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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Jihad Azour

HE Ambassador Robert Blackwill

Mr. Andrei Bystritsky

Kishore Mahbubani

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aGVD083PUSk&t=6s>

Raghida Degham: Good morning DC, and good morning New York, good afternoon Moscow, and good evening Singapore. Here are my guests, my very distinguished guests, from Washington DC I have Jihad Azour, Director of the Middle East and Central Asia at the IMF, and from New York I have Ambassador Robert Blackwill, Deputy National Security Advisor for President George W. Bush and he is the Henry Kissinger Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, where I am privileged to be a member as well, and expert on China and the US, then I have from Moscow Andrei Bystritsky, the Chairman of the foundation for the Valdai Club, and from Singapore I have the author of "Has China won?" Not yet, China has not won. The name of the book is "Has China Won?" and he is the Former Singapore Ambassador to the United Nations, that's where we know each other. Welcome this is the fifth e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi which will be convened in 2021 now. It was supposed to be actually this next week June 13 and 14 and because of COVID-19, we pushed it back. This is a great gathering and we wanted to pick up momentum and have a conversation going on until then. And this conversation will always be global as we are becoming more of a Global Institute rather than regional.

But I will start now with giving the floor to Jihad Azour who is going to tell us what's going on in the future with the Middle East and Central Asia and you have four minutes, each of you will have only four minutes. Jihad Azour, you can start.

HE Jihad Azour: Thank You Raghida, and hello to everyone here in the US or overseas. Of course we are in one of those very challenging moments because we are in the mix of one of the most challenging crisis that the world economy has gone through and the difficulty and the level of uncertainty is still very high and this also applies for the region that went through a crisis like no other, compounded crisis, where the coronavirus shock itself led to a severe impact on the economy which was compounded by the decline in oil prices that had reached levels that were not seen in the last two decades and has left many countries with a very challenging economic and social situation.

We saw during the last few months countries coming and governments coming forcefully to help the economy, to reconcile between protecting lives and livelihoods which was the priority of many governments, including in the region. We saw also countries who are in the oil exporting side, reaching after the destabilization that the market went through in agreement in order to stabilize the oil market and oil prices going up. We don't expect them to regain the levels that they had before this crisis because the level of demand globally has went down and the recovery that we were expecting to be in a form of v-shape is going to be more protracted and more challenging as a recovery. The issue going forward is on three folds: How governments and how policymakers are going to reconcile, between stabilizing the economy and recovery, especially that many of them have entered the crisis in weak fundamentals, this is a challenge. The second challenge is we are now in a postmodern type of globalization where some of the features that we saw over the last decade in terms of global value chain, acceleration of trade, higher utilization of hydrocarbon, are going to change and therefore, how to adjust to the new normal, a new normal where there is change in pattern of production, technology is now gaining additional space, how the region and the regions are going to cope with this change

and when this transformation, this is the second challenge. The third challenge, we are in a situation where economic challenges could easily lead to social unrest and political instability and what needs to be done in order to prevent this from happening and this requires not only policies at the country level but also at the regional level, especially for the region that we're talking about, the Middle East or Central Asia that is at the center of the global trade, that exports more than 40% of the oil of the world and some of the protracted conflicts are there, and therefore I think this is going to be also an important challenge, how to make sure that countries as well as also institutions address very quickly some of the deep-rooted challenges in order to avoid seeing additional destabilization and have another lost decade for some of those countries.

Raghida Dergham: Jihad Azour, let me follow up very quickly to something you said, you pointed out that you're expecting social unrest and political instability in countries, your country and mine Lebanon, although you are in Washington DC for the IMF and I am both Lebanese and an American. This country is tortured because of the situation it's in and its instability is tearing it in the face, so is social unrest, and everybody's talking about the negotiations with the IMF as if the whole rescue of the country is going to be or downfall of the country will be at the hands of the IMF. Tell us what's going on in a few words because a lot depend on it, people are feeling angry and anxious and feel that there is too much history behind the silence.

HE Jihad Azour: Raghida, on the social unrest we have witnessed starting 2017 an increase in that issue. We have at the fund developed an indicator for that that started showing, for example, in the region several countries going through a challenging social situation and this is something that has expanded globally from Latin America, to Europe, to Asia, we are seeing in different ways and forms of increase in social unrest. What I'm trying to say is it's very important to address the root cause of those issues because what we went through is eroding the economic fundamentals and the capacity of countries to recover especially for those who are not included in the economic system, especially those who are in the informal sector.

And therefore our message is countries need to focus more on addressing the fundamental issues using this crisis as an incentive for them to address some of the reforms that requires changes in social cohesion. Lebanon is among those countries who, in addition to its own economic and financial problems, is facing the problem of refugees. Lebanon, Jordan and several other countries in the world are facing this difficulty, the difficulty of hosting refugees which reduces the capacity of the system and the immunity of the system to address those kinds of problems.

Raghida Dergham: But also it's facing the issue of sanctions especially the new sanctions such as the Caesar Law. Is this going to complicate your work or is it independent? That your work will remain, as IMF, independent or is it mainly independent from those sanctions by the Caesar Law? Which will control illegal crossings, which of course speaks about, you know, illegal crossings and control of crossings, to different, to the neighboring countries, so in that context I'm asking you the question.

HE Jihad Azour: Raghida, as you know as a national I have certain number of obligations but what I can tell you the Fund works with 189 countries around the world and recently we have received requests from more than 100 countries for rapid facility, the facility that we have developed, in order to address the challenge of the coronavirus shock on countries and several countries of the region have received that. We are a financial institution and Lebanon is a founding member. The IMF team is currently in discussion with the authorities in order to understand the reform agenda and the reform program that the government has put in place.

Raghida Dergham: Well, thank you. I pushed you hard, although you told me the restrictions from the very beginning but definitely, I'm looking forward to hearing from you maybe later on if there is a deadline or there is a light at the end of the tunnel. But I will turn now to Ambassador Blackwill, and please you have four minutes go ahead and use them as you wish. I have a feeling you're going to talk about the US and China as you are a prominent expert on this matter. Please Robert Blackwill.

HE Robert Blackwill: Thank you Raghida. First, I do want to, before I begin, say the IMF has a crucial role here in trying to ameliorate some of the catastrophic effects of the virus and I salute Mr. Azour and his friends and colleagues at the IMF for what they're doing. I would like to talk about US-China relations, I'd like to do it, at least I'm going to try to do it in a scholarly way, I'm not going to adopt the American view of it. I'm going to try to be objective, we'll see how well I do.

The headline is US-China relations are the worst in a half century, since the opening to China in 1971-72, the two countries, and when something changes are heading for permanent confrontation.

Raghida Dergham: Come closer Ambassador Blackwill please, come closer so that we hear you better, you are too far from the camera, and I want really to hear you better.

HE Robert Blackwill: I'd be happy to. So the US and China are heading for permanent confrontation, that would be bad for the United States, bad for China, and bad for the world. You might have said that the coronavirus was an opportunity for the two countries to work together to deal with the plague but of course the opposite has happened. I think because of the actions of both countries. I want to say what I think are the five reasons for this sharp deterioration in the bilateral relationship between the United States and China the first is, Graham Allison has spoken to this, is the natural worry of a status quo superpower, about the rise of a competitive superpower, and I won't go into the details, I come in Graham Allison's book "Destined for War" the lucidity is trapped but that's a structural factor. Second, I believe is China's more aggressive foreign policies under Xi Jinping in the South China Sea, on the India China border in the Himalayas, in Hong Kong, in its rhetoric toward Taiwan and so forth. Third, is Donald Trump's incoherent policy toward China, it's curious, he salutes again and again Xi Jinping as a great leader, while his administration only offers bills of indictment against China, led by the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Every single day, he is offering a bill of indictment against China with no suggestion on the part of the administration of how to avoid this permanent confrontation. The fourth reason is the increased know-nothing mindless nationalism in both the United States and China and if you doubt that's occurring just look on the social media in both countries. The social media talks about a war between the United States and China in the most casual possible way as if it would be a weekend picnic. And then finally, there's no diplomacy between the United States and China. It really is quite furious that with all these problems the two sides simply shout public accusations at one another and I can't explain why these two countries, who are in a downward spiral in their bilateral relationships are not trying to use diplomacy as a way to ameliorate their differences, but they are not. So those are the five reasons I think the US-China relationship is in serious, serious trouble. What to do about it? Well I have written a report for the Council on Foreign Relations with 22 policy prescriptions of what to do about it, that's available on cfr.org, but for our purposes and given the time constraint let me just say one: the two governments could agree today to stop their rhetorical excesses with respect to the other. They could agree to do that today and that would be a good start. Thank you.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you. I will get into some of the details that I read in your report, both actually, "The End of the World Order and American Foreign Policy" and then the other one on the US-China relations. But Robert Blackwill, you said the reputation of the United States is that it's a dysfunctional superpower, dysfunctional superpower, that's a big word to say.

HE Robert Blackwill: Well, it's accurate, I think, it isn't only China it's basically all of America's diplomatic interlocutors do not know what the president will do this afternoon. And so, they can't depend our allies and others on any consistency of American policy, and of course when that happens, when that happens, countries are very cautious engaging with the United States. The New York Times had a story this morning about Europe pulling back from interacting with the United States. And I think objectively, there's no better word than 'dysfunctional' to describe the U.S. foreign policy under the President now.

Raghida Dergham: We will debate that but in one word can you answer me this question, as a 'yes or no' Because I'm going to really discuss it in detail later. Do you think we are on the verge, or there will be a war, not a trade war, not an economic war, not competition, but actual war between the United States and China, and of course I'm thinking, Taiwan is the only way that would be probably a trigger, but just yes or no. Is there war or actual war between the United States and China on the horizon?

HE Robert Blackwill: No, the answer is No.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much. Andrei Bystritsky, you are not confined to speak about US-China of course if you want to talk about something else. The floor is yours for four minutes, go ahead.

Andrei Bystritsky: Thank you much indeed, thank you for the invitation, thank you for letting me participate in such a conference. But about US- China, first of all about war, I think that the risk of war

between China and the United States is very low. Everything is possible of course, but actually not. But at the same time, the conflict it is openly dependent and the best way to influence it for other countries, the best way to do it, is not to participate in it. Other countries should pursue their policies there's so many issues that can and should be resolved by countries themselves. For example, the effects of Corona virus or who and how will create, produce, distribute the vaccine against Corona Virus and so on, and so on. So, the most important issue, its certification of this for virus, for instance. Well very important to maintain global trade and so on, so on. And anyway, it's time to learn how to live as if there is no United States, or it is just one of the countries. There's no hostility to the United States, it just that the United States itself, does not want to play a role of global leader. Therefore, the best solution for everyone is to act as they see fit. We have moved to a system of world anarchy in which everyone will have to negotiate with everyone including the United States of course. The Global Initiative has scattered around the world. No one has a monopoly on it. It seems to me, I have one minute, approximately. I'd like to say that really, before your conference, yesterday or the day before, you asked to speak not about reason just to describe situation, to speak about what should we be doing. We should live in to create a new world. It's a problem of United States and China, to join or not to join, the other countries. But maybe later about so-called liberation space, it's working because now we have new great opportunity for new space of calculation, for instance in Eurasia. Thank you.

Raghida Dergham: Well, it certainly is a bit of a new world but I don't think it's that much of a new world that it can be created without the United States and China, Andrei right? But I'm sure that there will be a debate about this in a bit after we hear from Kishore Mahbubani, you really dodged the question you asked, I read a lot about your book, from your book excerpts as well. So can you take your four minutes to tell me, did you find an answer whether has China won or not? Go ahead four minutes for you.

Kishore Mahbubani: Thank you. I mean it's such a pleasure to be in such a distinguished group and like my friend Bob Blackwill, I'll try to be very objective in my analysis of US-China relations and answer your question as to whether or not China has one. But the first point I'm going to make is that as you know we live in very unusual times. Now I'm 71 years old and in my 71 years, this is the first time I've been locked down in my house for two months, I cannot meet my friends, I cannot travel. I never experienced this in 71 years. So the whole world has shut down and if humanity is the most intelligent species in the world, which is what we are supposed to be, then we should be all coming together to deal with this crisis and frankly what we should have seen that the oldest room of geopolitics should have applied, which is 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. So, if COVID-19 is the enemy of United States, and COVID-19, is the enemy of China, then United States and China should have logically come together to deal with COVID-19. But as you know it didn't happen and then the fact it didn't happen showed how deep and structural the US-China contest has become.

And here I think we should try to identify the structural causes, he has five, I only have three. I can't think as well as him but, the first one I completely agree with him, Graham Allison nailed it right. Whenever there's an emerging power, inevitably the status quo power, goes against it and that's a strong structural factor but the second structural factor I am going to point to, and I'm going to be very delicate about this because I'm raising a very, very sensitive point here, which is that this is actually the first time in 200 years that a non-Western power is emerging and could well become number one. And in the Western psyche for 200 years or more there's, maybe even several hundred years more, there's been a buried fear of what I call the Yellow Peril. Now that's an emotional factor at play here, the fear in a sense of a yellow country taking over the world and that I think is an emotional dimension, the reason I service it, is because it explains some of the irrationality that is at play in this conflict, it comes from irrational emotional factors and that explains a lot of irrationality in this dimension. But the third structural factor is that, of course, for a long time the United States believed in, Kurt Campbell said this in an essay in the magazine of Foreign Affairs that United States believe, that if it engages China, China would open up economically and after China opens up economically, it will open up politically and China will become an open Liberal Democratic Society like United States and everything will be okay and everybody will be very happy. But as we know that it didn't happen. And of course, why it didn't happen, you can have a lot of discussion about it. But I think future historians will ask the question, how is it a country like the United States, which is less than 250 years old expected that one quarter the population United States, would transform the world's oldest civilization with a four-thousand-year history? And that shows the mismatch of expectations, which is also driving this misunderstanding within that unit. I want to say that the rest of the world as they watch this contest are very, very disappointed. I want to really pause now so that we can all focus on the number one issue of the day which is COVID-19.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, the same question to you as a follow up Kishore Mahbubani. Do you see war booming, an actual war between the United States and China? Because we have people here in the region talking about that quite often, saying absolutely a war is in the making, it's around the corner. What is your answer to that Kishore Mahbubani?

Kishore Mahbubani: I'll take a \$1,000 bet with you they'll be no war, there'll be no war, in the next year, in the next five years and \$1000 I'll bet you.

Raghida Dergham: Are you willing to take the bet Jihad Azour? You agree with Kishore Mahbubani and Robert Blackwill?

HE Jihad Azour: We're not in the in the business of betting. We're in the business of more designing policies. I think, there is definitely one challenge today that is on the top of the mind of many of us. This crisis is a crisis like no other crisis like no other and therefore I think the global economy would require a huge level of cooperation in order to address the aftermath of the crisis. If we compare it to previous ones, the Second World War, or the Great Depression, or even the 2008 crisis, it required a massive and consistent coordination and cooperation internationally in order to lift up the global economy and here, I think specifically about the emerging and developing countries, who have less capacity to defend their economies and therefore a restored global coordination, multilateralism, are going to be key and whatever can be done in order to reduce the tension, bring the big players around the same table, both the G7 or G20 are important steps.

Raghida Dergham: Let me tell you what Robert Blackwill writes in the "End of World Order and American Foreign Policy", you write Robert Blackwill that the COVID-19 crisis ought to mark the end of the post 9/11 era, you basically say, I'll quote one or two lines: "the United States has overly invested in the greater Middle East and Washington should stop trying to fix the most dysfunctional and self-destructive region on earth". You give, again, this is very strong language and in a way some people might be quite offended by it, Robert Blackwill, okay to pull back but do you have to sort of like step on this region while you're pulling out?

HE Robert Blackwill: Well, not pulling out, not pulling out, I try to write what I believe and it's up to others to decide whether they're offended or not, the substance is what is important. I believe United States is over invested in the Middle East. Its policymakers have spent too much time on the Middle East trying to help the Middle East solve its intractable problems and I'll give you two policy prescriptions, only two: One, the United States should stop starting wars in the Middle East for the foreseeable future, so that's my first policy prescription. And my second is the United States should not devote diplomatic capital to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The two-state solution is over. Israel will bear, the reason of course is mostly Israel but not entirely Israel, but mostly Israel. It will bear the consequences of this, but it's a hopeless endeavor now for the United States to use diplomacy to try to solve that problem.

Raghida Dergham: Are you proposing just let the Israelis get away with it, whether it is annexation or otherwise, just because it's, you know, it is what it is, Robert Blackwill?

HE Robert Blackwill: Well, get away with it. If you're asking, 'is there any chance the United States would sanction Israel for its annexation policies?' The answer is: no. And it is even more stark than that, 'which government proposed that Israel annex 30% more of the West Bank?' The answer is: the United States government, in the Kushner peace plan. So now if there's a different American President, we'll see what he does about annexation but the main point I'm trying to make is that the problems that Kishore and I were talking about with respect to Asia are more important, and demand more time of American policymakers than the problems of the Middle East. It's not pull-out, it's just reduce the commitment and the time.

Kishore Mahbubani: Very quickly. I completely agree with Bob, because I have a chapter in my book called: "Can America make U-turns?" and actually I make exactly the same prescription that Bob just made that if the United States believes that China is the number one geopolitical competitor, there's no doubt that China is the number one competitor, you stop fighting wars in the Middle East. And then I also explained, Bob sadly, analytically why the United States has a great difficulty stopping wars in the Middle East and that's a very sad thing. But I want to tell you Raghida a very important point because I suspect in this whole program you're going to hear a lot of pessimism and I think it's very important for me to inject some optimism in this this whole discussion, to tell you that despite all the problems in East Asia, I guarantee you that growth will come back to East Asia very fast and East

Asia will mostly remain at peace and then you will see how easy Asia will lead the global recovery and the question therefore is: 'why is essentially in the global recovery?' And one lesson, I think that Middle East should learn from East Asia is stop fighting wars. We've been silent... for how long? For 40 years, the guns have been silent in the region... Why?

Raghida Dergham: Kishore Mahbubani the issue we were on was the annexation of Israel and the way that Israel has killed the two-state solution. Alright so this is another issue rather than an ongoing war so, about the two-state solution is killed and Robert Blackwill is saying we'll pull-out and go with all the resources to Southeast Asia.

HE Robert Blackwill: Raghida, you keep saying pull-out and I keep saying NO. I just said reduce commitment...not pull-out.

Raghida Dergham: Shift resources, you have a very clear paragraph in which you say "just shift all the resources out"...

HE Robert Blackwill: Not all the resources.

Raghida Dergham: Alright... We're going to have a whole thing about it.

Kishore Mahbubani: Raghida Raghida... Just to be fair... Why is it? You have how many million people living in the Arab world?

Raghida Dergham: But Kishore... Listen please I really need to be fair to my other guests... I just don't want to... I just want this to remain at the same tempo like the other conversations we have had.

Jihad Azour, listening to Ambassador Blackwill, in what he's saying, to shift some of the resources out of the region into... and I'd like to read that paragraph... I'm going to challenge you Ambassador Blackwill when I'm offline... Just how powerful the region can go on without any trouble Jihad Azour? And Andrei I'm coming to you for a very lengthy intervention.

HE Jihad Azour: Raghida, I would like to introduce another dimension, that it's most of the time forgotten here in the region, it's the economic and social dimension. I think, we, I would say here the international community, invested a lot in the political tract and less in the economic track. I think what the region needed and still needs is a more Marshall Plan that will allow some of the resources to be redirected in order to address the economic and social issues. And let me take two examples, over the last two months, we saw fairly a good level of response to the coronavirus in countries where the health infrastructure, the governance is weak, yet we saw a high level of resilience. The second element, this is a region where 2/3 of the population are below 30, and we know how much technology is going to lead the wave of the recovery going forward.

Therefore, I think what we need to do is to shift more into addressing the growth and inclusion issues in the region, address the economic situation, find out a global initiative to marshal additional resources, to reduce the root cause of those problems. You are in a situation or in a region where the level of unemployment of the youth exceeds 30%. You are in a situation where you have the highest number of refugees. Therefore, if you don't address those inclusion issues, you will keep bleeding conflicts and therefore this is our plea, now we need to focus more into inclusive growth issues, addressing the economic fundamentals, give the chances to the future generation to lead, to create growth as East Asia forty or fifty years ago. And I think it's doable.

Raghida Dergham: I want to go to Andrei Bystritsky, with one more thing about the US-China relationship and its reflection or impact or what is needed to think about it. And I want to take what Robert Blackwill said and this time I'm going to actually read it, so that we don't have a fight. So he says that one of the most dangerous scenarios is the potential coalition of China and Russia, united not by ideology but complementary grievances, in particular Russia which should consider moving further into Ukraine in the event of a full-blown US-China confrontation over Taiwan. And he goes on speaking about the increasing Russian embrace of China is clearly not in the US interest. Is there any such thing, are you... Is Russia thinking that 'yes, we're going to embrace, as Robert Blackwill says, China?' Tell us about that dimension please, and is this a good scenario for you?

Andrei Bystritsky: It's a complicated story because Russia, first of all, we should think about Russia and China calculation, relationship in context of Eurasia. In Eurasia, Russia has its own interest. I

know that some pundits speak about Russia-China triangle and the relationship. Of course, such kind triangle doesn't exist. And we can say there's a lot of triangles. We can create triangles with Russia, Japan, China, a lot of triangles, but most importantly, that Russia is trying to build relations with China in short Eurasian space, and especially Eurasian Union, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan probably, and so and so on. It means that it's not particular Russian-China relations, it's, we can speak about a system of countries, and system of relations, because there are a lot of countries in the rest part of the world, except China and the United States, India for instance, Iran, Turkey, European countries, a lot of countries, and it is extremely important for us. I think that it's a lame simplification to speak only about Russia-China relations, and so on, so it's much more complicated. Russia is on its own. And Russia is looking for new balance in this space. Balance means balance, it's not direct union or between two capitals.

Raghida Dergham: Okay. I understand. Let me ask you something else Andrei Bystritsky, because I did not bring you in any earlier and listen I mean you're aware of accusations against Russia, not only for interference in the American elections, Robert Blackwill says that it's proven that Russia interfered in the US elections in 2020, sanctions re-enforcement, increased sanctions. He speaks for himself on that. But even right now with the situation and I want us all to talk about this, with the current situation in the United States, after the killing of George Floyd, and of course the genuine demonstrations opposed to what had taken place and it's a homicide according to everybody who has looked at the situation. But then there are also riots, and Susan Rice, no less she's not a supporter of Donald Trump, she said, I heard her say in an interview on CNN, that she thinks there is Russian interference in that. Every time there is a little bit of trouble in the United States, Russia activates its whatever machinery it has and in order to drive a wedge, further deeper wedge amongst Americans, especially when it comes to ethnic lines, and of course it is the rise, what is it, "Antifa", which is the anti-fascist movement that is leftist, but it is as fascist as that the fascists they are being, you know, opposed to.

Do you want to defend Russia, or do you want to tell us why on earth is it important to play the card?

Andrei Bystritsky: From my point of view, this is what could be a dream for but it'd be wrong for the Soviet Union, because Russian Soviet communists, they dreamed about both power and so on so on. Of course, it's only the opinion of Susan Rice. Even seeing it said, that is not correct and no evidence in this Floyd case. Sorry I know Russia's IT industry, not there, but it seems to me it's mythology. Of course, it's very convenient to use internal fighting foreign forces. It's typical, it's typical for internal policy but I think that Russian influence is not. Another problem, it seems to me is more important, it's a problem of global serial rebellion if you like, and we see in United States it's the common problem because previous year was year of rebellions, from Hong Kong and now to United States, Yellow Vests, even in Lebanon, there were, there was after cellphones payment. It is a serious problem. I think that Russian influence is extremely underestimated, maybe it's important for internal policy but it's unrealistic.

Raghida Dergham: Robert Blackwill, you want to take this point and also add to it whether you think these demonstrations and riots are a turning point in the United States at this point? Maybe impacting the elections, the upcoming elections. Can you take both points, the Russian interference, alleged interference, I should say because he's denying it, and the turning point aspect for Donald Trump, maybe?

HE Robert Blackwill: Well, I've written often as a champion of trying to improve the US-Russian relationship, that is minority view in the United States of course, but it is been my view and I'm bewildered about this Russian interference in our electoral process, because in this situation, with the current civil disturbance, it's at the margin, it's at the margin. It's not having a decisive effect about how Americans conduct themselves in these circumstances, so why are they doing it is bewildering to me. Because it sours the relationship and I'm at a loss why they think this serves Russia's purposes. On the second point, well every generation believes that it's at a turning point and most aren't. So I would say, here in this, it's obviously a very serious internal situation in the United States. However, I'll just quote Lee Kuan Yew on turning points. Lee Kuan Yew, my hero, one of my heroes, he and Henry Kissinger are my two premiere heroes. He said, 'the mistake that foreigners most often make, about the United States is its resiliency'. And I used to say to my European friends, that they don't solve problems because they tried to solve them fifty years ago and failed. The United States solves problems which it tried five years ago and failed to solve because it doesn't remember that it tried five years ago. So this disturbance, serious as it is, when we look back in a year, did it changed something fundamental in the United States internationally? No, the elections may in November, but not these events. Did it change something domestically? I hope so, that the Congress

and the political elite will be more active in trying to deal with the inequalities in American society. And we'll have to see if they do that.

Raghida Dergham: Kishore Mahbubani, I have two things to tell you please, I have Sunil John is asking me to give you the chance to go on with the important point, you were trying to make so I want to give you that chance to go ahead and make the important point you were in the midst of making and if you're using, if one of you is using the cell phone, please do not use it, because it's interfering with the sound, and it's skipping bad interruption, so whoever is using his cell phone, please do not kindly. Kishore Mahbubani, first can you go ahead and finish the point that you were making.

Kishore Mahbubani: I think the point, the point I was trying to make, and I hope you would allow me to make this delicately if you don't mind. You know that if there was one region in the world that should have been the epicenter of the conflicts in the world, it should not have been the Middle East, it should have been Southeast Asia, the region where I come from because Southeast Asia is by far the most diverse region on planet Earth. You know out of 615 million people in Southeast Asia, you have 250 million Muslims, 150 million Buddhists, you know, Buddhist, Mahayana Buddhist, hundred fifty million Christians, Hindu Tau, Confucianism, and Communism. We have everything in Southeast Asia and Southeast Asia was supposed to be the epicenter of conflict but as we all know ASEAN has turned out to be the second most successful regional organization in the world, and why has that happened and tell me one reason why it has happened, and this is the point I was trying to make earlier, it's that we have succeeded in preventing wars in our region. We have created a culture of pragmatism, a culture of accommodation, and I actually think even though many people think, that if the United States leaves the Middle East, things will get worse. Actually, in my view, may be naïve, that United States in some ways, you know after the Vietnam War, it left Indochina, everyone thought the Southeast Asia would collapse like dominoes instead Southeast Asia emerged as the second most successful regional organization after the European Union. So in some ways you will provide opportunities for what I call indigenous, independent, initiative in the region also. And I know that's not a popular point of view, but at the end of the day, we have tried all these wars and haven't worked. Let's try the ultimatum.

Raghida Dergham: I don't think so, I think your point coincides with the call by Iran for all the American assets to get out of the Middle East and I think the timing of your point is wrong probably because of that. And I think, also that this region, is somehow, you know enchanted and connected with American culture. I'm sorry, but there is an embrace of the American Culture. I don't think that there is knowledge of the Chinese culture as much or a relationship with it. So, we need our young people to also do what they want to. And I'm not going to agree with you to pull-out, to call on the United States to leave us alone because we can do better, but you know Kishore Mahbubani, you also said something in your book which interested me because you posed the question whether China has won, but in the end, you know, you criticize the United States very strongly but in the end you speak about all the strengths and amongst the things that you speak about, you talk about, that the society, "no society has a powerful an ecosystem as America for producing strong individuals". You say, "the second great strategic advantage of America is that it has access to humanities' best and brightest", you say that "the third great strategic advantage of America is its strong institutions" that they are, you know, that they protect the society, not just individuals and then you say the strength of these American institutions, "the rule of law explains why the whole world has faith in the American dollar" you say, and number four, you say that the first great strategic advantage of America is that it has the best universities in the world and then you also say that the fifth great strategic advantage which also explains the extraordinary success of its universities is that America is also part of a great civilization, a Western civilization, so this is I'm quoting you. How is it possible to say, in light of what you said, have you concluded if it is China or the U.S. who has won on the cultural? And the points you made a very strong point.

Kishore Mahbubani: You're absolutely right and I, well, I've always mentioned that since human history began, the most successful society in human history, by far is the United States. I mean what the United States has accomplished in terms of transforming itself, transforming the world. It has sent men to the moon. And what you're quoting for from by the way is a fictional memo that a colleague of mine *Inaudible* rise to President Xi Jinping saying, "whatever we do in China, must never underestimate the United States." And I think, frankly I actually am a great believer in the United States. I'm a great believer that the United States can bounce back. But at the same time, I mean objectively, you know as I am a friend of United States, and as you know the reviews of my book have said the Kishore's book is not anti-American. It should help the United States and my goal is to persuade the US and China, to work together, to help themselves and help the world, rather than

going into an unnecessary condition, that's my thesis, in my very last line of my book, you see, I say the question is not whether the United States has won, not that China has won, it's whether humanity has won, whether all seventy five billion people of us, can come together to take care of the more pressing global challenges we face today. I wrote my book before COVID-19 but COVID-19 demonstrated it and global warming, overfishing, you name it, there's so many global problems and frankly the people of the United States and people of China will be better off if you press the pause button on this geopolitical contest. That's my goal.

Raghida Dergham: Okay, thank you very much. I think, let's see, I'm going to go for the two minutes conclusion for each and every one of you so that in case there is a reason to debate a certain point we will still have two more minutes. I think I'll go to Jihad Azour, why don't you give me your two minutes. What should we look forward to? What should we be doing? How shall we be thinking? So Jihad Azour, you are also not only Middle East but Central Asia, tell us from your point of view what is it that we should be doing so that we don't go into what you warned us about. You warned us about the disturbances, collapses, instability, in this part of the region in particular. Can you do that in two minutes?

HE Jihad Azour: Well Raghida, there are several issues that are currently changing in the world. The world economy is in a middle of big transformation and I think we underestimate the importance of the economy itself and the economy is currently the main reason why those powers are superpowers. We had in the discussion certain number of issues on the region. Yes there will be different players. Russia and China will play and continue playing with EU, a greater role in Central Asia and Caucasus. And the Middle East will be at the crossroad of several economic, financial and political powers but I think what important today is to look at what are going to be the big transformers, the long-term trends. The long-term trends are going to be: A, technology is going to be very important. Climate change and issues related to the transformation of how economies and societies are working, are also going to be transformative. Three, I think we underestimated the importance of economic forces, and how those economic forces are currently at threat because the framework for global coordination is currently being challenged. And if we are not able globally to find out a mechanism whereby all these forces would work together as they did in the last fifty to seventy years, the economy will not enjoy the level of growth that we saw and the level of lifting up populations in the world who saw their situation improving over the last five or seven decades. Therefore, I think we need to regroup again and think about the challenges of the future.

Part of what we are discussing is the challenges of the past. Now we are in a new framework and this new framework would require, to change a bit our paradigm of thinking, both in terms of where the centers of powers are going to be and where the mechanisms of coordination will be. It's like when we get out of the Second World War and we changed dramatically, the way the global order was run.

Raghida Dergham: Reform, reform, reform... This is what the IMF is always saying.

HE Jihad Azour: No. Embracing transformation, looking at the long term transformations and trends, and try to improve the enablers: education, health and social infrastructure, improve infrastructure that links people together, address some of the deep-rooted issues of economic transformation that have led to the social unrest that we saw from Latin America, to Asia, to Europe, and build new paradigm, a new paradigm that will allow people to come together and find their interest in more collaboration and less inward-looking strategies.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Jihad Azour. Andrei Bystritsky, two minutes to you thank you.

Andrei Bystritsky: Thank you very much indeed. I'd like to say just one thing. Of course, the United States and China conflict is very important. Of course, China is growing power, most important competitor for the United States. The United States is a great power too. Of course, there are a lot of some internal problems and so on but I think in future United States will be a very powerful country. But now there is a window of opportunities for rest part of the world to make some efforts and to create more maybe regional unions, maybe regional, to find some regional solutions for most important problems, to use international financial institutes, to reconstruct both Health Organizations. Due the conflict, the deepening conflict between the United States and China, the rest part of the world has opportunity to, maybe, to make some steps in creation, in the direction of creation of a new world order, a new world order must be result of collective efforts and there is no opportunity to use the conflict between United States and China by constructive, by positive way... Maybe conflict

between socialist system and capitalist system had some positive features, I don't know... But now this conflict is, of course, it's unfortunately, it seems to me, it's deadlock. But for as part of the world it's a great opportunity.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Andrei Bystritsky, Robert Blackwill, two minutes to you.

HE Robert Blackwill: Let me just return to your point about Iran. I think the United States should do three things with respect to Iran's hegemonic ambitions in the region. The first is to rejoin the nuclear agreement that was reached with Iran and which Donald Trump pulled out of, and incidentally that was an example of very close US-China collaboration. We need more of such collaborations, so that's number one. Number two is we should try much harder than we are to have a bilateral diplomatic channel with Iran, that's difficult but we should try. And the third is, we should make clear to Iran that the United States will not permit it to acquire a nuclear weapon. And that if we believe that it is going past the threshold in that regard, we will stop them by any necessary means, and I say that very directly to them so they know that's the case.

Raghida Dergham: All you said Ambassador Blackwill, you pointed out only to the nuclear disarmament and this part of the region cares about something a little more close to them which is for paramilitary forces to operate in sovereign countries, you seem to have not mentioned it, is it because you think we should live with that and you're fine with it, as a condition?

HE Robert Blackwill: Let me be vivid about this: Does America have a vital national interest in the future of Syria? No, is my answer. It is highly regrettable that the Iranians have paramilitary forces in Syria but it is not, let me finish, the U.S. cannot have a vital national interest everywhere, by definition. And so what Iran is doing with the paramilitary forces is regrettable but I must say and this is a point Kishore made in another way, if the region is so concerned about these paramilitary forces, why doesn't the region do something about it? Instead of saying, "well it's over to you Americans". I didn't notice any Middle Eastern country, Arab Country aching to get into the war in Syria. "No, no let the Americans do that".

Raghida Dergham: The Americans are also enablers, they have enabled Israel to do what it does so they are enablers, let's just claim that the Americans are absolutely innocent...

HE Robert Blackwill: I didn't say they were innocent, I said it's not in America's national interest to intervene and involve itself in any one of the many, many problems of the Middle East, that's what I said.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, I thank you so much Robert Blackwill and I thank you all for joining me today. Of course, it's been feisty and fabulous as always in the style of Beirut Institute Summit and I look forward to hosting you, really genuinely and physically, at the next summit.. So thank you all for joining me and for next week I'd like to tell you who do we have for e-Policy Circle 6, Wednesday June 10, we have HE Noura Al Kaabi, the United Arab Emirates Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development and former Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs. We have HE Najat Belkacem, the first French woman to be appointed Minister of Education and Higher Education and Research and this was in in France of course and she's also in the Ministry of Women's Affairs, we have Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director of the Hermitage Museum in Petersburg in Russia and we have the fabulous Nadine Labaki, Lebanese actress, director, and activist and first female Arab director to be nominated for an Oscar in the category for Best Foreign Language Film. As usual the theme is Stability Redefined, this one will be on culture and education, very important to our well-being and central to the future that we should be dreaming of. So we're going to switch from just geopolitics to the importance of education and culture and then we'll go back to the geopolitics so stay with us every Wednesday. And thank you all for joining me and until we have another feisty conversation in the future. Goodbye everyone. Thank you!