



BEIRUT INSTITUTE

TRANSCRIPT OF e-POLICY CIRCLE 1

May 6th, 2020

RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal

HE Anwar Gargash

HE General David Petraeus

HE Andrei Fedorov

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpedwlyEu6s&t=1015s>

Raghida Dergham: Good afternoon, good morning wherever you are. I think you very much for joining us for our first e-Policy Circle for Beirut Institute Summit. Those who are part of the Beirut Institute Summit family know that the policy circles are normally off-the-record, but this time because we have had to take them to the webinars, we will be on-the-record, and we are so honored to have with us a fantastic group, of not only leaders, but also deep intellectuals, and I will start by welcoming the co-Chair for Beirut Institute Summit His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al-Faissal, welcome Your Royal Highness. I am extremely thankful to have with us His Excellency Minister Anwar Gargash, who is actually the first time that he is a speaker with Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi, this time it is going to be online, hopefully next time it will be in March 13 and 14, 2021, the new date for our Summit, and welcome Dr. Anwar Gargash. I have with us our marvelous, regular, committed, fabulous General David Petraeus, who's so loyal to Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi and I welcome you and I look forward for your always controversial contributions because they're always like sort of thinking out of the box, welcome and thank you for joining us. Ahlan wa Sahlan. And then we have Doctor Andrei Fedorov, who is not someone who shies away from making statements that create very important debates. And I thank you from joining us from Moscow. So, we have Moscow, New York, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi, and I am in Beirut, Raghida Dergham, I am the co-Chair for this Summit of Beirut Institute, I am also the Founder and Executive Chairman of Beirut Institute. Thank you for those who are joining us, and I am going to start as follow, each of the participants will have four to five minutes to state what they have to say, and then we are going to engage into a frank discussion.

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal: Forty-five minutes, or four to five minutes?

Raghida Dergham: Four to five minutes. Thank you for asking for the clarification. Either four minutes, or five minutes for each of you, and then we will engage in a conversation with each other. I shall have the honor of being the facilitator, moderator, slash whatever you want to call me in this role that I will be playing on this e-Policy Circle. So, I will start, unfortunately we will not be taking interventions live. But we will be looking at questions that the participants, the audience send to us, and we will try to accommodate as many questions as possible. So that I

don't take any more time, Your Royal Highness, would you kindly start by giving us your take on 'Stability Redefined' in not aftermath because we are in the middle of COVID-19, and of course in the crisis, the multiple crises that came as a result. Kindly give us your take on 'Stability Redefined'.

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal: Thank you very much Raghida. It's a privilege and pleasure to with this group of this distinguished group of thinkers and doers. First of all, the Kingdom, of course, has been in the COVID storm since the beginning and took very strict measures to try to stem the impact of that storm on the people and worldwide. At the same time, the Kingdom, and so King Salman, is chair of the G20 this year, so King Salman took the initiative of hosting the summit of the G20 via similar facilities like you're providing us today. And you've seen the results of that summit. I think they were very much dedicated to finding solutions rather than trying to place blame anybody and that is, I think, where we should be going. In the Kingdom of course the measures taken have been very, very strict. Just yesterday, a new regulation on fines and prison terms for people who break the regulations and appear to be not performing what is required of them has been put in place, amounts reaching one million riyals of fines and one-year sentence in prison for those who break either regulations or other norms that have been put in place.

Health wise, the Kingdom is the largest in the Gulf states in recording the number of afflicted citizens and residents. But in terms of deaths, percentagewise, the Kingdom has one of the lowest percentages of deaths in the world, Thank God. And I think that is because of the preparation before COVID-19 took the ground as it were in the health services and ancillary activities. This is not unique to Saudis, but all residents, including those who are not here officially, meaning the illegals or the ones without official documentation, they're all being put in the health service environment and they are being treated whenever necessary.

My biggest concern today is what I see happening between China and the US. It's as if we're going back to grade school with finger-pointing and blaming and other actions that won't bode well for the world community. This is a dangerous time. We have one common enemy which is corona and I think all of us should be in the same effort to beat it and get the world back to normal if that can be achieved and depending on what you mean by normal.

But otherwise, I think in general my take on this is that I'm hoping for the best and the G-20 put that very successfully in its statement by saying our first priority is the welfare of the health of humanity and this is where all our efforts should be put and if we are to blame each other or point fingers at each other I don't think that is helpful, that should be done after we get over this horrible storm that has engulfed all of us.

We are all victims of this and when it comes to human life nothing can be more precious or more valuable than finding the cure for corona as quickly as possible. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak like that.

Raghida Dergham: Is the G20 able to put the parameters of stability redefined or do you think it has to reinvent itself in order to matter? Is Saudi Arabia trying to play a role in that?

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal: I don't know what you mean by 'reinventing itself'. The G20 represents the countries that have the highest GDP in the world and in that context, their

responsibility has been recognized since the past crisis we had fifteen years ago and so they don't need to reinvent themselves but what they have done is, I think, the right thing. They have pointed to the cures, cures not just health-wise but also economic stability, incentivizing the recovery from whatever economic ills we have gone through and put a plan forward.

That is the role of G20. Of course the world community through the United Nations and other world organizations has a responsibility as well and Mr. Guterres has been forward with many proposals and there have been many conferences held at various levels to put forward programs and activities for the world community and I think this is where we're going.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Your Royal Highness. Your excellency, Anwar Gargash, please give us your take on how do you see 'Stability Redefined'.

HE Anwar Gargash: I think what we're all facing essentially is a public health crisis. I think the world is going through several economic crises but has not gone through a global public health crisis and that's why we see that we are clearly unprepared as an international system.

This crisis from day one had an impact on the economy and food security. From the way we look at it, it's a multiple crisis where public health is the main indicator and then the economic indicator is right behind it and sometimes surpassing it, to be honest, in its severity. But clearly, from our regional perspective, the food security part is a problem. At the same time, two other parts that are very clear in the Gulf, one of them is labor and the other one is energy, and these have an impact anywhere in the world but here they have also substantial fiscal problems. Again, you know, to echo what Prince Turki said, I think we've done a good job in addressing the crisis so far, it's not like we have had a game plan or road map but from day one we realized that this is not going to be staying in China, it will come eventually West and, you know, our major thing is the belief in testing: we've done now, out of a population of 9 million, about 1.4 million tests in the UAE and we are doing about 30 000 tests every day. Every day you test, you find 3 400 people who actually have the symptoms, but that is I think a major thing, but what I would say is, Prince Turki spoke about US-China and I'm not going to repeat that because I agree with him totally. But I think what has really emerged is the efficacy of dealing with the issue, it has nothing to do with ideology, the efficacy has to do with state capacity; some states have done very well because they've got the institutions, the capacity, the planning, and some states have not done so well regardless of ideology. So, I think the emphasis will be a lot on state capacity.

I also see that there has been more of a myth and this is something we need to deal with and to deal with this I think the Europeans are, you know, admitting that rather than think in an EU, you know, sort of frame of mind, they've been really thinking in a France, or Germany, or Poland, or Spain frame of mind and this has been all over the world, even here in the Gulf we've been thinking more about a national program so I would say that state efficacy has basically played an important part while regional or global capability and cooperation is taken aback and I think this is not entirely a good thing, this is something that we need to deal with, I would say also we would look at globalization differently. Again, I would say that it's too early to prophesize but again there will be questions about globalization. Here in the Gulf, I'm sure we will have a lot of questions about what constitutes a Gulf frontier state model. I mean, we've been for many years trying to escape that model with varying degrees of success, but I think this is going to accelerate the necessity for us to find something a little bit more sustainable. I'm going to stop here, I have more comments but I'm sure they will come in the discussion.

Raghida Dergham: I'll do a quick follow-up on what you said regarding labor and energy, but I will stop at the issue of labor which is a popular one for this part of the region, as we mentioned. Are you thinking of the need for structural reforms in order to deal with your issue? Like before we went on live, we were talking about the Western countries have got the problem of unemployment, but in your part of the world, you have the problem of the expat labor. Are you studying real reform on the structural level or is this not the time?

HE Anwar Gargash: No I think it's a bit too early to say but clearly labor does not mean all expatriates but because a large segment of it is in creative jobs in, let's say, medium jobs and so on and so forth, and these will be affected by any economy in terms of unemployment or terms of an economy facing a severe crisis such as the one we see today. But I think labor here in the Gulf has depended on a large number of blue-collar expat-labor. Not only the gulf is dependent, you know, one of the largest employers of Arab labor, for example, in the world is the Gulf countries so this has an effect both ways and I think these are areas that will be under consideration. One would have to look at it to see is this model that has been part and parcel of the development model in the region since the 1950s and maybe before, is this sustainable the same way? Should it be tweaked or not? I think it's a bit early, but this is emerging I think as a major issue.

Raghida Dergham: Great. I'm going to get back to these issues during that further larger discussion but let me bring in General David Petraeus. General, I know that you have, or you want to say what you have to say in your opening statement but I'm sure you're going to address the US-China angle and I'm sure you you'll probably touch on the bilateral dimension of that potential. I don't know if it is going to be face-off or it is going to be contained but maybe you would also, if you have the chance to tell us how it would reflect on the Arab region or is it separate. Is it only bilateral or will it have an impact on this part of the world?

The floor is yours.

HE General David Petraeus: Well first of all thanks Raghida, it's always great to be with the Beirut Institute, even if in this case it is virtually and it's always a pleasure and a privilege to share a stage with my fellow Princetonian and fellow former spymaster prince Turki, with one of the region's foremost diplomats Dr. Anwar Gargash, and also to have Dr Fedorov join us from Moscow.

I think first of all it's much too early to draw any conclusions about whether stability has been redefined, is being redefined, what the implications of this are, but it's not too early to start at least focusing on the questions that we should be seeking answers to over time as we do, indeed, start to draw conclusions about this. As you may recall, I've been associated with a particular question since early on in the invasion of Iraq when I was a young two-star General and it was clear that all of the assumptions that we'd been provided prior to the invasion were being invalidated one by one and I turned to a reporter who was with me, Rick Atkinson, and asked "tell me how this ends" because it was not clear to me at that time how that wasn't going to end and I've been asked that question again now "tell me how this ends" and of course this now is the pandemic and the associated economic collapse that has resulted from the steps we've had to take to deal with the health crisis in each of our countries. There have been a few titles that I have thought about for this piece that I should share. One of them is "Two to Three Years to a New Normal" and that new normal is going to be different from the old normal because of business

and consumer behavior is going to change as a result of this. We don't know yet how much but it is clear that many, many industries and many sectors of the economy will be affected by changes in how we work, how we travel, whether we travel, again tourism and hospitality, and all of these different venues and so forth so that could be quite profound. Another possible title since, as you know, I'm a former economics professor was "It Depends" and it does depend obviously at a host of different factors, some of which have already been raised and I'll raise some more. And then there's another, which came from a projection made by one of my old dissertation advisors at Princeton twenty-five years ago, now he's at Harvard, who predicted that the world would be less open, less prosperous, and less free. Now I hope that is not the case but I can see how he might have assumptions that could lead him to that kind of conclusion. In the meantime of course how this ends is really with a vaccine and with, and or a therapeutic treatment, noting that, for example, HIV was never actually, there's never a vaccine for it, it's the treatment that enables people to live a normal life and so there's a race on to solve this problems. There are a hundred or more initiatives in the vaccine arena alone. In the meantime, the question is "How can restrictions that have been imposed on societies around the world to break the community transmission of the virus be relaxed and done safely?" And of course, the issue here, as both of the previous speakers have highlighted, is the issue of testing and then contact tracing in the United States, this has to be expanded very, very significantly if there is to be the establishment of the confidence that is necessary for consumers to resume some of their normal activities.

Keep in mind that it's not enough for governments to say you can reopen your doors, businesses of this type for that type, there has to be the confidence in society for individuals to walk into those doors and again to resume some of their normal activities for the economy to gradually begin to recover and that again is going to be dependent on a massive increase in testing. I mean it could be at some point that we will have a credential digitally that we will carry around that will show that we were tested in the last 24 hours and we are COVID-19 free and therefore we can get on a plane or do whatever else it is that we would like to do. That's crucial even as there are continued measures, people work from home where they still can, the most vulnerable in society still shelter in place a whole host of including wearing masks in public places when physical distancing is not possible that will gradually start to help some economic activity resume but there are a lot.

Raghida Dergham: General, how about the geopolitics in general? Everybody is interested in the US and China.

HE General David Petraeus: Well as I was just saying, there are numerous geopolitical implications, needless to say as well foremost among these, certainly, as has been raised previously, is the effect on the US-China relationship. Obviously, there have been frictions in this relationship. My hope, frankly, is that leaders of both countries, and again a relationship that's the most important in the entire world, that they can for the time being put the differences aside, put the blame and finger-pointing aside, for now, to come up with a global response to a global problem. Keep in mind, that none of us is safe when there is a global pandemic unless all of us are safe and so again, the leaders of the two greatest countries in the world hopefully can come together then certainly bringing in the G7 the G20 has been highlighted previously to spearhead that keeping in mind that it is just now that Latin America, Africa, and South Asia are seeing how terrible the pandemic can be. They are weeks behind Europe, and the United States when it comes to this and many of those countries do not have the fiscal and monetary

firepower that the US and other developed economies of the world have to provide support at a time when you're seeing unemployment levels that rival those of the great depression, not just the great recession. So again, my hope would be that geopolitically, this could be a time where we return to the use of multilateral institutions, international organizations and indeed the leaders of the two foremost countries in the world do come together, share information, share overtime treatment and vaccine discoveries and help the world come to a global solution without which there will still be a global problem that will have an associated economic faction issue with it.

Raghida Dergham: Great, thank you very much General. Dr. Andrei Fedorov, Russia has had its own notion and definition of stability, and basically as in the meaning of stabilization versus stability, or at least as it was interpreted by Russia.

Where is Russia now? Give us your four minutes statement, and then I have lots of questions for you on how Russia is seeing or defining stability in its new phase, or is it just business as usual?

HE Dr. Andrei Fedorov: Thank you Raghida. I will not go through this corona virus issue too much. I want to mention a couple of things. First of all, what is going now with this corona virus? Is the performance of existing crisis? We are speaking of corona virus, but we still have obvious problems in Syria. We have problems in Libya. We have, at least in my personal opinion, next month will be a very serious turmoil in Iran and Afghanistan. Many other things. We have just a little forgotten about these things which are still going on without any solution. This is the weak point of foreign policy of all the countries including Russia. Russia also, there is one negative point is that Russia is losing now its favorite toy: Theme of disarmament. No one is interested in disarmament at this stage, frankly speaking, it will be very hard for Russia to play again the role of the country which is trying to bring peace and stability with the situation where interest towards disarmament is on the nearly zero level and I don't think this situation will change. This is a problem for us. What I see now first of all, I see that in the future, the solution of many existing problems will be even more difficult than now. Why? Because all the main players including Russia, China, US, they will be weaker, more or less, than they are now because of economic problems, because of this corona virus, because of many other things and it means all the players, including Russia, will definitely spend less time, less money, and effort for solution of the existing crisis so that's why I don't expect any kind of new stage of stability after the corona virus would be more or less over. Vice versa, we will come to the new stage without reserves: financial personal and other reserves to solve this crisis. It means that my main idea, we should be prepared for the period maybe to the end of this year when all these old crises, existing crises will be brought back to the agenda of all of us and we will be obliged to return to them, and if there will be no understanding how to deal with this, I don't know how it will come.

Concerning the US, it can be one very good thing. I'm absolutely sure that out of this crisis, the US will go out much stronger than China. I mean, on the international level, maybe not economically, but internationally, US will be the winner. US will be capable of forming rather broad anti-Chinese coalition which they started to build up since the beginning of this year and I don't think that there is a chance to find common language between these two countries on key problems which are existing between them.

Raghida Dergham: That is very interesting, that the US will be the winner in the dual between China and US. I'm sure I'm going to drag out of all of you, your point of view on this one but let me stop at a couple of things that you said. You said there will be in the next month a turmoil in

Iran, can you explain what you mean? And do you expect this will spill over the Arab Gulf states or into a confrontation with the US? Can you explain exactly what you mean and then I want to ask you later on, during the engagement on Russia in Syria, we're hearing a lot about that. But focus with me on this: the turmoil in Iran that you are predicting.

HE Dr. Andrei Fedorov: So my contacts with Iran are showing that they are entering probably the last stage of their semi-stability inside the country. Economic situation there is terrible. The mood among the citizens has also become more and more negative and this situation for Iranian leadership, there is no other way out of the current situation inside the country and to create an outside crisis and most probably as it was before it will be the crisis created with US because it's much easier for them to do this. According to my personal knowledge, only to my personal knowledge, the end of May or beginning of June might be a new stage of the crisis inside Iran and outside and the government should be ready for this because in Russia we see a negative scenario but very probable scenario.

Raghida Dergham: Let me take this to the other distinguished panelists, Your Royal Highness, you heard what Mr. Fedorov just said, and I want to also invite Dr. Gargash on this one so be ready, get a little bit worried because stability may be not lasting at all, or the pretention of stability is not lasting in the region. Can you first address what Mr. Federov has said? And then I am going to turn to General Petraeus to talk about Iran, as potentially another round of attempting instabilities, especially by engaging the United States in the Gulf area, of course. Your Royal Highness, Prince Faisal.

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal: Thank you Dr. Fedorov for what you said because we've been living with this Iranian situation since the revolution and Iran's choosing to put on the outside the blame for what is happening in the area and inside Iran is not new. The great Satan has been the banner in the Iranian revolution since its inception and directing their venomous and their very harsh words not just to America but to countries like Saudi Arabia, Israel and other places has always been a practice for Iran and I'm not in the government so I don't know what my government is considering in this aspect but I am sure that we have been stung too many times by Iran's overacting and beyond border ambitions since the revolution started. Most recently in KSA has been the bombing of the Aramco facilities last year and yet we as a Kingdom, have been acting very much with stability in mind in bringing this as not just a Saudi responsibility but as a world responsibility that must act to prevent Iran from doing what it has been doing for the last forty years. This is not new to us. This is something that has been in the Iranian field of vision since the revolution and their extra-territorial ambitions have not been hidden by them. They have boasted about controlling four Arab capitals. Look at their media now, blaming the US for the corona virus, and so on. So yes, you are absolutely right. Countries in the Gulf Arab Cooperation Council, I'm sure, are taking this into account and hopefully the US is equally aware of these dangers.

Raghida Dergham: What are you doing about it Prince Turki? Last time there was an attack on tankers and US sort of said that this is your problem, not really much ours. Is there a new thinking among Arab countries? Saudi Arabia, all the GCC countries or some of the GCC countries? Are you better prepared? Are you more ready to take care of yourself in case there is a need by Iran to shake the stability in your own countries through bringing further instability whether it's by attacks against tankers or otherwise? Any new thinking on that? Do you know of any planning?

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal: As I told you, I'm not in the government but I've seen that the Kingdom and the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman, I don't know about Qatar, they seem to have some different interpretations as to where the threat might come from. These countries have been dealing with this for many years but also we've been dealing with the US since the attack on Aramco oil facilities the US have come forward and agreed to place military hardware and personnel in the Kingdom particularly along with what they have already in places like the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar and Oman.

So as far as security and safety, this is what we've been seeking. It's the responsibility for the world and not just the GCC countries to meet this challenge of Iranian extra territorial ambitions and trying to throw on others what it should be dealing with in its own turf.

Raghida Dergham: Mr. Anwar Gargash. You heard what Andrei Fedorov said: the turmoil expected to change the subject outside through generating outside crisis probably engagement with the US, the provocation and that is the territory will be your part of the world. How prepared are you? How frightened are you and how reasonable you are?

HE Anwar Gargash: Again, I'm going to build on what Mr. Fedorov and Prince Turki said. We can see a multitude of issues and problems here and at the same time, you know, this is not the first time, we've been living this sort of environment in the gulf for a long time but really if we look at, if we go back and think "how does COVID-19 affect regional opportunities?" In my opinion, the key here to try and think that we will come out with a new regional order is long-term thinking, and it's not practical so I think we need to really concentrate on de-escalation. In my opinion one of the things that we will see in the coming period is the realization for the same reasons that Mr. Fedorov mentioned, that countries realize that they have gone through a traumatic experience and as a result nobody really wants a confrontation. So de-escalate and I think here some people who think that we can somehow, you know, turn the page and start putting together a new Gulf regional order, I think this is a little bit too ambitious but de-escalation is something that can be achieved and it's in everybody's interest because I feel that in the coming period all countries will be looking internally. The type of issues that we are facing, financial and otherwise, are going to lead all of us to look internally, and if you look internally you are bound to think of de-escalation externally. I think this will be a period of re-examining development policies internally. I don't really see it as a period of rebuilding regional orders so from that perspective I think vis-a-vis Iran they will be really between two instances pulling them apart the explanation that Dr. Fedorov gave but on the other hand also realization that they've got internal priorities that cannot wait and these internal priorities are not necessarily political but they impact politically. And I think this is the way that I see it. I think everybody is going to think that the real winner here is your state capacity.

Raghida Dergham: The UAE had reached out to Iran during the difficulties of the corona virus and this pandemic really spreading in Iran and I think you had a humanitarian relationship with Iran. Has this been developed further into something more? Are you now having this discussed?

HE Anwar Gargash: Let us put this in context. Last year, I think it's been so long, but last year the UAE and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia also jointly sent humanitarian support to Iran following floods. There have been other instances of earthquakes, etc., that countries look

beyond the political. So, I'm not really going to give you know these measures any extra political weight. I mean there is always a political angle, but I think it emphasizes the issue that the priority right now after we've all been hit by a hurricane regionally, globally and the first thing you think is trying to sort of put the pole up, make sure the tent is up, and I think de-escalation should be ruling how we conduct our foreign policy during this coming period.

Raghida Dergham: General Petraeus, obviously if you hear it from the Iranian side you hear that it is the United States who wants to provoke a confrontation. If you hear it from the US side, it is really the action of Iran, be it in Iraq, in Lebanon, potentially as what Dr. Fedorov said in the Gulf through new operations that is really calling for a confrontation. What is your view? How is the United States going to act, especially this administration? Because I think the Iranians are thinking maybe, well that dragging that Donald Trump into confrontation maybe may cost him the elections. Give us your assessments and share with us your zones of comfort and your fears of what is coming in the next couple of months as a result of what you have just heard a little earlier turmoil in Iran and beyond.

HE General David Petraeus: Well first of all I don't think there's any question about the source of the provocation, it has been Iran, it was Iran that shot down 130 million dollar drones over the strait of Hormuz, it was Iran that harassed shipping in the Gulf, it was Iran that attacked the Saudi Aramco facilities, and so forth, and it's Iranian-supported proxy militias that are carrying out various actions in Iraq and in other places. I think it's always important to remember the context when you're talking about Iran, it retains regardless of the pandemic, or whatever, we've been hit by a hurricane. I like the metaphor, but the fact is that Iran's long-term objective is unchanged, it is hegemony over the Shia crescent, and it is the Lebanonization of Iraq and Syria in addition now to having Lebanonized Lebanon. By that I mean that you have powerful militias on the ground that give you great strength, in that regard Hezbollah. And then there is power in the parliament as well, in this case the Hezbollah coalition in Lebanon is literally going to be the foundation for the government, as you know very well being there in Beirut, and they'd like to do the same in Iraq and ultimately they'd love to do the same in Syria and probably even Yemen if they could pull it off. But they're in a very, very difficult situation. They are being crushed by the economic sanctions, their economy is in free fall, the currency's devaluated, unemployment is vastly higher, they've mismanaged every aspect of the economy including even water. And now they have completely mismanaged the response to the pandemic, completely stalled in what they should have done early on and allowed a variety of different major activities to take place in which the transmission of the virus was very, very broad indeed. Beyond that, I don't think that they want to provoke war with the United States. I think they realize what could happen, and by the way, they know that the United States has improved its defenses, it has consolidated its forces on a number of bases in Iraq, it has surrounded them now, it has patriots and other air and ballistic missile defenses, it has done the same as Prince Turki noted in the Gulf states as well and shored them up including forces back on Saudi soil for the first time in probably decades really and so I think again they are going to be cautious. That doesn't mean that they won't use again their proxy militias try to push US forces out of Iraq, or Syria, or perhaps other locations. It does mean that they're not going to provoke the United States directly because the United States is in an even more defensible position and presumably US central command has shored up the preparations for a variety of other activities as well. Beyond that, of course, they know there's an election coming up in November, they know there's not going to be any meaningful diplomacy prior to that, I've actually suggested perhaps some modest outreach to try to reduce the tension

somewhat but it would not be something very significant and then after the election we'll see whether or not there is the possibility of some kind of initiative to get back to an Iran nuclear agreement but with the issues that cause concern resolved in terms of the end dates the horizon, the sunset clauses and so forth.

Raghida Dergham: So just two quick follow-ups. One is, you mentioned Lebanon, right here, but it is really at the breaking point, this country is really at the breaking point and so as far as the United States is concerned if it falls into squarely, into the hands of Iran, so no problem, and the gulf states probably feel the same way, I don't know maybe they will answer me through their distinguished representatives, but quick take on Lebanon and Iraq so that these are the two important stages or fronts for potential confrontation or the latter or maybe not between the United States and Iran.

HE General Petraeus: Well look, Lebanon is going to have to develop a proposal for the IMF that is truly credible and that meets the requirements for an IMF support package and it's not clear to me yet that they have been able to do that. This is not going to be the IMF bailing out Hezbollah, this is going to be the IMF supporting a package that truly will come to grips with the corruption that has plagued the country that will truly come to grips with a variety of the other issues that have put the Lebanese economy at the brink of very collapse. So that would be my take on Lebanon.

And then, in Iraq, the hope is certainly that the current prime minister designated, who was again announced by president Barham Saleh, can move forward. My understanding is that within the next week, he will put forward his government, his list of candidates for the various ministries and there is hope this time I think, having not seen this happen with the two previous individuals who were designated as prime minister and given the chance to form a government and were unsuccessful in doing so, I think the prospects this time are that the parliament, that there can be the requisite votes in the Council of Representatives to enable the establishment of a government that can now deal with the challenges that Iraq faces, keeping in mind that the biggest challenge it has may not even be the pandemic or the, again, Iranian-supported Shia militia and a variety of other challenges of ethnic and sectarian nature and the corruption that has plagued the country um it is actually the collapse in the price of Brent crude and for a country that really depends on the revenue from the export of crude oil this is very, very difficult indeed and they're going to have to come together on this and there's no way they can sustain all of the different federal spending that they've had in the past, the fiscal spending, and they're going to have to work together to figure out how to make changes to get them through a tough period before the price does begin its recovery sometime probably next year.

Raghida Dergham: Okay thank you very much. Andrei Fedorov, straighten the record here because we hear so many different inputs by the media and both in Russia and the United States, across the world, telling us that there is a fundamental change in President Vladimir Putin's position towards President Bashar Al-Assad. We hear that Turkey, Iran and Russia are ready to sort of, you know, have to overthrow Bashar Al-Assad and, tell us what's going on, is this a new alliance between Turkey, is it possibly an alliance between Turkey and Russia because of the necessity to work it out in Syria or you don't lend any of this any credence? What is your take on that, sitting in Moscow, is this something we should take seriously, or not?

HE Dr. Andrei Fedorov: One very small comment to the previous discussion, the problem is that both in Tehran and Moscow there was very deep dissatisfaction with the fact that both countries wanted to use this corona virus situation to become free of sanctions and it didn't happen. This is a very important element because if, for example, Iran could be free of sanctions, the situation might be changed but now there is a growing anger by the way both in Moscow and in Tehran. Okay concerning Syria. Syria is becoming more and more headache for Russia. Support for Syrian operation is on the lowest level among Russian society, according to latest polls it's only about eight percent or something like this in comparison with about seventy percent in the beginning.

The problem for Moscow today is that the preliminary written timetable of going out of Syrian crisis is fully broken down, it's absolutely clear in Moscow that in 2020 there will be no solution found for Syria there is no political process, there is no Geneva, there is no Astana, there is no searching, nothing and the only solution for Syria today from Russian point of view is to try to help Bashar Al-Assad to take control over the country including Idlib. That's why we are increasing our military assistance through Assad during the last two months because we understand that in this stage its old scheme when there should be a political process above all is not working.

Raghida Dergham: One second, because your voice was cut off a bit and I want to make sure that we understand you. Did you say that the decision is to increase assistance by Russia? You are challenging all these other public, I mean, it's been a wave of applications today that actually put the anger with Bashar Al-Assad because he torpedoed the political process, he actually torpedoed the exit strategy of Russia and now you're challenging all that and you're saying in fact the decision is to tighten the support, not to loosen the support of Bashar al-Assad?

HR Dr. Andrei Fedorov: Absolutely. All this public media noise was just a noise, it didn't change.

Raghida Dergham: Why?

HR Dr. Andrei Fedorov: Because as I said, there is no political process, there is no chance to start it again and it is in this very state, yes it's very painful for Russia especially in the consideration making concessions that at the current stage Iran is taking more and more control over Syria on the ground, which Russia is not capable to make and the thing for us is the best option for us in this state, for Assad to take control over all the country and then to play his own game, with our help, without our help, to have elections, to have everything and we can try to sell it as a positive way out. If it will not happen, if Assad will not be assisted by us military especially now and will not have offensive operation in Idlib, in this case Russia will lose too many things in Syria. We cannot stay there forever we don't to...

Raghida Dergham: So just to understand you, you're saying there is going to be a new wave of attack in Idleb right?

HR Dr. Andrei Fedorov: New offensive operation, yes. It's inevitable now from Syria.

Raghida Dergham: I'm going to be asking each of you to conclude but you know I'm going to stay with you to give you one minute quickly, Andrei Fedorov, to conclude because we are

running out of time and then I'm going to go backwards so that I could end with HRH. So, you give me your one minute take on, I mean conclusion, if you will on this debate whatever you want, however you want to use that your one minute, go ahead.

HR Dr. Andrei Fedorov: Only one minute, so the world will be in more troubles after the virus hysteria will be over. We will face much more new challenges and our resources for solving the existing and coming problems are less than before the current world, that's all!

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Andrei Fedorov. Petraeus you've got your two minutes now, or one and a half, from what I'm being told. Go ahead General.

HR General David Petraeus: Well I just sum up by saying again that a global pandemic and a global economic crisis require a global solution, or global solutions. I do agree with Andrei that there will be less resources the fact is that the United States, as an example, have spent in about a period of a month three times its annual discretionary budget to provide support for those who have been affected by this, which is a very broad part of our economy and there will be fiscal pressures not just in the United States but I suspect in all governments in the wake of the pandemics resolution, and as the economies begin to come back, and that will weigh on what is possible in the future, and arguably it makes it even more imperative that all the countries come together in some cases pool resources, pool solutions and pool the approaches that will be necessary to resolve both a health and an economic crisis.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much General Petraeus. I have Dr. Anwar Gargash, you've got your two minutes, sorry I have so many questions coming and I did not even get to any of them. It's such an exciting conversation that everybody wants to get engaged.

HE Anwar Gargash: Again, I would say that the region like all regions in the world is going to be financially and politically weaker. I think we will be wise to think about our development models about de-escalation and to try some problem-solving. However, there will be countries or parties that will try and continue, you know their same way of foreign policy or international behavior that will not be helpful. I think we're also very much concerned about what we are seeing in terms of US-Chinese confrontation, with its implications on our region. We need to heal this is a period of healing, and healing means we need to look internally, and we need to address the impact of this huge pandemic on our policies and on our relations with others, I hope we do the wise thing.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you Minister Anwar Gargash. Your Royal Highness, Turki Al Faisal you've got, one and a half to two minutes, use it as you wish, one and a half to two minutes.

HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal: Following on Dr. Gargash's last statement, on which I fully agree, I have three things that I would like to say. One on Syria, I think Mr. Putin has been on the wrong side of history in supporting Mr. Bashar Al-Assad and if the Arab league resolution back in, when was it, 2012 that was taken to the United Nations which called for an interim government led by the then-Vice President Farouk Al-Sharaa and the opposition in Syria had been passed in the United Nations and unfortunately, Russia and China vetoed it, if that had been passed we would not be in Syria as it is today but rather on a more peaceful path to Syria. The other thing, the second thing I will say is that yes, we in the Kingdom particularly are now even more devoted to what the foresight of our leaders had when they proposed vision 2030 which

was to move us out of oil into a more diversified economy and a stronger internal base for that economy. And thirdly, Raghida, Beirut Institute has proven its worth over and over again and I thank you and all the workers of Beirut institute for giving us this opportunity and hopefully look forward to the next year's March meeting in Abu Dhabi.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much! With your support, with the support of the host country, that without the host country we couldn't have gone on, with the presence always with people of the caliber General Petraeus and Andrei Fedorov, we are honored to have you launch this e-policy circles. Next week at this time, at the same time, next Wednesday, we will have Amr Moussa, Minister Alistair Burt, Vice Admiral Robert Harward and Vitaly Naumkin. So, for all of those who have joined us, join us again. And forgive me for not getting to your questions. It was just such an exciting conversation.