therefore, currently we have to wait and see where this is going on. We really do need to revisit the whole idea of regional intervention, the whole idea of what the rules of engagement are, as we move forward, not only about Iran, but about the whole region, because we also have to incentivize Iran at the same time.

We have to come to Iran, and we know that a lot of the turmoil today in Iran is also about economic concerns. From that perspective, Iran has to be included at some stage in this sort of pillar of stability and prosperity. We have to incentivize it. We cannot criticize its nefarious activity, but we have to try to bring it in somewhere. I do not see this happening immediately, but as we discuss and as we talk, and as the region understands more and more that it has to be more responsible for its stability, this is something that is unavoidable.

Thierry de Montbrial

Last year you expressed very elegantly, as always, the wish that the European Union were more united in terms of foreign policy. Would you say that things have improved or deteriorated since last year in this respect?

Anwar Gargash

The language we are hearing today about engaging with the Gulf is quite positive, but we have to wait for the actions. That language is also partly driven by self interest, trying to find new gas providers, new oil providers. That whole politic of trying to engage with Russia has broken down in Europe, and as a result this is something that will take a long time to mend. It is fine for many European countries to prioritize their interests in the region, to look at the region. We are hearing some good signs, but it has to be strategic. It cannot be transactional.

Thierry de Montbrial

This is why I mention your elegance because you would not say what I say, which is that the Europeans have no strategy.

Anwar Gargash

Well, you said it.

Thierry de Montbrial

It is my responsibility.

Anwar Gargash

You said it and I heard it. However, what we are hearing, especially from the Germans and others, about reengaging with the Gulf, is encouraging. However, I would warn that it should not be transactional. There are huge interests between us and Europe, and there has always been this discrepancy between some of the national policies. The French are a good example, of linking with the area, and with some other policies that are just loading it with moralistic



baggage and loading it with other interests. Politics has to be more along the Hans Morgenthau school of realism if you really want any results.

Thierry de Montbrial

I am happy to say, as you know, that once again I am 100% in agreement with you. I think that politics implies being realistic in the short term, with some idealist vision in the longer term.

Anwar Gargash

Of course.

Thierry de Montbrial

This is not what we are doing. I think we should underline the importance for Europe of the Arab world, of the Gulf countries, and to a large extent the African countries. We have to repeat time and again that these countries should be a major concern for the European Union. I think you would not disagree with that.

Anwar Gargash

I think definitely so. However, as I said, we need to see the actions, we need to see the sort of realignment and we need to see more contacts. However, I think at the same time it has to be long term. It has to be strategic. I always say we will always have good relations with Europe. The difference is about a relationship that is just good or a relationship that is strategic. That is really the big difference there.

Thierry de Montbrial

Khaldoon Al Mubarak spoke of patience and rapidity in execution. What is missing is this rapidity in execution.

Anwar Gargash

In execution, yes.

Thierry de Montbrial

Can we spend the last few minutes coming back to the UAE? You mentioned diplomacy many times. There is a very distinguished institute of diplomacy here in the UAE and the Emir gave your own name to this institute, which is called the Anwar Gargash Institute of Diplomacy because of the services that you have rendered to your country for many years. One of the mysteries of the UAE is that it is indeed a nation – I think it is very difficult not to think of the UAE as a nation – but with a very small minority of the population being natives, and it seems to work, and it works in a remarkable way. However, talking about diplomacy, you need an army of diplomats, if I may say so, to achieve your goals, that is being active diplomatically almost everywhere because you need a very strong diplomatic force. Can you tell us in a few words about how you are, year after year, achieving this goal?

Anwar Gargash

The first part of my remarks was about the UAE. The UAE is classic in a lot of the Gulf writings on what we call population imbalance. It is to see the foreign presence in many Gulf countries as a threat. We turned around a few years ago and we started thinking of it as a positive element for the UAE. If you read a lot of the Gulf writings of the different nationalities that are not only part of the UAE, but part of every single Gulf country, in the last few years we came to a conclusion and said, 'For all our lives the composition of these countries, of the UAE, will actually include this sort of huge diversity, so why should we look at them as temporary and transient? We need to look at them as positive and something that will enrich our society, so to speak a pool of talent'. This has changed the way we look at things.

Regarding the second element, I was looking at numbers about naturalization of people who have lived in the UAE, and our rate is better than Finland, for example. Over the last 40, 50 years a lot of people whom you see as Emiratis are people who have become Emiratis through nationalization. This is not something that we advertise a lot, but our rate is as good as Scandinavian countries when you look at it.

This comes back to how do you take your limited human resources and try to put them in a larger and ambitious diplomatic outreach? In my opinion, you cannot do everything, so we have two or three things we need to do. Number one is we need to manage our environment. Our environment is the Gulf, the Middle East, the Arab world, and our environment is really turbulent and problematic. We do not really expect to gain a lot back from our environment in terms of economic benefit, etc., but it has to be managed. If you look at it, the first goal is to be engaged in the region in more of a management mode, but we also have good successes here. There are plans to invest in Turkey. There are already plans to cooperate with Israel, Jordan and Egypt, etc. These are quite positive things.

Then number two is to manage your traditional partners – countries that are part of the EU, the United States, rising countries in Asia, China and India – so again also trying to understand more and manage more is another area we need to look at. We have always also had a layer of countries which we think are major and where we need to put some effort in. Here I mean countries like Brazil and Indonesia. We traditionally do a lot of business with Brazil, but we are not necessarily totally engaged with them or understand them very well, but we need to understand them more because they are bigger partners for us in trading and so forth. Recently, for example, what we are doing with Indonesia is extremely important. Our trade with Indonesia is very small. It is about USD 2.6 billion, compared, for example, with our trade with India, which is hitting the USD 70 billion ceiling. Our idea is that we need to invest more time and effort in a country like Indonesia to try to quadruple that investment and trade portfolio. If you look at the world as 190 plus countries, we are spread very thin, but if we look at the world from the sort of circle of where we need to put more effort, this is a little bit more manageable.

Thierry de Montbrial

This is the last question. Tomorrow evening we have the visit of the Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. What would you recommend me to ask him?

Anwar Gargash

I do not think you need any recommendations, but I think the first thing is a word about what is going on in Saudi Arabia. What is going on in Saudi Arabia is phenomenal in terms of societal and economic change, and this is something that is positive for the whole region. This is a process and a process will bring its own challenges, but strategically it is extremely positive. On the other hand, I see our relationship with Saudi Arabia as complementary, where a larger regional pie in terms of economy and investment is something that everybody will benefit from. Therefore, as you see more locations for tourism, as you see more industry, as you see more enterprise it means that this whole pie in the Gulf is becoming larger. It is significant, for example, that the UAE, which is a country with a population of under 10 million, is going to hit, for the first time ever, USD 500 billion of GDP this year. This is quite significant for a country of this size. How do you do that? Part of it is dealing with a more vibrant environment, and part of it is also dealing with a more dynamic environment. What is happening in Saudi Arabia is definitely more vibrant and dynamic. These will be my comments and then you can use them the way you want.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. I will remain discreet and I will not tell him that I asked you for your advice, but thank you very much for your answer.

Anwar Gargash

Thank you.

Thierry de Montbrial

Unfortunately, these conversations are always too short, so time is up, but I do not want to close this session without giving you again a heartfelt thank you because the WPC would never have met here in Abu Dhabi without you.

Anwar Gargash

Without our collaboration actually. Thank you.

Thierry de Montbrial

Without our relations. Thank you very much again.

Anwar Gargash

Thank you.

Thierry de Montbrial

I suggest that we applaud, Dr. Gargash.

Anwar Gargash

Thank you.

