

TERRY MARTIN

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this Middle East outlook session at the World Policy Conference in Abu Dhabi. I am Terry Martin. I am a Berlin-based broadcast journalist and some of you may remember me from yesterday, when I chaired the Ukraine session.

Today, I am jumping in for Steven Erlanger, who I understand is a regular at this conference. He was originally scheduled to chair this session but was called back to work. Therefore, my apologies to any of you who were expecting to see Steven Erlanger up here. There is no way I can fill Steve's big shoes, but I assure you I will do my very best to make this panel worth your while.

I will introduce our distinguished guests in just a moment but, first, I want to say if this conference had been held one month ago, we would be having a very different conversation than the one we are about to have right now.

The attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7 and Israel's response have shattered the status quo and put a big question mark over the immediate future of this region. The repercussions, of course, have been global. It has been felt around the world.

Over the next hour and a half, we will explore what has changed since October 7 so far and what has not changed, what is at stake in the coming months, and how the conflict might shape the region moving forward.

Now, we are not going to talk exclusively about the conflict, but there is a good chance that 98% of it will be related to it.

Understandably, public attention right now is focused very much on the profound suffering and risks inherent in this war, but I will encourage our panel to also reflect on the possibility for exploring a viable solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, because obviously such a solution can be regarded as essential to the future of peace and stability in the region.

We do have a great panel on this topic. I am going to just quickly introduce them now.

Starting from my left, Mohammed Baharoon is Director and Cofounder of the Dubai Public Policy Research Centre. Before that, he was Editor of the Gulf Defence magazine and worked for multiple media outlets, therefore a colleague in that sense. He played a key role in the United Arab Emirates national identity initiative, I understand, and he is a founding Board member of the Bussola Institute, which is a Brussels-based think tank, focusing on the ties between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council states.



Nabil Fahmy next to him, I understand that you have also been here a time or two yourself, is Dean Emeritus at the American University in Cairo, where he founded the School of Global Affairs. He is also a career diplomat. He was Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs and also Ambassador to the United States and Japan before that. He also worked extensively with the United Nations on disarmament and international security.

Renaud Girard is senior reporter and international columnist at the French daily, *Le Figaro*. He covered global political crises and armed conflicts for 40 years. He is a journalist, also a colleague in that sense, but very accomplished – much more accomplished than I am. He has written several books on the Middle East and diplomatic issues, so he is well-versed in these topics.

Volker Perthes, someone I have known for quite a while in Germany when he was Head of Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. That is the Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP – some of you may know. He is currently Under-Secretary General and Head of the Strategic Review team of the United Nations assistance mission in Iraq. He formerly served as special representative of the Secretary General for Sudan and Head of the UN's transition assistance mission in Sudan. He was also UN Assistance Secretary General and Senior Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria and was previously Director of, as I mentioned, SWP. Therefore, we have got someone with intimate knowledge of a couple of the signatories of the Abraham Accords as well.

Itamar Rabinovich was supposed to be joining us. He could not travel here. We are trying to reach him right now. He was planning to visit us remotely. We are hoping that he will be here. He is Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern History at Tel Aviv University and President Emeritus and Councilor of the Israel Institute, with offices in Washington and Tel Aviv and Distinguished Fellow of the Brookings Institution. He served as Ambassador of Israel to the United States and Chief Negotiator with Syria in the mid-1990s. That experience would be very valuable to have with us today. I am hoping that we will still be able to contact him remotely. I will keep you updated on that.

At the other end of our large stage here, we have Dorothee Schmid. She is Head of the Turkey/Middle East program at the French Institution of International Relations, Ifri, which is behind this. Her work has focused on European policies in the Mediterranean and the Middle East on the dynamics in these regions and on the Arab policy of France. She has done extensive work tracking the emergence of Turkey as a global power.

Thank you to all of our panelists for being with us today. It is an amazing group of speakers that, I think, are going to be able to give us some real insights on where we are and where things might be headed.

We will start with each of our speakers delivering some opening remarks. The remarks will be delivered mainly in English, partly in French. If you need some headphones, please get them now.

I will then get the discussion going. Along the way, I plan to integrate some input from the floor, from all of you. Therefore, during the last third of the session, I will be calling on you for questions, if you just raise your hand when we get there.