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However, we are going to move towards that last phase of the program, and it is my great pleasure to have Mohammed Baharoon now give his observations.

Mohammed Baharoon

Thank you very much. I will try to keep to the seven minutes mark, hopefully. First of all, thank you very much for having me and welcome to all of the people who travelled a long way to be here in the UAE to be part of this discussion.

The title of the discussion, and this is a sort of a warning I think we have heard, is the Middle East in the next few months.

A Middle East warning – nothing about this region is regional. Everything is global and I think we have just heard that. There are always global implications of everything. For a few months, we have already heard that, a month ago, things could have changed, and I think this could remain the case.

Let me talk about Gaza as an example. When it comes to the operation, it is a local operation. We have got Israeli troops, who are conducting an operation in Gaza, which is an occupied land, even though it is autonomous. It is a local war, supposedly.

However, there is also a lot of regional fears, and we have heard the fear about Iran or its proxies being involved and this war could spill out. That is one of those fears.

There are also international realities and part of the international reality is that there is about 40 000 American troops assembled in the region and we have got warships from the US, from the UK, from France and from Greece in the region. We have also heard calls to turn the international coalition against ISIS to fight Hamas.

There is a reality here that this is already internationalized. We are afraid of regionalizing it but, in reality, it is internationalized and that is going to affect us.

Now, if we want to talk about what could happen in the next few months, I think the current progress of the operation – and we have seen to the extent how many times the ground operation has been either delayed or changed. This tells us that this is going to be a lengthy operation. With that length of time will come casualties of people. Those casualties of people would have an impact not only regionally, but also internationally.



Also, with the objective of the military, which is eliminating Hamas, it is very difficult to say, at this point in time, 'We can call this mission a success. Mission accomplished'. It is very difficult to draw lines on when that mission has been accomplished. Again, that would take a lot of time and would also mean more casualties.

There is also this concept of those bridges of cooperation that we have been building that are now regressing. We have already seen the impact on countries like Turkey, as already mentioned. Countries like Egypt have been warning that an operation across the border into Israel would result in a response from the Israelis that could take us back to a time of war. We are going back to 1973. Those bridges of cooperation are now being hugely challenged.

What this tells us is that the clock in this region is ticking backwards. We are looking backwards. What is considered a terrorist organization today is very difficult to discriminate from the Palestinian people. You can see people going out in the streets, calling for free Palestine. No-one sits down to Hamas.

There is an area between what is right and what is wrong. It is not because of what Hamas did, it is because of the reaction to Hamas. I think the concept of international law when it comes to wars comes to mind, but it is the sheer understanding of what you can do for peace.

I think this is the role of the armed struggle and I think it is coming back. Hamas is possibly now in the same position where PLO used to be during the Munich attack. Now, people are saying again that ISIS is different from Hamas, because ISIS has occupied land but Hamas did not occupy land. These types of comparisons are now becoming commonplace, which was not the case two or three months ago.

What we have heard several times here, and I think that Nabil Fahmy was talking about it, is the national identity. This is going back to becoming an identity conflict and, unfortunately, it is not nation-based. It is a religious identity. It is a Jewish identity and it is quite difficult when you see, for instance, Secretary Blinken coming to Israel after the attack and saying, 'I am Jewish'.

I know what he is doing but, for the rest of the world, what they see is that this is now turning into a Jewish/Muslim conflict. That is a very difficult position to be in because it will bring back all of those identity conflicts that we have seen in the past.

If you want to look not only to the next few months, because it is really very limited, what is the long-term impact in the next few years?

I think one we have heard is the attraction of the global west are in front of the expansion of the global south. It is not the north versus the south, it is the south versus the west. We have heard this very clearly before and I think this is the reality. If you look at the pattern of voting in the UN, this is quite obvious.

I think we should not be slipping into that when whatever is always connected to international community, to international norms, can be just looked at as just the western norms. It does not apply all the time, it applies at certain times.

People would say you want Iran not to intervene, but the US is already intervening on the ground and that is contradictory when it comes to principles.



We are also looking at the rise of the middle powers. Middle-power states are now taking the lead because the international leadership is not regarded as something that is going to take us somewhere. It is quite interesting to see, for instance, countries like Saudi Arabia or the UAE celebrating the G77 over the G7 because they see that the future of the world order is the middle and small powers organizing and galvanizing a position together.

However, there are still opportunities and I think one of those is the analogy Volker made on what happened after 1973, which was the peace. Any war conducted is a tool, it is not an objective. The objective of any war is peace, so how could peace be looked at in this situation?

I think one of the major concepts that we can see today is that there is a failure of the concept of security at gunpoint. Weapons do not buy security. The security concept is changing. We have seen this here in the UAE after Covid 19. We have seen that, with all of the military minds that you might have, it is not going to stop your people from dying. We realize that walls are not going to provide security, it is roads that will create security. I do not think that this is a concept that is being seen inside Israel today as we see it here in this region.

I think Hamas is in a position to do exactly what the PLO did at a certain point in time and exactly what the Houthis did recently, turn a resistance into a state. I think this is where we need an investment in statehood, the statehood not only of the Palestinian state but also the statehood of Israel because Israel is our partner in peace. Hamas was not our partner in peace.

However, at the moment, it is difficult to have a partner in peace who does not do their share when it comes to peace.

I think I will stop there. I might say something later on about what Iran could be looking at, but I will stop there.

Terry Martin

I really appreciate you pointing out the fault lines that are associated with this conflict that extend to different regions, not only this region but to other parts of the world. It was interesting to me how you set up an opposition between the West and the South in this case, when we talk about 'the West versus the rest'. We have had that located in China and Russia. We have had it located now in the south – I presume the global south you were referring to there by that, probably emerging nations.

I also found interesting your reference to Iran and the contrast with the United States. Iran, of course, has its proxies in the region. They are not official forces but I found that an interesting parallel.

We are going to be coming back to this. We only have 13 minutes left in this session and I am told that I need to be on time. I am only going to ask one question. I have been preparing this for some time, as you might imagine. I have lots of questions here but I am only going to put one question to the panel. We do not need answers from everyone, but maybe someone who wishes to jump in on this before I open the floor.



What next? We have talked about this possibly, indeed, creating conditions that would allow the pursuit of a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, which would have great value.

Volker Perthes suggested steps that could be done in that process, but the question is, under the auspices of whom? How would that process be started? How would it be organized? Who would take the lead on that? Would it be the United Nations, the United States, the EU?

The EU has offered to host a peace conference. We have seen Egypt host a peace conference very early on that did not get too far. How do we begin to work on a solution, under what construct? Any ideas from any of you? What would be most promising?

Mohammed Baharoon

May I say that any solution should start in Israel and then Palestine. This means we now need goodwill capital from Israel, saying, 'I am in for a two-state solution'. Unless that is clear, any effort we are making is going to be momentary.