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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Sir John Sawyer

HE Brett McGurk

HR Rania Al Mashat

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQvByHy92Ho&t=921s>

Raghida Dergham: Good morning San Francisco, very good morning and early morning, good afternoon London, Croatia and Cairo. I am in Beirut, and welcome to Beirut Institute Summit e-Policy Circle number 10, and we have a great cast with us today, of course. Sir John Sawyer, former Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), former Permanent Representative of the UK at the UN where I got the pleasure of knowing you. Of course, right now you are the independent non-Executive Director of BP Global and Executive Chairman of Newbridge Advisory. Brett McGurk, who joined us last year at Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi, welcome to the e-Policy Circle. He is former Special Assistant to President George W. Bush and Senior Director of Iraq and Afghanistan, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Iraq and Iran, Special Presidential Envoy for the United States campaign against ISIS under President Barack Obama. He is now a Payne distinguished lecturer at Stanford University. Her excellency Rania Al Mashat is Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation, Former Minister of Tourism and previously Adviser to the chief economist of the IMF. And we have Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong, I hope I didn't butcher that, he's a China foreign expert, former Ambassador to Qatar, Jordan, and Ireland, he's

Director and Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Studies at Redmond University of China, and he is now in Croatia, he's joining us from Croatia.

Welcome. As it goes, four minutes to each of you, three and a half to four minutes to bring to the table what you wish and I will start with Rania Al Mashat, to you right now, tell us what you'd like us to learn about international cooperation, the dossier that you're holding in the Ministry of Egypt.

HE Rania Al Mashat: Thank you very much Raghida, and it's a pleasure to be joining such expertise on many topics and I see everyone has a relationship with the region and that is extremely extremely important for this discussion going forward. Maybe what I would like to focus on is the concept of multilateralism. Of course, there are so many debates going on. Is cooperation getting weaker? Is everyone on their own? What is the word going to look like post-COVID when it comes to international cooperation and collaboration? And what I want to start saying is that this crisis has shown that no country lives by itself in isolation. What has started as a health issue has actually propagated into economic and social headaches for different countries. Lives have been affected when it comes to livelihoods and jobs. And when we think about, you know, every country having sort of a place on the table, what this crisis has shown us that the shared experience, whether it has to do with how to deal with the health situation or actually how to take policies related to mitigating the socio-economic implications, has been extremely extremely telling. And maybe as we're talking about the region, a few points that I want to highlight, and this is a work that we are doing with regional action group with the World Economic Forum, it includes public sector representatives from different countries in the region, it also includes private sector representatives, and it includes civil society. And what we talk about is, or what we try to address is the stakeholder capitalism under this, you know, post-COVID. How are countries in the region, how can they engage together to actually overcome many of these obstacles that have happened? And the idea is

scaling up the national reactions, or the national actions, taken by governments so that's this whole debate about our global supply chains being interrupted. Are they going to be replaced by local and regional supply chains? So many of these issues.

The first one has to do with accelerating inclusive economies and societies. As we know, many countries have taken fiscal and monetary measures to fend off the implications of COVID. That means that social safety nets have been widened, that means that more vulnerable groups have been addressed. In the case of Egypt, for instance, we have close to one and a half million workers who are in the informal sector have become more formal, so there are many structural reforms that on the backburner pushed forward because governments really want to try and see the light after COVID. The second one has to do with the fourth Industrial Revolution as we see most of our webinars and meetings today are done through technology. In our case, schools and education were done online, we have a very young population in the region, and therefore they're more technologically savvy than others. And how can we leverage on that? The third point which is very important, is how we look at the environment? Today with all these fiscal stimulus on projects, how do we ensure that there's a green recovery? In our case for instance, the projects that are being pushed forward to create jobs and mitigate the implications have to have a 30% consistency with environmental rules. So this is a very important issue also related to some of the environmental challenges in the region, related to water, related to the desertification, related to the hot weather. So green recovery is something that we are doing in Egypt but also with my colleagues in the region, other countries are looking at. And the fourth one has to do with regional integration. Studies have shown that trade, intra-trade in the region is very, very modest. You're talking about 16%. If we look at Asia, if we look Europe it's much higher. So how can we look at the complementarities between the countries to actually improve that? I will stop there and thank you very much thank you very much.

Raghida Dergham: Rania Al Mashat, I am pretty sure that there will be an engaging conversation on these points that you raised when we open the floor for a conversation, the global conversation that we have in these e-Policy Circles. I'm going to go now to Sir John Sawers, to you please.

HE Sir John Sawers: Thank you Raghida. I think Rania, Minister Al Mashat has set a very good framework for the economic aspects of this discussion. It is very striking that the COVID virus when it hit us all the responses were rather fragmented, they were very national based. And quite often they were competitive, they were closing borders, they were fighting for essential medical equipment and materials. And it was certainly the first crisis in my lifetime where we didn't have the benefit of American leadership. American leadership isn't always a pleasure but I think the absence of American leadership is even worse. So I think it's been very striking, that aspect of this particular crisis. And of course we're only part way through it, we're seeing the numbers of cases around the world continuing to grow on a daily basis and I'm very concerned in particular for areas with weaker health policy systems like India, and Pakistan, or Africa, including North Africa where the first wave of the virus is only just, isn't just getting going.

But if I look at the...Rania looked at the economic and regional aspects, I look at the more global, political, and geostrategic aspects, I think we're going to emerge in this first wave of the virus, and I say emerge, we will be living with this virus for the next year or two I think, so we need to find a new normal with the virus still with us, we can't just wait until the virus is defeated, or there's new vaccine, it could be a long way off. But we're going to emerge from this process more divided and as Rania said, poorer. There's an economic recession going on in most parts of the world, certainly here in Europe and in Britain. And it's going to make it harder to come together to address the issues that we need to address whether it's public health or emerging from economic recession or dealing with global trade tensions. But even more difficult from that is, I think, the relationship between the world's two great powers, between

the United States and China, has also taken a sharp turn for the worst. A lot of this is attributed to the more assertive approach by the United States on economic issues but also I think, and Ambassador Yue I'm sure will comment on this, and he won't agree with me, but there's been a more aggressive Chinese behavior in the last year or so as well. We've seen it not just on the issue of diplomacy around the COVID crisis, but we've also seen it on the borders with India, we've seen it in dealing with Hong Kong and the Uyghurs in Xinjiang in the South China Sea, and so on. There's a more assertive China as well as a more assertive national United States. And I think as we look forward, the single most important issue for the long term is for the United States and China to find a way of working together which suits both those countries and indeed the rest of the world. We haven't touched on the U.S. elections coming up in November. I think these are going to be very important on a whole range of issues but one of them will be on the attitude of the United States to its close allies and it has very good alliances with Europe, with Japan, or South Korea, with Australia, and so on. And I would hope that, with some confidence if it's a Biden administration, with a bit less confidence with Trump. But still with some hope that building and retaining alliances becomes a very important feature for the United States over the coming four years, more so than it has been in the past.

When we look at the Middle East region, I know the Gulf reasonably well, I know Egypt very well, I've been concerned about the impact of the virus in these areas. But the economic impact caused by the collapse of oil and gas prices, there may be a lot of strain and stress in the region because of loss of revenue. There's also greater competition between the powers of the region, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Israel, Egypt and I think that's going to be an issue we're going to have to address in the period ahead. I'll just leave it there, thank you Raghida.

Raghida Dergham: I thank you very much Sir John. We will definitely touch on all the things that you have mentioned, from the Gulf region, to Iran to the US-China relations and the impacts. In fact, you have written a very interesting piece, a very impactful piece in the Financial Times, I

believe, in which you pointed out to the closer relations between the US and Europe in a way lining up against China provoked by Chinese actions, I'm paraphrasing your words. However, we will also get into the US elections and the impact of that. And speaking of the US, we're going to go to Brett McGurk whom we've woken up so early in the morning at Stanford University. Please Brett, four minutes to you.

HE Brett McGurk: Raghida thank you so much for having me, it's just a pleasure to be here, I wish we could all be in person as we were last year, hoping to go back to that again. But these Policy Circles have been so invaluable and I hope people watch them, I was just watching some of them over the weekend. I think some of the most engaged discussions, really extraordinary and extraordinary people, such as this panel, I'm very honored to be here. I'll be brief but as I'm here in the United States, I think it's kind of the elephant in the room what's happening here. And very uniquely, at least in my lifetime, we are in the midst of four interrelated crises, domestically. We have this public health catastrophe, I think we have one of the one of the worst responses to COVID in the world, which is I think shocking to most Americans. We have an economic catastrophe which many are living through, but ours is now, I thought we were going to recover, looks like that might now be delayed. We have a racial justice crisis as something our countries grappled with for centuries is very much upon us again. And we have a governance crisis, just a basic competence of governance, I think the basic questioning the competence of our authorities, of the federal and local level is something that is very much called into question. So all of these interlapping crises at the same time is just leading to a real crisis in confidence.

All that said, we are 119 days away from an election. This is going to be a truly historic election, I think the most historic in my lifetime. And if you look at some of the trends in the United States, it seems like there is a mood, a trend to get out of this, just that tumult and kind of return to some sense of normality, which is what Joe Biden is really running on. So I'm not speaking for Biden, but I'm speaking as an American citizen,

I'm very hopeful, you know, kind of interwoven into our founding documents, we're always striving to be better, a more perfect union, and that's very much a moment that we're in as a country, and I think we might actually come out of this in a better place as a country.

Now where does the Middle East, where does our foreign policy kind of fit into that? I think it's conventional wisdom that in terms of the US position in the Middle East, it's not going to have the same priority that as it has had in recent years. That's kind of conventional wisdom. I kind of push back a little bit on that and I just mention to people having dealt with these issues nearly for two decades, you know, we may be less interested in the Middle East, but the Middle East is very much interested in us. And I think the old paradigms energy, Iran, Saudi, all those are there; but the kind of new trend lines, the trend lines that are really shaping the future, not just of 202, but the 2040, 2050, climate, artificial intelligence, technology, stock and energy markets, just fundamental transformations that'll be global. They're all accelerated in the Middle East and they're accelerated in the Middle East because of the state of conflict, the state of rivalries. So you take cyber, there's active cyber conflicts going on in the Middle East. You take technology, I dealt with this in the ISIS campaign. Here in Silicon Valley there's a debate about the future of war and artificial intelligence, I point out for a while in the Battle of Mosul, ISIS controlled, we controlled the airspace of 30,000 feet, ISIS controlled the 5,000 for almost a week by using adapted drones, off-the-shelf technology. So all of these things the Middle East move very fast, and if we don't deal with them in a way to develop norms, we could really have a free fall. So that's why the Middle East is so important, not only old paradigms which are still there, but these trends that will shape the globe really in the next twenty, thirty years. They're accelerating in the Middle East, we need to be able to deal with them.

But where might we get back to assuming we got out of that? And I served for two years in the Trump administration so I know it very well. I'm assuming we come out of this... I just think you look for a return to kind of the first principles and I'm going to dovetail off what Sir John

said, just the first principles of our foreign policy. What is it we're trying to achieve? What are our objectives? And in terms of, once we have a defined objective, what are the resources that will be put towards it? How will we achieve it? And that means we have to be very clear with our allies, of what we're trying to do, get back to the fundamentals, the first principles of alliance building, alliance maintenance, diplomacy, which means persistence, which means compromise. It's hard, but kind of getting back to those first principles, I think, out of that we can come out in a much better place. This will be difficult, but I'm actually fairly hopeful, even as we're all living through these interlapping crises.

Raghida Dergham: Very good, thank you very much, I appreciate your cooperation all of you with the timing since I'm just waving at you all the time that your time is up, so I'm going to go now to Ambassador YUE Xiao Yong, Please. Four minutes to you.

HE Ambassador YUE Xiao Yong: Thank you very much. Ms. Raghida Dergham and distinguished experts. Now, and I believe there are many audience listening to us. First I want to thank Ms. Raghida Dergham to invite me for this opportunity. I'm very happy to share my views as much as I can for our themes we have provided. I also want to concentrate, I think it's very enlightening after hearing experts now, it's the opening statement, it's really very forward-looking, and very factual finding. I keep the theme of my statement as strive together for peace and stability with common development. This is actually what we, China, focus to do now. And we have been focusing to do in all these years when we launched the reform and open up and we are going to focus to do in the years to come for the common development and the common prosperity, and as just now, her Excellency Rania Al Mashat has said in the beginning that to do this we very much hope that multilateralism is really a key as to how we saw all these problems, and that they are not much different with the problems and the challenges now facing humanity now, obviously COVID-19 and others. And sometimes China, we very much emphasize that we come together, not

only in the world, particularly in the region of the Middle East, it's really a very original necessity for humanity to unite, to pour collective efforts, to maintain global peace, stability and the development. And now I want to, as an opening statement, I want to share two things we are in China actually we are doing. One is just 6 July we successfully had our, I think it's the ninth, China Arab Forum and in this forum our president Xi Jinping sent his written message and emphasizing the cooperation and a common purpose. And in this, I should say the important meeting, we have quite an impressive document, outcome documents. For example, we have a joint statement emphasizing how China and the 21 Arab states focusing on the solidarity against COVID019 and we have an online declaration focusing how politically we support each other for the regional conflicts of order, or the common issues, and the Palestine issue and in the time of this so many challenges.

Raghida Dergham: Ambassador, I just want to follow you with you on this. Did you just say that you just had an understanding with all Arab countries on how you support each other on regional conflicts? I thought that Arab countries differ among each other.

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: It's an online declaration, we support each other for solving the problems, not for the conflict. Of course, we have the execution plan for 2020 to 2022. All this the execution plan of the forum is for the practical cooperation ranging, from the economic development, recovery from the COVID-19, all the way up to the science, and technology cooperation, and humanity exchanges. All we actually have signed 107 cooperation document in 20 areas.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much ,I need to move to other things. I want to start off with US elections and I have a question for each and every one of you so we're going to have to be crisp and fast

with this one. The US elections, of course, you know, the results mean a lot to everybody. For the transatlantic relations Sir John Sawers, what do you think? Would it make a difference who wins?

HE Sir John Sawers: It makes a huge difference. I think they're very consequential elections, as Brett described to us. I think they're going to be important for the direction of America. I don't think a Biden administration would take us back to the land of Obama world, if you like. You can't turn the clock back but I think there will be a greater emphasis on common problems like addressing the COVID crisis collectively, addressing climate change as Brett mentioned and Rania mentioned, and rebuilding America's alliances which I think is a great multiplier for American power and influence in the world. I think if we see a second Trump administration, it's for Americans who to decide of course, but I think it would be much more difficult, much rocky a ride, for the world because that's stabilizing influence that we've had for the last 70 years will not be there to the same degree. And I think also a Biden administration would approach the crucial relationship with China in a way of trying to find common ground and trying to address some resolve issues in a constructive way. Whether they would succeed, I don't know but I think life would be a lot calmer, certainly for America's allies if we see a Biden administration. And then we'd have a chance to address the crucial issue of climate which I think has been rather squeezed out as a debate because we'd be so focused on the COVID crisis.

Raghida Dergham: Sir John Sawers just voted for Biden, I would say. Correct?

HE Sir John Sawers: I don't have a vote.

Raghida Dergham: A virtual vote, we are in a virtual world. Rania Al Mashat, Egypt when one would think Egypt would worry if there is a Biden presidency because there would be a sort of reset of the relationship to the time of President Obama which really was not very good to Egypt, I mean I understand your point about multilateralism and about the necessity of paying attention to climate change, but it seems to me that Egypt was in a very big trouble when President Obama actually reset the relationship in a way that he stepped away from Egypt and the Gulf states and embraced Iran. How do you feel about that? Where do you stand on this?

HE Rania Al Mashat: you know Egypt's relationship with the United States is very strategic and it's very old. And when we take a look at whether its cooperation with respect to economic ties, military ties, they're very strategic, they have been there regardless of who's in power or which party rules this is something that the American people will have to decide. And as, from where I stand because we have a lot of work with USAID and we have lots of projects coming forward, so you know the economic diplomacy that takes place, these are, these are projects that really affect, you know different, not just Egyptian people, but also with the different firms, American firms that also provide this in Egypt, so it's a mutual benefit actually. So I mean, again this is not a decision for any citizens in the world except the Americans and whatever the Americans are going to choose, all of us will have to definitely move forward and cooperate.

Raghida Dergham: Okay. Brett McGurk, wouldn't you agree that if it's a Biden presidency, it will impact the relationship with countries like Egypt because of course the very nature of the relationship during President Obama? And then it is in fact Valerie Jarrett who was the shadow president, as she's called for President Obama who was going to be the vice president for president Biden. Isn't Obama revisited? Isn't that what we should expect, and specifically in terms of relations with

the Arab region, with the Gulf region, and with Egypt in particular?
Brett McGurk.

HE Brett McGurk: Sorry, I've got a little toddler running around so I have it on mute sometimes. I will answer your question but I also have a question for the Ambassador because I've heard this, I was in Beijing a year or so ago at the Carnegie Foundation and heard the approach of the Middle East from China and that kind of friends with everybody, and trying to solve problems, you're friends with Israel, friends with Iran, which my response was that's going to be very difficult to sustain because of the intractable rivalries in the region and you're going to have to take positions which I think, from what I hear from Chinese officials, will make you uncomfortable. And then when you do take positions, again you're not speaking for the government, but I'm very privileged to be on the panel with you. Just yesterday in the Security Council, China uses veto which you've rarely done, historically, to veto just humanitarian openings in Northwest Syria. So the question is, Why? I think if you, a policy that was really focused on solving these problems, at the very least humanitarian access, given the terrible conflict in Syria, would be something I think we can all support.

That said, on your question, look the Obama era and Egypt in the Middle East was such a tumultuous time, you see, a unique moment in history with the Arab Spring and with everything that came of it. So I think I'd be very cautious before drawing direct parallels and policies. I think what you will see though is a prioritization of diplomacy, and I've just been struck, I dealt with the Libya crisis a little bit in terms of ISIS in the 2014-15 timeframe, I've been just struck by the careening aspect of the Trump administration. When I was in the Trump administration, the policy just shifted like all the way over to the Egypt, Saudi, UAE side of that divide in the which is a very fundamental divide and very important that we all have to deal with, in terms of Qatar, Turkey, UAE, Saudi and Egypt. And now, it seems to be on the other side and the Trump administration actually has a named policy now in Libya, called 'Active Neutrality', that's like completely meaningless, that basically means

we're going to do very little. So I think what you will see, we have deep strategic relationships with everybody in the Middle East, from Ankara, to Doha, to Abu Dhabi, to Riyadh to Cairo. And I think what you will see is a return to very active engagement diplomacy, empowered Ambassadors. One thing about the Trump administration that is unique, nobody and I've been a diplomat in the Trump administration, nobody can speak and I'll wrap, I know you want me to wrap, nobody can speak with authority across the table from a counterpart, whether a friend, or an adversary, or competitor because the pot there's no real policy and the president shifts on a dime and everybody knows this that that just makes the basic to use an American football and out that the blocking and tackling the fundamentals of diplomacy very hard. So I think you'll have a return to fundamentals diplomacy, empowered ambassadors, I mean trying to manage a lot of these problems that right now are not being managed at all.

Raghida Dergham: I have a question for you a little later and it's actually from General David Petraeus for you Brett McGurk, I'm going to save it for the next round, but I want to go now to Ambassador Yue, what about a second term for president Trump? How does China feel about that? Do you think it's going to make things better if it's a President Biden?

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: Thank you, normally we don't say something about other country's internal affairs, and since there are some other questions put forward about China, just now by Sir John and Mr McGurk, I will put it together and give my views. Number one concerning China-American relations and I happen to be one who is a little bit optimistic, if we try hard and hard enough to bring back these relations to a better course. Of course it needs the efforts from both sides. Now a lot of things you see happening in America about China bashing, focusing on, to my personal view, is sort of a lot of exaggeration of China's threat and you can see a lot of rhetoric about

how China was doing like Soviet Union and how China was in technology, and in a lot of things. I think there is a lot of exaggeration there. If you go to China, what China is focusing on is really to develop itself and to maintain as peaceful a stable relations as possible with any country, number one. Number two, I think for the question just now Mr. McGurk mentioned about the Middle East, China in the Middle East, we don't think we are like the traditional powers to intervene in internal affairs. I didn't know, I don't know the specific issue you mentioned in Syria, but I think when last year's Beirut Institute Summit was happening, I think in Abu Dhabi, I was in Turkey when America, Trump administration declared to withdraw troops from Syria and it costs a lot of issues between Syria and Turkey. The issue like, this the principal China holds is whatever you do on the regional issues like Syria, refrain from intervening the internal affairs of a sovereign country. We should, like you have mentioned about humanitarian assistance, if there's something about this issue sovereignty within the Syrian sovereign government ,we are not used to intervene like that.

Raghida Dergham: Ambassador Yue, let me ask you a question, a very specific question. The Secretary General of Hezbollah here in Lebanon has been speaking to the public here, including yesterday, to say that China is willing to come in as a partner of Lebanon and of Hezbollah in terms of, sort of standing up to the American actions in Syria, including the Caesars Act. Is China willing to risk that in order to uphold Bashar Al Assad in office, or to have this partnership with Hezbollah? Where is China on that since you speak of sovereignty, what happens to the sovereignty of Lebanon when you align yourself with a paramilitary force, whether it is in Syria or in Lebanon? Can you please respond to the specifics of this question?

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: You beat me and this is very specific, I'm really, I'm sorry I'm not very clear about the specifics of this issue. But as I said we, China, are very careful, no matter it is concerning Syria or it is concerning Lebanon, we will never do anything

to imposing our solution or imposing our will. We will also never do anything to intervene the domestic rivalries or problems inside, we are not, we are very careful. And if you try to listen to China's positions from beginning to the end...

Raghida Dergham: But this is very specific and it impacts a country, this is a country called Lebanon that has suffered, as a state, and there is there is a party and that is member of the government that is saying ‘China is ready to come in, to align itself with Hezbollah and Lebanon to make up for what Lebanon needs while, you know, the United States is being pushed out this country’. Is China ready to do that?

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: How about you send me the question, I will try to reply answers for you after the conference. I really not very clear of what you mentioned the problem.

Raghida Dergham: Let me go to back to the questions from General Petraeus to Ambassador McGurk. He says, quoting him, he says to you Brett, he says: “thanks for all that you did over the years, and through Republican and Democratic administrations, as you look at the fight against the Islamic state now, what are the top three big ideas that you would want to share with the US administration that takes office in January 2021?” And he said thanks too.

HE Brett McGurk: Thank you Dave, great to see you out there, somewhere. Look, I think the ISIS campaign, I'm writing a book about 9/11 until the end of 2018, but when you really get into ISIS campaign, given what we faced in 2014 and what we were able to do, I think it was a success, I mean. And in terms of three things, that's difficult, but where are we right now? I think the the threat of ISIS in the 2013, 14, 15

timeframe, this unique phenomenon of forty, more than 40,000 foreign fighters pouring into Syria training over almost 7,000 Western passport holders able to travel out of Syria into our own capitals, into Europe, that threat has been significantly reduced and that was always one of the main objectives. In terms of an insurgency threat, that is still very much there. So if I had to boil it down to three things, number one we need to stay, we are not, there's a discussion in the US about endless wars and forever wars, I began to try to remind people of debates about this, our presence to counter ISIS was not the same as when Dave Petraeus and I were doing, say the Iraq war of the surge. Our resources were extremely limited, we had a military coalition of almost 30 military contributors. Just take one year, in 2015, the United States spent about five billion dollars total in the counter ISIS campaign. In one year of the surge, we spent almost 150 billion dollars. Our casualties obviously were extremely low, we want to keep it that way. So we need to stay, and stay does not mean forever war. Stay means a sustainable presence that allows us to keep ISIS in check. Second, I think there is a center of gravity in Iraq when it comes to the counter ISIS campaign in Iraq and Syria. We are in Iraq at the invitation of the Iraqi government, that's something we very much need to maintain. There's a new Prime Minister in Iraq, he's a good friend of mine, I think there's some potential there, but Iraq is under tremendous challenges but that is the center of gravity. And third, the coalition. ISIS is not just a threat in Iraq and Syria, it is global and through this coalition of almost 80 partners, we developed in a pretty unique way, information sharing arrangements between military law enforcement intelligence. That apparatus still exists, it's really critical, we have stopped attacks from that. And we just need to maintain this, this is something that's going to go on for a long time. So stay, we need a presence in Iraq, we need a presence in eastern Syria. Iraq is the center of gravity, don't forget that. Without the permission of Iraq to be there, we can't be there. And the coalition is really critical, and that takes diplomacy and maintenance and a lot of work. So those would be, if I had to boil it down, those would be the three things.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, I need to bring John Sawyers on this, and other questions that are coming in, but quickly there is one to you, Brett McGurk, it's from Raouf Qobaisi, "What is likely to happen to the deal of the century if Joe Biden wins American election?" Quick answer, please.

HE Brett McGurk: I have never worked on Middle East peace, so I will leave that to others.

Raghida Dergham: All right, Paul Sullivan sends a question to both, to Brett and Sir John. He says "please comment on the seeming neo-Ottomanism of Turkey, and how this will affect the Middle East politically and economically, particularly in terms of recovery" and I'd like Rania Al Mashat to come in on that afterwards. Let me start with Sir John first, and then I'll go back to Rania and then to Brett, and then take other questions. Please.

HE Sir John Sawers: Well thank you. On Turkey, I think this is an important question. I don't take a conventional Western view on this because I think Turkey had really rather a rough time over the last five years or so. And I think it's too easy to focus on some of the mistakes that President Erdogan is making, and he undoubtedly is in terms of the control of the judiciary, the suppression of the media, and so on. It's not an attractive government that he runs in Turkey. At the same time, he came into office and managed to restore democratic structures to Turkey which have been threatened there and he sought to join the European Union but was rebuffed, mainly by France and Germany. He has developed, worked to develop close ties with America, but America provided a home to his biggest enemy, a sort of an Ayatollah Khamenei type figure in Gülen, in Pennsylvania. I'm not suggesting the Americans return Gülen to Turkey, but it was very striking when the Gülenists in Turkey tried to organize a coup four years ago, there were a lot of people

in the West who were silently cheering him on, which I think was very misguided. So I think it's not surprising that Erdogan and his government are very frustrated with the West. They also had to deal with, I'm afraid Brett this is in your bailiwick, but the United States chose to side with a group that the Turks see as a terrorist organization aligned with the PKK in their fight against ISIS. Now it's one thing to take on a terrorist organization like ISIS, but the PKK and its affiliates, of course, had even more problems in Turkey than ISIS has. So it's, say, they've had a tough time the Turks, you can justify each of these each of these decisions the West has taken, Western powers have taken, but I do think that a big priority for the coming five years will be to re-engage for Turkey, between Turkey and the West, between Turkey and its main regional partners, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Raghida Dergham: Except, I am going to respond with a personal opinion about what you just said about Turkey, Sir John, from the point of view of many here in the region that Turkey has become an incubator, if you will, of extremism and whether it is in Syria, and Libya particularly, there's a lot of anger with what Turkey is doing in Libya and I know that the Minister wants to stick to the economic diplomacy, but, I mean, maybe you want to come in to tell us how threatened Egypt is by Turkish behavior, in next-door Libya? Turkey is also, you know, it is alleged that they are leading the Muslim Brotherhood movement to overthrow governments in Egypt and Tunisia and that's the project of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. So how worried is Egypt about what Turkey is doing in Libya and its project and within the North, let's say North Africa all together, Rania Al Mashat, is this something you can talk about?

HE Rania Al Mashat: I think that would be a question for our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and military, so in your next policy maybe they can join you and respond to that, but I enjoy the debate between you and Sir John.

Raghida Dergham: I see, and who's side are you on? I am battling, I am wrestling with Sir John. Are you with him or with me?

HE Rania Al Mashat: You know, it's the first time for me to see both of you, so I'll keep my preferences for later.

HE Sir John Sawers: I think, just to come back before you go on to press on this issue. I think on Libya, there was an international process to support a government in Tripoli and that was undermined by a number of countries who decided to support a sort of a man, a ministry figure, who wanted to be a successor to Colonel Gaddafi. And it was curious, I thought that so many countries came out and undermined the United Nations' process, and France is one of them, and for a brief the United States was another.

Raghida Dergham: The UK as well Ambassador, if you remember, the UK. It was everybody who danced in the Security Council, including Ban Ki Moon, I guess.

HE Sir John Sawers: My general point here is that, if the international processes, like in the UN, are not supported by all the countries of the region, then you're bound to find this dealt with by people backing different sides of a civil conflict and I don't think Turkey was the first country to be involved in that.

Raghida Dergham: I need to go back to Ambassador Yong at some point, but Brett McGurk, I need you to address please this issue of

Turkey and whether it is an incubator of extremism, or even terrorism as some think. What is it doing in Syria and Libya, as well? I want to combine this, I know it's a different story but try to address the same question with the Taliban militant story and consequences on the US-Russian relations, because this is a big issue that is going on. Are the Taliban militants the new ISIS? Can you address these questions together as briefly as you can before we go into the US-China relations? If we can get a little bit more on that.

HE Brett McGurk: If I open up too much on this, it will take up all the time. Look I went to the school of hard knocks on Erdogan. I first met him in 2007 with Condi Rice, we dealt with him a lot, I probably spent more time in Turkey as a diplomat than in any other country, going in and out of Ankara. I take some issue with Sir John that it was a conscious choice in terms of the YPG, we tried everything with Turkey to close that border even after the Paris attacks, even after the Brussels attacks, when we really went all in on the other it was after probably a year and a half of trying almost everything else. Hundreds of millions of dollars, I can go through the whole story. And a lot of that was working with the Turks and trying to control that border when tens of thousands of people are pouring in and out. So, and right now I think if you look at what Turkey is doing, I think there is some reason for concern in the region that we hear and read about. But, you know, moving just even into northern Iraq right now, they have an operation in northern Iraq right now that is qualitatively different than what they've done before, and they have legitimate security concerns. I have on-the-record about that, no question. We should help them with that in all sorts of ways to make sure that they are very much protected. But they are moving in a very significant way into Iraqi Kurdistan and the spokesman for the Iraqi Peshmerga has said, you know, Turkey's moving 40 kilometers into our territory as Iran is moving 10 kilometers into our territory in the east, this looks like a coordinated effort. And having dealt with the Syria file for so long, we tend to have an assumption that Turkey's kind of on our side of this, but in fact, especially since 2015-2016, the Russia-Turkey

coordination on Syria, when it comes to the US presence, is something we have to watch very carefully. And I'm seeing the Russians start to encroach on our presence in eastern Syria as the Turks move into Iraqi Kurdistan and they're starting to move towards what is really our main supply line. I think this isn't an imminent crisis, but it's coming, so just something to keep an eye on.

But the bottom line, coming from the US perspective, Turkey's a NATO ally, their vital ally, we have to be engaged with them, we should not take sides in this regional divide, we should try to use diplomacy to maintain it so things don't spiral out of control, and use our good offices to good effect. So with that, I think I'll leave it there.

On the Taliban story, this is really a significant issue of domestic politics, as it gets to just the competence of the President in terms of doing his job. I think if there's intelligence in the President's daily brief, even if it's low confidence, moderate confidence, that Russia might have a policy to target our forces, which would be a sea change. I mean, Russia supports proxy groups and things but that directly target each other, that's kind of a no-no, and that would be something the President would need to know about, especially when he's on the phone with President Putin multiple, multiple times, five or six times after this period. So it's kind of like a shocking story here. What it does to overall Russia-US relationships, look it is a fraught relationship. It's a fraught relationship because of the policies of Russia and in terms of how those things can verge, from Syria and all over the place. There's also areas in which we need to work with the Russians on. And this is this area of great power competition, truly is competition. I think we have to work with Russia in a number of areas, we have to, in some ways, we have to deconflict and coordinate them on Syria. I led the Russia channel for a number of years on Syria. But we also need to be very clear about what they're doing and draw lines where lines are necessary to be drawn. And that's what I fear is not being done right now.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Brett McGurk. Ambassador Yue, can you please tell me about the China-India clashes, recent clashes. Are they, from your point of view, have they been contained or are they ready to flare up again? Has there been any sort of fundamental attempt to contain this very dangerous development?

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: Thank you. To answer those questions simply, it is contained and actually both sides have very good meeting. And, you know, I think this incident is, really happened in a very what is a critical time. But for China, we didn't expect it would happen. So after that, we quickly contacted our Indian partners and we had a very good meeting between Wang Yi, our State Councilor and Foreign Minister, with the Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and they reached a four-point agreement. Simply to say, to summarize these four points, is to say both sides agree and bring down the tension and maintain the status quo and also both sides to lose the tension and restore the troops on the border areas. We have very hope signs, we are very confident that this border will be well, not be a flaring up as some media have said. And this mechanism is from the military commander to the representatives of the security on both sides, and Foreign Minister Zarif. The mechanism has been working for the all these years, so if you check out the policy briefing, the briefing from the our foreign ministry, the situation now is coming down and we also have the mechanism and dialogue both from the political side and the military side.

Raghida Dergham: Ambassador, as you heard, some countries are accusing China of opening too many war fronts and I'm not talking about actual war as little engagement necessarily. As you know there's been quite a number of criticisms Sir John mentioned and that FBI Director spoke of recently. So why is China opening so many more fronts? Is it on purpose, or is it because of our lack of coordination? Is there any way that you could explain to us why that is happening? And

are you worried that this might impact, or effect, or impede your Belt and Road Initiative?

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: Thank you for the question. I think the metaphor of the war if that metaphor is appropriate, it is the war not from China, it is from somebody else and that China is purely very, or personally I feel very strange why all these talks about this like China is doing something. If you say China doing anything, China is just react and then defend its own interests by explaining that we are continuing to go along the peaceful path of development, we are continuing to practice our cooperation with win-win approach with any country, including America, Europe, Middle East and the developing and developed countries. So from China's perspective, we saw a very positive picture of the world which is quite different than what you had mentioned. FBI director Mr. Wray, I've heard his presentation in Hudson Institute, they described an exaggerated quite another picture, and he very weakly to compare China to somebody else which anybody in the world can immediately say 'that is rubbish' and we will continue to say this. I think in the English presentation, questions are very well asked from the Hudson Institute to him to say 'what is the exchanges, normal exchanges? What is the normal cooperation?' And from that I think I come back to answer the question, if you like me to. Both America and China look assertive, a little bit like a big power rivalry.

Raghida Dergham: Please can you do that in like thirty seconds ambassador, we are running out of time. Thirty seconds, and those would be your last words.

HE Ambassador Yue Xiao Yong: I think the assertive is not a quite appropriate work, it is the situation, for me personally, last year, I went to America to have the second track dialogue with American friends and foreigners, sometimes as you sit down there with some Trump

arbitration people, they don't wait for you say anything, they bombard you with all the accusations and all the words out the very, very militant and they wouldn't wait for you to explain. So that's a different picture, but we're not worried. I still think this is some people there, they have their, maybe they have their own domestic political agenda, they have their own political ideas, but I always believed that American people, American different walks of life, they believe the facts.

Raghida Dergham: I have to cut you off, I am really sorry, I apologize. I apologize to you madam Minister, because I'm sorry I brought you into this discussion and you did want to talk about international cooperation, and I've been very unfair to you. Can you take a couple of minutes please, like a minute, if you don't mind to just tell us, what do you hope International Cooperation would look like?

HE Rania Al Mashat: I think there have been many lessons over the past few months and the key lesson is humility. There's not a single country who has been able, or has not suffered from COVID, from the implications, whether health or socio-economic and it's still ongoing. And when there's humility, it fosters collaboration. So I am in no doubt that the period ahead is one where there is more engagement. In our case, or in my case, we create multi-stakeholder platforms where we discuss with all partners of development multilateral and bilateral sectoral priorities for us going forward. And this really pushes the cooperation between countries. Egypt has very strong relationships, and I'm very happy that I'm in the economic diplomacy because from the discussion today there's so much going on and I've enjoyed the different debates here. Thank you for inviting me, and I think the last word I want to say is, in my different, I mean, I come from the region, I've been brought up here, the geopolitics of the region keeps on evolving and changing but, you know, that's our faith. But nonetheless, I'm very proud that I am in government, I'm able to contribute, representing a generation that is looking forward, and hopefully through economic

diplomacy we can bridge gaps and we can create more consensus, rather than conflict. Thank you very much.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much, and I really apologize to you for having little time to discuss the multilateralism that you wanted to address, my apologies to you. Next time we will have you on, we'll talk about multilateralism. This leaves us with about thirty seconds to each, Brett McGurk and Sir John Sawers. Go first, who's going to go first? Go Brett and last word to John Sawers. Go Brett McGurk, thirty seconds.

HE Brett McGurk: My answer, just kind of to sum up what I began with, we have these multiple crises, public health crisis, economic crisis, governance crisis... the one thing we don't have right now is a true international security crisis, and I think I'm hopeful we don't have one particularly heading into our elections because I think we have so many problems. But if history is telling, I think there's a decent risk there will be one. And there may well be one in the Middle East just in terms of Libya and what we were talking about Turkey, we could open that up in terms of a very potential, very serious flashpoint if the Turkey back forces move on to certain other things. But that is the one crisis that is not on our plates and hopefully it'll remain.

Raghida Dergham: How about Iran? Brett, are you thinking there might be a clash US-Iran before the elections?

HE Brett McGurk: I wouldn't put it past the Iranians to do something. I think the UN is now determined, which everybody knows that they launched the attack on Saudi Arabia, six or so months ago, so again I would not put it again past Iran. My experience with the Iranians, they follow our domestic politics extremely closely so I think they are

probably calculating if there may well be an incident. I think it's something we need to watch very closely.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Brett McGurk. John Sawers, comment on the Iran-US potential clash.

HE John Sawers: Just as a final word, on Iran, we've talked a lot about the American elections which obviously are very important. Iranians have an even more important election and that's their own presidential election next year which may not only determine the succession to Rouhani, but also the succession in time to the supreme leader. The Iranians are under huge pressure at the moment caused by the US sanctions and these could be intensified. My own sense is the risks of a clash in the Middle East have gone up but I think the Iranians will probably be relatively calm in the senses in the same way they were to my surprise after the killing of Kassem Sulemani.

I think what this COVID crisis has done, it has shown the importance of competent government and that's something which Brett mentioned in the earlier. Those governments that were elected on the basis of ideology, or reaction to popular anger have actually performed very badly in this COVID crisis. I think if we can return to competent government, we can have an American administration that reaches out and works actively with partners and restores American leadership, and we have a Chinese government which sees that actually confrontation and suppression inside the country is not a net benefit for China and there's a way forward which doesn't require to take those sorts of approaches. I think I would be optimistic about the future but each of those three things have to fall in place.

Raghida Dergham: All right, I'm going to have to thank you very much, all of you, and I'm going to have to tell you quickly who's gonna

be our guests for the e-Policy Circle number 11, next Wednesday July 15 and we'll have no time to give the background, I'll just say the names. Former Minister of Libya Mohammed Al Dayri, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, you all know who he is, he had so many positions and I'm very happy that he's going to be with us. We have Lady Olga Maitland from the UK, and we have Irina Izvyagelskaya from Russia. Please follow us on our social media to know, on Beirut Institute channels, to know the background of everybody and to join us next week at the same time. I am most grateful to all of you for making this an amazing conversation. Forgive me if I wasn't fair to everyone but the subject, it seems geopolitics always wins against economics and diplomacy forgive me for that. But thank you very much and have a good afternoon, good evening, good day, goodbye everyone, thank you.