

NABIL FAHMY

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Let us see who wanted to be first. I think Nabil Fahmy wanted to be first. There you go, the floor is yours.

Nabil Fahmy

Let me first thank Thierry for the kind invitation to be back here. It has always been a very informative event for me and I have learnt a lot from many of the panels.

I want to also start by repeating what you just said. A month ago, or a little bit more, when I first got the invitation to come, I looked at the topic and, frankly, would have given you a completely different presentation. As an Egyptian looking westwards, I see a failed state on my right, in Libya. I see a failed state in Sudan, southwards, with no peace process – there was no violence but there is no peace process. Looking eastwards between Palestinians and Israelis. Syria is still coming out of a nightmare and then all the way down to Yemen and the tensions with Iran.

There were a lot of problems. I will not focus on any of them, but let me simply say that I actually expect what happened in Gaza to have negative effects on all of these because, on the one hand, there is clearly a regionalization of conflicts in the region, with the major powers trying to figure out what role they want to play. There is going to be an opportunity for players in all of these conflicts to try to get as much leverage out of their positions than in the past, when we were not focused on the Gaza issue.

The second point I would make is, and I have gone hoarse trying to make this over the years, never assume that the Arab/Israeli conflict is over only because there is no active bloodshed occurring. It is something that we kept hearing over and over again. The Palestine issue is not important, it is not a pressure point, it is not a priority. It always breaks out, unless we solve the problem between Arabs and Israelis. The question will never be whether or not there will be violence, it will be when is the next cycle of violence?

Whether it is on the previous conflicts I mentioned or on the most recent conflict, countries in the region have to have better governance. When I say that, I mean not only domestically and regionally, but also in terms of respect for international law in their international relations.

Unless that becomes the focus of how we operate and how we move, the idea of a balance of power is always a variant. The problem here is that it is not always a balance of power



between nation states, it is a balance of power between who is ready to cause more damage and more pain on the other side.

When one looks at what happened recently, clearly there is a higher profile for non-state parties and, clearly, there is an argument being presented – I do not agree with it – that, irrespective of the issue, revenge and inhumane collateral damage is acceptable in order to respond to what is considered to be the initial source of conflict.

My point really here is we need to have an Arab/Israeli process that leads to Arabs and Israelis living peacefully in the Middle East and, at the core of that, are the Palestinians and the Israelis. That will require an ending of occupation. It will require being able to have a national identity for Israelis and for the Palestinians in viable sovereign states.

I have heard very frequently that a two-state solution is dead or difficult. I argue it is much more difficult now than in the past, but I do not think it is dead. I hope it is not dead because I do not see a one-state solution as a viable alternative to solve the problem. A one-state solution means that the Israelis and the Palestinians forego their desire for a singular national identity and decide on a common identity between them, and I do not see that happening peacefully. It may become a one-state reality, but then you will have continuous conflict between these two peoples because it cannot be a reality that ends up giving priority to one state versus the other.

My country started the peace process with Israel after embarking on a war, which was intentionally started with the explained objective of starting negotiations – I am talking about the '73 war – and we were the first to sign a peace agreement.

That being said, even back then in the 70s, part of our agreement with the Israelis had a framework agreement to create a special agreement between Palestinians and Israelis. What happened in the last four weeks is really going to the core of Arab/Israeli hatred and anger and, if we start to light that fire again, we will all pay a very severe price for it.

Nation states, as angry as they may be, have to respect international law, have to respect international humanitarian law, including the laws that govern war, and we need to go back to trying to establish a two-state solution.

Now, is that possible now? I will sum it up in very few words. We need to deal on an emergency basis with a crisis management situation. The continuous deaths of civilians every day, the destruction of Gaza – about 25%, if not 30%, completely destroyed – cannot be the basis for a relationship between Arabs and Israelis. For every combatant that is killed, you are planting the seeds for 10 more who have lost family and will want revenge and retribution in the future.

Therefore, we need to get a ceasefire, not for the ceasefire's sake, but just to control the viciousness of the combat, with the objective of ultimately then moving on to a conflict resolution phase, which has to be essentially a two-state solution.

I would argue that this requires an Arab initiative, we need to take the issue in our own hands. It also requires responsibility of the major states globally, be they the Americans, the Chinese



or anybody else, to go back to, 'How do we bring the parties, the Israelis and the Palestinians in particular, back to the negotiating table if they do not believe in the end result?'

This will be my closing comment. Having done these negotiations for most of my career, this is not the best time to start this project, by any standard, whether it is with respect to the leadership paradigm on the Palestinian side, or the Israeli side. However, we cannot afford not to and I, therefore, suggest that dealing with the crisis situation is imperative, but then what we need to put to the Israeli and Palestinian public is not an interim solution. We need to actually offer them the elements, in as much detail as we can, of closure. Where will the two-state solution actually be? How do we deal with the different components of that?

That will ultimately achieve, for Palestinians, what they want in terms of national state, and it will achieve, for the Israelis, what they are even calling for in the midst of combat, which is security for Israelis in the future.

Let me just throw out those two points. This is not the time for continued violence. We are planting the seeds of non-state party violence for the future and it is not the time for incremental proposals because they are not enough to bridge the pain and get over what has happened over the last few weeks.

Thank you very much.

Terry Martin

Nabil Fahmy, thank you very much. You have touched on a number of points, which I am sure we are going to be picking up on over the next hour or so. What came through for me, most importantly, is it is not just an Israeli/Palestinian issue, there is the Arab/Israeli issue that needs to be addressed as well. There may be room within seeking solutions and these processes that you have suggested need to be pushed forward, for a role for other actors outside the region, from around the world, to play a diplomatic role. Thank you very much.