

DEBATE

Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy, Director General and Chairman of the Board of Directors at the Arab Monetary Fund

Water is a very big issue, with climate change and food security included. If you have comments make them as short as you can and if you have a question please let us know who it is directed to and introduce yourself.

Peje Emilsson, Founder and Executive Chairman of Kreab in Stockholm

I am an entrepreneur in education and I think education is one of the most important things but, as you said, one size does not fit all. There is a trend in education to have more and more private entrepreneurs to work alongside governments. I am currently running 100 schools with 35 000 students in six countries. I have one school that is regarded as one of the best in Jeddah with 1 000 students. Just before the pandemic I had very interesting discussions with the Minister of Education because we see enormous potential for going in with private investments and do private education here. My comment is that when talking about this that you should make sure to make use private entrepreneurs. I have also been part of a big UNESCO study, the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Peace Education in 50 countries and it shows that there are more and more alternative ways of doing education that could complement and be a catalyst for change in providing the best for education.

Hiroyuki Akita, Commentator of *Nikkei*, Japan

I am not a Middle East expert, but since I am from Asia, based on our experience I really agree that inter-regional economic cooperation is key to avoid conflict and maintain peace. Based on that, I have a question for Mr. Al Neyadi and if possible I would like to ask the Chairman too. In order to deepen inter-region economic cooperation maybe ideally Israel should be included because they have high-tech and are an economic power. How do you see the potential or possibility that Israel will be included in Middle East economic integration and cooperation in the long-term? Related to that, what about Iran in that context?

Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy

Let me ask Abdulrahman to start and then Dr Mona to follow. I am not going to answer because it is good that I am not speaking in this session.

Abdulrahman Al Neyadi, Director of Policy Planning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UAE



Let me answer that in two parts. The first one is the idea of including all regional states, including Israel, within the concept of regional economic integration. In fact, we have already seen some initiatives on that going back to the Abraham Accords, the I2U2, the Negev Forum and they are all focused on achieving the goal of economic prosperity that enhances quality of life for people and to show that the narrative could change in the region. That is the concept of these minilaterals that came out of the idea of the Abraham Accords.

The other element I would like to mention is in terms of compartmentalizing. We do not see eye to eye with many countries when it comes to politics but that is not a barrier to pursuing mutual economic interests. That is where the UAE engages with other countries. We engage with all the countries in the region and we have a dialogue and build bridges with everybody, including Iran. The idea is to expand on the base of mutual economic interest to achieve the economic prosperity we are pursuing. Maybe that is part of your experience but it also requires two main elements. One is agreed principles and values of non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and cooperation. It also requires pragmatism and being able to compartmentalize your engagement with countries so that you work on mutual areas of possible interest and avoid immediately tackling divergent views. However, that also does not mean just being fixated on getting low-hanging-fruit. You also need constant dialogue to deal with divergent views in the longer-term.

Mona Makram Ebeid, Egyptian Senator, Advisor to the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, former member of Parliament

Education is a main theme and focus in Egypt but I do not think we do that enough. Far too little money is allocated to education, so words are good but the execution is not.

Talking about Iran and Israel, as you know, Iran and Saudi Arabia had an entente through China, which was very good and was accepted by everyone and it was the first approach to Iran in the Arab world. The other topic is Israel and, as you know, Israel and Egypt have now had a peace process for 30 years and it has been sustained. We are very scared that this new tragedy might fragilize the treaty.

Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy

I will make a comment. We have two types of meetings among our leadership, one that focuses on political issues and the other one on economic issues. If you take all the economic summits, which we pay a lot of attention to in my institution, they are all successful, we agree on the issues and then implement actions. For example, they have agreed in Kuwait on the importance of establishing a mechanism for cross-border payments and the Arab Monetary Fund actually initiated a new institution to carry out that objective. In Saudi Arabia they agreed to increase the capital of financial institutions and it was implemented. If you take all the summits at leadership level, the economic ones are very successful with agreement, hugs and kisses, etc. Whenever it is a political summit, they leave without shaking hands so we need to pay a lot of attention to economics. The European countries previously fought each other but they got together on economic and financial issues. We need to pay attention to economic ties and the Arab Monetary Fund has recently been advising the relevant ministers on those issues. Please let us focus on economic and financial issues and I think we are no different, we are not exceptions, we can agree if we want. For example, we have made good progress



on electrical connectivity and connecting countries. We never have issues around projects where there are benefits, the difficulty arises when we talk about political issues and where we stand.

Karima Anbar, CEO and board member of Intisar Foundation

I have a question for Mr. Abdulrahman Al Neyadi. I work in the field of empowering women and I would like to know if the UAE has a national or international policy regarding empowering women to counter terrorism?

Abdulrahman Al Neyadi

We have always seen it as an objective for our empowerment of women and of building a healthy society that is resilient when faced with extremism. So it has always been part of our vision. I am not sure that there is a global push to look at it from that perspective, but it is one element of the empowerment of women. The overall topic is much larger and includes economic goals from enhancing the workforce and entrepreneurship, etc., within the same spectrum. I wanted to shed some light on addressing the idea of extremism from the angle of creating a healthy society, of which women are a fundamental part.

Kamel Abdallah, Managing Director and CEO of Canal Sugar

People think that agriculture and farmers are male, they are very far from that, most agriculture is done by women. We work with 6 000 farmers and we are shocked. We reach 20 000 farmers in Egypt and when we go to the communities, I moved my office to Said, I deal more with women farmers. Second, I talked about food consumption and wellness and this relates to the food intake of teenagers and pre-teens, and this comes back to the important role of women.

The inclusion of women is a critical component in food security not just something that is nice to have. Women are at the center of this puzzle, either producing food through agriculture or helping with the consumption of proper food and nutrition. We are now working with women more and more and that is getting us to a lot of issues related to society in the Middle East and who controls the economic wealth in farming communities. I believe that is something we need to look at.

Riad Tabet, President of Berit International Holding SA

My question is for President Al Hamidy. I am not a realtor but I am a city planner and urban sociologist. In the Middle East area you have countries with high levels of per capital income and others with very low levels, even though these countries might have important resources. From your point of view as President of the Arab Monetary Fund, do you think the area's development problems are economic, demographic or political?

Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy

All the above. We have political, security and economic issues but I think we should focus on specific issues and youth is very important. We have the right paradigm in the region, while others have aging populations ours is 60% and in some countries 65% below 40 years of age.

Therefore, we need to change our economic development model and work it out with this new generation. As a Saudi, I have seen changes with mostly young people in leadership positions and they can interact with youth, rather than my generation, they know what they want and they do it perfectly. I no longer need to go to Saudi, I use my mobile for all my needs and that change was not introduced by my generation but the current one. I also agree about giving women opportunities. My first career was in academic and at the university I also taught women and at that time it was As for them and Cs for the boys. In Saudi they are very educated when they get the opportunity and in just six years we have reached a level where 30% of the labor market is now women. That was a case of changing the model before it was changed because it was necessary. I think the UAE is also a leader in this and other countries like Jordan and Morocco, which we also work with, and who have done a very good job in clean energy. There are models that are working with opportunities and challenges from all directions. Sudan is an issue, and now Palestine is another and I believe our leaders need to focus on economic issues, which I think could help enlarge our markets. The Arab common market was agreed in the 1956 before the European one, and we implemented anything because we turned away from economic issues. I think we should go back because with our youth population we have a very large market and the private sector could be very big with everything we have, with all the issues of clean energy, and our educated young men and women. Let us change the paradigm and give the young generation opportunities, and they are getting that in the UAE and Saudi where they are making the change.

Soumeya Abdelatif, First Vice President of North/South dialogue for Arab countries and the Mediterranean at the Robert Schuman Institute for Europe

I have a question for Dr Mona. Can you tell us more about the one-state solution proposed by Mr. Dahlan or is it just an announcement?

Mona Akram Ebeid

I think he is very well-read about the solution. He was born in Khan Yunis, he is from Gaza and was in charge in Gaza before he fell out with Abbas and I think he is the best person to do this. The idea of a one-state was first proposed long ago by Rashid Khalidi, who you may know is a very well-recognized professor of political science in the United States. It was his idea that the two-state solution is not feasible, particularly after recent events, Mr. Netanyahu has killed it off and we cannot go back to it. We have to think of something new. Mr. Dahlan is very much involved in this and he has the protection of the rulers of the UAE and is an advisor to them, and he also has good relations with the Israelis, the Palestinians and General El-Sisi, so you cannot do better. I think he is putting all his credentials in place for people to pick up what he is saying. I am going to write an article about Mr. Dahlan, I am very much a supporter. He might not be the best but he knows the issues and he has good support in Gaza.

François Gouyette, former Ambassador of France to the UAE and to Saudi Arabia

What if the alternative was not Dahlan but Marwan Barghouti?

Mona Makram Ebeid

Whether it is Mustafa Barghouti, the one in jail, Mahmoud, or Marwan, they are all probably better human beings than Mohammed Dahlan. However, Mohammed Dahlan is a politician

and he is accepted by people on different sides, which is what we want if somebody is going to lead Gaza as it is now. He even has connections with Hamas, having been born in the same community of Khan Yunis. I respect the others a lot, both Marwan and Mustafa Barghouti, who I know personally, but I do not think they would be accepted by Israel or the rest.

Ahmed Awad

I work in human rights for the UAE government, and I am based here. There are so many interesting things and my question is for Madame Mona. I wonder if you have thought about any reconciliation process, which is extremely important, especially in the light of the news and it is extremely important with Palestinians in Gaza and the Left Bank. From my experience working in Geneva in the Human Rights Council and in the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, every time you have a conflict, if you do not have a reconciliation process afterwards it is very difficult to keep the peace. First, it is important inside the Palestinian community itself. Second, no donors, whether institutions like the World Bank, etc., or state donors, will not give a single euro or dirham without a consensus in the country. I think it is extremely important to address the reconciliation process before going any further.

Mona Makram Ebeid

I agree with your remark because there will be no consensus if there is no arrangement among them. This is why I spoke about Mohammed Dahlan because he has the connections to the different sides, who are mostly fighting each other, but I think it is a great advantage he was born in Gaza.

Abdulrahman Al Neyadi

I just want to comment on Ernesto's presentation. It is very important because in foreign policy right now we see a lot of connections between them and technical issues, and this is something very important we are dealing with every day. You mentioned decoupling and de-risking, and we see it from a policy point of view and what we are trying to create in terms of strategic autonomy to address the issues or build resiliency against things like Covid-19, etc. It is very important and I think we should embrace technology going forward and it could be a solution to many of our problems going forward.

Ernesto Damiani, Professor at Khalifa University for the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, Director of the Center for Cyber-Physical Systems (C2PS)

I also tried to deliver a warning that comes from mathematical modelling. Deploying the technology in a no-trust environment may not deliver the quality of optimization you expect. The less the trust and the more you want to control risk, the lower the benefits you can expect from the technological-based platforms for collaboration. We need to have a balance between how much risk we want to take and how much we expect joint optimization to deliver.

Younis Zrikem, Partner and Director of Boston Consulting Group



I am Moroccan and French. Many of you know this but for the others, when it comes to the Palestinians it is not an option to go back to the previous status quo. Maybe Mohammed Dahlan is an option but we have to remember that there are different categories of Palestinians. There are the Palestinians in Gaza, in the West Bank, and all around the region, with 60% of Jordanians being Palestinians and we heard 300 000 Palestinians live in Lebanon, and there are Palestinians in Syria, etc. There are almost 1.5 million Palestinian Israelis with an Israeli passport. Then there are the Palestinians in Europe, North America and elsewhere. Therefore, there are five categories of Palestinian and I think they should each be heard and their views taken into account in any future solution. You said that Mohammed Dahlan was born in Khan Younis and comes from Gaza, and I think that is important and a solution should probably take that into account. Even in the Oslo negotiations we know that they were mostly led by the Palestinian diaspora abroad and maybe that is one of the reasons things did not go as well as they should have.

Abdulrahman A. Al Hamidy

I will take the opportunity to thank the seven speakers for their very comprehensive introductory remarks and for making this a very active session. I hope to see you in the near future at another event.