

# DOROTHÉE SCHMID

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We are going to move to Dorothée now, Dorothée Schmid. The floor is yours.

## Dorothée Schmid

Thank you, Terry. I think it is not an easy moment for anyone because, lately, we were mainly commenting on the conflict in the region, speaking about the Saudi/Iran normalization, about the Abrahamic Accords and prospects of normalization with Syria that had been ushered back into the Arab League.

Now, we have just been drawn backwards in history to this Israeli/Palestinian conflict that we all wanted to forget. It seems that we missed something, something very big, because now we see the consequences are spreading within all of these conflicts that we were trying to solve – just like Nabil Fahmy said.

I must say, speaking as an EU citizen who has been a rather fascinated observer of the efforts that the EU has made to establish and stabilize the Palestinian authority, all of these efforts have fallen completely into the Hamas trap in 2006, after the elections, when the EU decided to turn its back on Gaza. We are now again, as I said, drawn forcibly into this trap.

The three points I want to make are, first, I think we are going through a moment of *flo* that has been described more or less by Nabil Fahmy in the beginning of his speech, saying that most regional actors are still struggling with where they should stand and if they are going to coalesce or not to find a solution.

However, my concern is that this moment of *flo* could freeze into ‘the West against the rest’ and Gaza would be the symbolic point that would catalyze this divide of the West, explicitly the US, the EU and Israel, set against a very disparate group of countries that have stood against what they feel as blatant injustice against what they see as a massacre being perpetrated in Gaza by Tsahal currently, as a revenge operation for this horrendous attack that they have gone through in early October.

My problem is how we avoid again falling into this narrative that I see emerging against this *flo*. The *flo* is because we work on the backdrop of the collapse of state structures in most of the countries in the region. We have seen that in Syria, arguably Lebanon is becoming a failed state as well, war is spreading, unresolved conflict and we also have this *flo* between what is a conflict and what is a war. That was alluded to by Thierry this morning.



I heard Ghassan Salame saying, 'We do not declare war these days, we slide into war'. This is the concern we have – that we are being drawn into war. Everybody is wondering about potential escalation with Lebanon. Hezbollah say they do not want to go to war, Lebanon is exhausted, but they might be sliding into war without even realizing it.

This emerging rationale of 'the West against the rest', on Gaza specifically, goes with this idea that the area of conflict is enlarging in the minds. There has been a historical effort to constrain the conflict to Palestine against Israel, after the Arab/Israeli conflict, but I think this is completely failing now.

On the contrary, lots of countries now feel concern for the situation there. However, the other side, which is also very worrying for our own Western societies, is that, through migration and diasporas, we see the divide operating in our own societies now and threatening order and peace in our own societies. In France, this is particularly clear.

Who is 'the rest', if we have 'the West' on one side? You have two very big opportunistic actors – Russia and China, clearly. Russia is now turning its back on Israel, but also Israel turning its back on Russia. This is a mutual soft divorce currently.

China has always said they were in favor of a two-state solution. If you go to this very classical consolidated rhetoric of the Chinese, they may have been the last defenders of the two-state solutions in the world. However, I see Africa and Asia, as I said, now standing against the humanitarian massacres, but also what they feel as a political injustice vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

The second point is that, in that context, I think three countries are especially interesting to look at. Of course, Israel, Iran are some protagonists that we will have to go on to speak about later, but, for me, what is more interesting nowadays is Egypt. Why? Because it was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel and, now, actually, there is a question mark over how to proceed to enlarge the zone of peace.

The second interesting actor or protagonist is Saudi Arabia because there is a lot of pressure on them to revive the Arab peace plan. The idea is that maybe there could be a coming-of-age of the Saudi diplomacy now and, as Nabil Fahmy said, we need an Arab solution for this. We need an Arab plan anyway, so they may have the symbolic and material resources, but do the system have the political maturity and willingness to do it?

The third country, which I know and I am following on a daily basis, is Turkey, which actually moved from the status of outsider to primary actor in this conflict. Tayyip Erdoğan is pursuing a very consistent pro-Palestinian narrative and has been extremely vocal against Israel for the last 15 years. He also proposed to mediate in the beginning between Israel and Hamas, yet is now escalating rhetorically again, against Israel.

However, my concern is that, if you think in terms of military escalation, Erdoğan has said many times that he thought Tsahal was behaving in a very immoral way and they should not go too far, etc. We know Turkey is the one military power that is extremely active in the region currently and they have already had a skirmish with Israeli forces in 2010 that led to the break-up of relations with Israel.

I am insisting on these three countries because they are on both sides: they are friends of the West and they talk to 'the rest'. They are more part of 'the rest', if you like.

How do we avoid this scenario of an isolated West against an angry global south, as the Americans would frame it? I think it is very clear that we have to take political responsibility for the Palestinians and not economic responsibility. The matter has become political again and there, of course, Americans are the ones who everybody will turn to to make peace. I think, again, they are the number one and we see Blinken has a very hard time now travelling to the region and rebalancing from week to week how to operate with every protagonist of the crisis.

The EU, who has been rather silent, has stood with Israel but, clearly, there is this deep historic regret of having failed on the Palestinian solution.

However, I think the country that we have to speak about also clearly, in terms of responsibility, is Israel. The first thing is that I think you have to make peace with the countries you are at war with. I mean, the Abrahamic Accord is a very interesting diplomatic device, but the countries that are involved are not the ones that have to make real peace with Israel. They are not primarily concerned with the conflict.

Then, I think, of course, we have to find a way to make the Israelis look at the Palestinians as political partners again and not just as the leftovers of the grand quest for the consolidation of the Israeli nation state.

Is it wishful thinking? Of course, we will be struggling. Now is the time for war, clearly, but it is also a time for the humanitarian operations, as has been said over these three days, and a time for working out sustainable political solutions for the future.

I completely agree with Nabil Fahmy, that it is now time to close this fight, otherwise it can escalate. We have to close it. It means we also have a historical opportunity to take care of this. This requires political patronage, clearly, from the US, according to me, and this will not be easy. Perhaps with the next administration? We do not know what the future brings. It needs political will, but it also needs economic resources and this is where the Abraham Accord's rationale has its place.

### **Terry Martin**

Thank you very much, Dorothée. You have covered, again, a lot of ground. All of the points that are being made here are hugely germane to our discussion. (...)

The points you were making about the risks inherent in this conflict, that it has the potential to freeze over into a conflict between, again, this term that has been popping up here, 'the West against the rest', and you kindly helped to define what 'the rest' might be. We had a bit of an issue on that yesterday, but you also pointed out the risk of countries in the region sliding into war, thinking particularly about Hezbollah and Lebanon on this, the risk of that.

However, you then emphasized the importance of trying to expand the 'zone of peace', as you put it, which I think is a nice phrase to describe some of the surrounding Arab countries that have made peace with Israel and potential for doing that forward. Your question about how to



get the Israelis and the Palestinians back working on a common political project for their own mutual benefit would, indeed, be the challenge.