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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Danilo Turk

HE Nabil Fahmy

HE Andrei Fedorov

Mr. Richard Fontaine

Raghida Dergham: Good morning Washington DC, good afternoon Ljubljana, Moscow and Cairo. I am Raghida Dergham, in Beirut and I welcome you to another e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi which I hope would be happening in 2021 because 2020 made it impossible. I am privileged and honored to have with me friends again, wonderful friends, smart friends and it's a global conversation that we will have as usual. We have with us Danilo Turk, former President of Slovenia, Nabil Fahmy, he's the former Foreign Minister of Egypt, Andrei Fedorov, also the former Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, and we have Richard Fontaine again he is now the head of the Center for New American Security but he's also worked with NSC – National Security Council, and the State Department. Welcome everyone, it's an honor to have you. As always, we're going to have an exciting conversation it will start with each of you with four minutes and then we will engage in a free conversation to take it wherever we want.

I will start by giving the floor to the President currently of the Madrid club which is the club of former prime ministers and presidents, Danilo Turk. Please Danilo Turk, four minutes to you.

Danilo Turk: Well thank you and it's my pleasure to be part of this great group that met this afternoon or morning for this discussion, and great to be with you as a leader of our discussion. Now, I guess that we all are aware of your commitment to peace, to improvement of international relations, and to geopolitical realities that actually define the scope of the possible. So I would propose to start with two points really. One about geopolitics as such. I think that there are certain basic geopolitical factors in place which are of a long-term nature and which will define the future of global relations, security relations, the situation in the Middle East fundamentally. I would define that as the growing importance of the Eurasian space. Eurasian space has become more important geopolitically for several reasons, one is obviously the growth of China and its belt and road initiative which is shaping much of the not only discussion but the actual politics in this vast area, the Eurasian space, and which has impact indirectly on what happens

elsewhere in the world. It affects the relations between the major powers, it affects the reaction by the United States, in particular, one started to talk about the danger of a new Cold War – which is a term which I think is inappropriate in every sense, even as a metaphor, it's a wrong metaphor. We are not in a situation of a serious threat of a cold war unless, of course, there is a sufficient will to create one. So, these are the fundamental underlying currents that are shaping the geopolitics and, of course, we all would easily recall the seminal work of Halford Mackinder some century ago, who defined the whole global space geopolitically as one of the global continents and the maritime outer crescent. So that I think is necessary to keep in mind in every conversation about security today.

The second thing is more specific and it is about European Union. Now in this circumstances European Union has interestingly suggested that it could play a stronger geopolitical role, that is what the new President of the European Commission has said, that's what the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy has said, so we hear this talk from European Union about greater geopolitical role. Now, my opinion on that is that European Union is not well prepared for such a role, that the global tendencies which I only mentioned, I haven't really even described them in the four minutes that I have at my disposal, are simply too strong and require a higher degree of coherence in European Union, something that is not attainable in the short term. European Union is divided between East and west and north and south, that division comes out on every occasion if you talk whatever subject you take today in relations to Belarus, to Russia, to Turkey, say the question of Palestine or the question of Libya, you will see divisions, and therefore one has to be really quite careful in not expecting too strong of a geopolitical role from the European Union although it will be a very important player in development in more or less general political discussion on the world. Now these are my two points with which I would like to start this discussion, I hope they will create some reaction.

Raghida Dergham: That's very interesting, very good. Tell me Danilo Turk, do you think Europe is fine if it becomes irrelevant in geopolitics, does it matter, or is it very harmful for Europe and probably for the world? I don't know, what do you think?

Danilo Turk: Well look, I like to look at these things from a longer historic perspective. Europe has since the collapse of the Roman Empire never been united. There have been many ideas about how to unite Europe through holy Roman Empires and Napoleonic periods, Hitler had his own ideas. But Europe is very difficult to unite because it is a system or a group of very diverse countries which was at certain points a weakness but it's also a strength, so I don't expect European Union to depart from its historic identity or his historic destiny but it can perhaps develop a more coherent and consequential policy vis-a-vis some of the key questions. How much, where, that of course is for further discussion.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much, I wanted to say that Danilo Turk and I go back so many years that I was there when he became the first Ambassador of Slovenia to the United Nations. Of course, Nabil Fahmy also and I go back to the years of the United Nations even before he became Ambassador to Washington and the Foreign Minister. Both of them have given me the honor to attend Beirut Institute Summits, not once but twice and some three times, and I hope the fourth edition as well, so I am going to go now to my friend Nabil Fahmy, four minutes to you please.

Nabil Fahmy: Well thank you Raghida, thank you for inviting me again, it's always a pleasure and insightful but especially so with these distinguished panelists, all of whom I've had the chance to work with in the past. Your session is highly important, you've asked us to address how you redefine stability and who are the authors of the future in a geopolitical context. I would argue this is sensitive and important because we face a unique situation today where there are no closers, nobody can actually close an action and there are a multitude of stakeholders. In other words, we have to find a way to work together or we end up all paying a price for that. In normal circumstances, we argue real politic versus rule-based systems, my argument really is – no, to have stability we need to do both, we need to be pragmatic in our approach, finding solutions with all of the influential parties, but I also believe that in creating stability, there has to be an order otherwise you end up with the rule of the jungle. We need to move more, once again, not in not in an idealistic sense, but we need more and more to move towards collective interests rather than a balance of power concept. And to do that [inaudible] bullet points the world and the main players globally and on any particular issue have to have a social conscience, they have to balance, as I said, interest versus power, there has to be some sort of set of rules I'm not arguing identical rules everywhere all the time internationally, domestically and originally domestically, but there have to be rules especially between nation states, and I would argue that we cannot live in the world paradigm of post-world war II, it does not exist, we cannot function based on who won the war 70, 80 years ago. Another factor to take into account is, the issues are becoming more regional and more sub-regional, and that makes it much more complicated to deal with. If one looks at my region alone, I used to joke when I was minister that my nightmares were better than my days, because they were short you woke up and they weren't true, but the reality was Libya was on fire westwards, there was no peace process eastwards, there was the serious situation was broken down, southwards we had the problem of the GERD Dam and so on, instability in the gulf area. None of these issues today can be resolved sub-regionally. I think none of them can be resolved domestically, nothing can be resolved globally alone. We have to find ways to work together, bringing into effect the five points I mentioned earlier and I can suggest to you some ideas in each one of these areas, whether it's from Libya or East wards. I have the luxury that nobody has a better answer than mine so all I can do is try. Thank you.

Raghida Dergham: All right, so we're going to get into the details of the spots that you're talking about and where can stability be considered and redefined and where might

it be a bit too late? I mean there may be cases where stability has become a far-fetched thought. I hope that it's not in too many places but sometimes we feel that it's a lost cause, and I wonder if you know Libya is one of them from your point of view or whether this part of the world in particular suffers from its inability to acquire stability, at least not in the gulf it seems to me, it seems to be in the Middle East and North Africa more so. I'd like you to think about that Nabil Fahmy and get back to you on this issue.

I'm going to go to Andrei Fedorov, another wonderful guest of Beirut Institute, every single summit, I'm honored to have you always and he is the first returned guest to the e-Policy Circles, that's the first one we've had him in the first, number one e-Policy Circle and here you are again Andrei Fedorov, it's a testament to who you are and what you bring to the table. Four minutes to you please, Andrei Fedorov.

Andrei Fedorov: Thank you Raghida. Maybe I will start with quite a pessimistic approach. It seems to me that we are coming to the end of the year with more instability than we even expected. It means that we are now in the situation when there are so many new and old tests for stability at the same time. I mean first of all of course, the situation with US presidential elections, though of course any choice which will be made by American people will be a challenge for everyone as well. Second, we see really, and Danilo mentioned it, deep problems inside European Union. We have very serious problems in regions, including growing confrontation between China and United States, Middle East remaining North Africa et cetera. As Russia we are now facing very deep and serious problems in our relations with European Union due to Belarus, due to Navalny case, as well as we are facing absence of any serious dialogue within the United States. From this point of view for Russia, in this situation we are now becoming more and more a lone player, which is not good for Russia. And it's a little bit dangerous because if you want to solve certain problems, if you want to reach stability, you need collective players, collective game, collective game under certain rules which are not existing now and from my personal point of view, the key problem for the coming period of time is to reconsider traditional rules of the game and to elaborate probably some untraditional approach also including Middle East. It means that quite soon, as I know from my friends from Tehran, we will face a lot of problems with Iran, on the new United States sanctions. So, it's not just a case of Iran, it will have its influence on the whole region on many other countries including Russia. So, we should be prepared for the certain untraditional solutions, maybe untraditional coalitions, maybe even some anti-US coalitions in case of Iran, so things will be, from my personal point of view will be much more different and much more difficult next year. We shouldn't expect that after US elections, world will just smile and enjoy stability. Thanks.

Raghida Dergham: Andrei Fedorov, “untraditional coalitions”, are you talking about the type of things that is taking place now between China and Iran, is this what you're talking about?

Andrei Fedorov: It's also one of the type of new coalition, the other coalition is possible coalition [inaudible] some states and on Iran nuclear deal maybe against USA, or not against USA, but with a different opinion than United States, there might be different coalitions inside such countries as Libya, there is a lot of other things and I mean that probably we should not think anymore that we can solve existing problems only by United Nations, I think that United Nations is still important mechanism, but it really need reforms and it really needs to look at the countries and the concrete countries.

Raghida Dergham: I want to get back to the issue of the lone player Russia, being the lone player and I'm wondering if this is not why, would Russia be sitting in such not a pretty place, because if you then are having problems with Europe, you're not talking to the US, you are a lone player it's, you know, of your own making. Keep that thought in your head, that question anyway I am going to get back and push you on that a little later, but now I'm going to go to Richard Fontaine, he's a new guest with us in the family of Beirut Institute. Welcome Richard Fontaine, we hope that you will be joining us at the Summit in Abu Dhabi and we appreciate you coming in and four minutes to you please.

Richard Fontaine: Well thanks Raghida, thanks for having all of us and our hearts I know go out to everyone in Beirut who is still dealing with the aftermath of the explosion and to watch what happened in one of the great cities of not just the Middle East but the world was heartbreaking I know for so many of us. But thank you for having us. I thought I would just touch on a couple of areas of uncertainty as we go forward, each of which impinges on this question of regional stability and the first I think is actually an encouraging one which follows on the normalization of UAE, Bahrain and Israel and following on the Egyptian and Jordanian normalization with Israel and of course there hasn't been a new round of normalization since 1994, so this is a major historical event and plenty in Washington are arguing over both its limitations and its opportunities but if it augers a new era of relations, formal relations, between Arab countries and Israel that would be a very good thing. And so the big question is, "does it?" You know, is this a modest step or does this lead to normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel and so forth?

The second is the future of the Iran nuclear deal and all of the things that flow from that including the regional competition between Iran and other countries including the United States, the future of sanctions and things like that and here you have, at least in Washington, a whole variety of approaches, even within the current administration I think where you have a President who seeks a treaty with Iran that would supplant the old Obama era JCPOA all the way through regime change minded folks and others who just sort of want to put pressure on Iran so that it could limit its regional activity and then, of course, you have you know an administration-to-be waiting in the wings with a wholly different approach from that. So the second would be on Iran.

The third is on the US military presence in the region and, you know, for several years now one would hear often that the United States is withdrawing from the region that it's sort of decided that it doesn't want to play a traditional role, certainly militarily, after having been so burned by the experiences in places like Iraq and Libya. But, of course, the reality is there's actually more American troops in the Middle East today than there were at the beginning of the Trump administration, they're in places like Saudi Arabia and other places where they weren't before. And even with the planned drawdown in Iraq, the United States will still have a quite robust presence in most of the countries in the region and there's some real I think soul-searching again in Washington to just give a bit of an American perspective about what American interests are in an enduring fashion in the Middle East and what the military presence should look like and what it should be there to do.

And the final thing obviously, the kind of elephant in the room at least here in Washington, is the November election and who might win, I don't know the answer to that but if any of you do please let me know and what that means for the Middle East. You can go through every issue that I mentioned and many more, whether it's Iran and you see a president in Trump who would like, you know, a treaty and so otherwise would stay out of the JCPOA or Joe Biden who would go back into the JCPOA. Saudi Arabia that has enjoyed very close ties with the Trump administration and I think would have far frostier ties in a Biden administration. You know you can go through Israel and Iraq and a number of these other countries and issues and you see a real series of differences between the two potential occupants of the White House starting in January so a few areas of uncertainty.

Raghida Dergham: So let's spread this conversation about, you know, the potential of President Biden versus President Trump, so you're saying Richard Fontaine, that the Trump wants more of Iran than Biden does because you talk about treaty unless I misunderstood you while using the word 'treaty' versus that JCPOA which is, you know, something that he would return to right? I mean, let me first of all simplify it, do you think Biden, if he becomes president, he will automatically re-embrace the JCPOA just like that? I mean with no conditions just say 'all right, now I'm going to go back and sign it', what do you think, is this what is expected of Joe Biden?

Richard Fontaine: Yes, I do I think that's what they will do, as a signal to really to the world that they're re-embracing the kind of commitments that were made prior to the Trump administration, they'll re-enter the JCPOA without conditions, and simultaneously then try to establish some sort of way of dealing with what they call 'Iran's regional issues', the Iranian presence in, you know, Damascus and influence in Lebanon, and in Yemen, and so forth.

Raghida Dergham: Explain that to me because I didn't get it, so they will go back to the JCPOA, they will abide the administration that is to say, they'll go back to JCPOA and

they would just say "are we going to address the regional ambitions and how?" if they lift the sanctions, how is that? What is the policy going to be then?

Richard Fontaine: Well I'm obviously not a spokesperson for the Biden campaign, so I can only give you my limited knowledge of what they have in mind. To my knowledge, they haven't sketched out precisely what by what mechanism they would address these regional issues, what sort of combination of potential carrots and sticks they would put in play and things like that. Obviously nuclear-related sanctions would be off the table as a stick if they went back into the JCPOA, but you know short of nuclear sanctions there's a number of other options available to the United States for at least attempting to shape Iranian behavior and I think that they would also want to reopen dialogue with Tehran in a way that doesn't exist today.

Raghida Dergham: Do you think Andrei Fedorov? Do you agree? I think you have a different opinion on that.

Andrei Fedorov: Yes I have a different opinion. First of all, I think that Trump will win election. I said it in 2016 and I am saying it again, this is my personal opinion. But concerning Iran, I don't think that the things will be so smooth and nice. If Trump will win, his pressure on Iran will continue and will increase and even if Biden by chance becomes the US president, I don't believe that he will be very nice to Iran because even a return of US to the nuclear deal means that Iran will have open door to new armed deals and by the way Iran's list for Russia, to obtain weapons from Russia, generally is 8 billion US dollars including all the new systems, submarines, airplanes, etc. I'm not sure that it will be a very nice limit in the United States even by Democrats administration. So, I think that in the Middle East region, Iran will remain anyway, it doesn't mean who will be Biden or Trump, Iran will remain a main troublemaker.

Raghida Dergham: And what? Iran will remain and what?

Andrei Fedorov: Main troublemaker.

Raghida Dergham: Ah, main troublemaker. Okay well how about that Nabil Fahmy, not only is Iran a main troublemaker, a serious partner came in. Address this issue that you just heard about, if you agree about what Biden would or would not do, but also please address, Nabil Fahmy, the issue of, again, the China – Iran pact, no matter how much Richard Fontaine spoke of the continuity of American troops in the region, that's a serious development. Can you take it from there, Nabil Fahmy?

Nabil Fahmy: Let me be a bit provocative. I actually think that American policy in the Middle East, with the exception of Iran, will not make a big difference between Trump and Biden.

Raghida Dergham: It's a big exception.

Nabil Fahmy: Yeah sure, with the exception of Iran everything else basically, even Obama said 'I want to pivot to Asia', Richard is completely correct, the number of troops are equal, if not more than they were. The US is not getting out, but it does not want to be operationally engaged as active as it was in the past, Russia understandably wants to increase its influence, but it's not looking for a confrontation with the US or anybody else in the region beyond what it has to, given the situation in in Syria. I think Iran is problematic, there is a difference between Biden and Trump, although Trump does not want to, I don't think Trump after the election would want to use force against Iran easily, question is – will force be used before the election? And I definitely don't think that Biden would want to use force against Iran. My position really is, you cannot ignore the big major powers nor you should even want but to. But it's the regional players which will determine what kind of role is played in Libya before the big powers, what kind of role is played in Syria. Peace process or the lack of it is an example, the confrontation with Iran. This is the era of regional players taking on, they should be the authors of their future, if they don't, they will continue to be a part of, if you want, the marginal players and that will be catastrophic for everybody because neither of the two major powers wants to play that leadership role.

Raghida Dergham: Stay with me on the point, Danilo Turk, of China. China not only the rising sort of like, I mean, you didn't want to call it 'Cold War', but there is an atmosphere of confrontation with the United States and, again, the pact with Iran is a very serious part of it. You may not feel it now I'm pretty sure eventually the US will wake up and try to separate them, but for now I don't know what they're going to be doing because if it's manifesting itself in this region in small places like Lebanon, in big places like Iran, so from your point of view is this something that worries you, as a European? That there is a serious and then china is sort of aligning itself with Iran and Iran has become problematic in Europe as well, not only a troublemaker in the region but everywhere else it seems. Can you address that Danilo Turk?

Danilo Turk: Yeah, well first of all, I'm not good at forecasting, I think that was Winston Churchill who said that 'forecasting is difficult, especially if it is about the future' so it's really hard to see because the situation is complicated and if I was asked to advise any of the big powers where to start and that would require a very long discussion and I'm not sure how the opening moves are going to be made after the American elections, either by Trump or by Biden, because each of them will have to look at this complex situation and see that there is really no prospect of, I should not say solution, but no the prospect of stability available right now. And you know, sanctions I'd like to say something about sanctions. I was, you know, serving on the UN Security Council and subsequently in the Secretariat with Kofi Annan and of course we were doing a lot of work relating to sanctions in the Balkans with regard to Iraq, Libya – I was chairing Libya's sanctions committee for two years – and, you know, the difficult thing about

sanctions is the exit strategy, how to move beyond sanctions. Now if you have a political situation which calls for a different combination of sticks and carrots, it's very hard to reduce sticks. It has to be something big happening to be able to reduce the level of sanctions and gradually move towards lifting of sanctions. Sanctions are inherently difficult to suspend, let alone lift and that's a problem and that means that sanctions are likely to stay and be perpetually there and it will be very difficult to kind of modify them, which is a contributing factor to pessimism because you know you have to do it, you know, to create a different type of dynamic but you can't do it because sanctions are so difficult to modify. So that's my point of sanctions. I'll come to China shortly, but please.

Raghida Dergham: Yes I just want you to speak about the issue of sanctions because in fact the Trump administration had taken on rather effectively the weapon of sanctions, I would say, and in fact you can even argue that it did not engage in wars, actual real wars and it succeeded in in in pressuring countries through sanctions. So, this is a success of a policy, rather than a failure of a policy, right? Go ahead Danilo Turk, you want to say something on that.

Danilo Turk: This reminds me of a classical international law terminology, see in the good old days that was before much before me and my generation, sanctions were not prevalent, they're not the term used very broadly what was used was hostile measures short of war. Now, nowadays people speak about sanctions against Iran as a successful substitute for war, and there is a measure of truth in this because it is better to have sanctions than a shooting war, really. But we should not forget that sanctions are a hostile set of measures short of war, so they are a kind of war.

Raghida Dergham: Let me ask you a question, is it a hostile act for example that Iran has taken over the country of Lebanon and dictates whether we have government or not? That's hostile.

Danilo Turk: Of course, but there are plenty of hostile acts in the Middle East, and Iran is by no means...

Raghida Dergham: Let us not justify it, Danilo Turk, let us not justify if there is many or few. There are many actions that, as you know, whether it's in Syria, whether it is, and you know one of the major problems we have in this part of the world is not the existence of the regime in Iran as such but actual performance outside their own borders by creating the paramilitary forces that report back to Tehran but run a country like Lebanon or Iraq or Syria, that is a problem. That hostile, don't you agree with that?

Danilo Turk: I agree and then you see what I'm trying to say that's really a concluding remark, because Richard Fontaine said earlier, if Biden wins, there will be an effort to limits to remove the nuclear weapons related to sanctions and then see what to do about the rest. What I'm trying to say is very modest, really. What I'm trying to say is in such a

scenario, it will still be very difficult to figure out what that arrest would be, because it would have to be some kind of sanctions based something, but something that is not devoid of incentives, it's kind of a different difficult combination to make. So that's on that subject, now on China, I'd say of course China has a very cautious and long-term policy vis-a-vis the region, I'm not a specialist on China, I have talked to Chinese but, you know, with China, it's usually very difficult to go in very much detail in these matters. What one can see is obviously there is a long-term vision of a role but extremely cautious and aware that there are many many pitfalls and many traps that have to be avoided. So, I can't be really very helpful in that regard.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, I'm going to go back to Richard Fontaine and I would again and just that quickly if you could tell me the presence of American troops versus the very strong fact that's going on between China and Iran, do you find that there's no...how is that going to work itself out? Do you think there's going to be in this part of the world a potential confrontation between the US and China or this going to be only in the high China Seas, if there is one?

Richard Fontaine: The Middle East is already emerging as commons for competition between the United States and China, and in that sense it's not particularly different than the Indo-Pacific has been, and Europe increasingly is becoming. Each of these areas in which the United States and China have economic activity, diplomatic activity and to some degree, military activity, are becoming avenues of competition, so you know it's often said that China's ambitions in the Middle East are primarily commercial, which I think actually they go beyond the commercial to the geopolitical. But even if they are primarily commercial, you know the pattern of activity is when you look at a great powers, commercial activity in a relatively unsettled region of the world, this historical pattern is to want to protect one's investments, the supply of goods and resources from that area, hydrocarbons going to China for example, and its population that might be located there and that then gets one involved in the politics of the region and the geopolitics of the region, so both in order to deal with its commercial interests in the Middle East and in the framework of this larger competition that is starting to play out between the United States and China, I think you will see a long period of rivalry between the United States and China across the region.

Raghida Dergham: But address the pact between, this is a 25-year-old pact, this is military there are bases right now, I mean I have my information and then Andrei Fedorov will tell me if I'm right is that they, I mean, the interest of China in major ports in the Middle East in this region is tremendous, and the offer by Iran is very valuable, so what difference does it make if the Americans are coming in with a number of people to, you know, troops here when China is digging in with very important force, including potentially the port of Beirut?

Richard Fontaine: Well I think the Chinese pact with Iran and its involvement in various ports around the region have potential military implications, but not actual ones right now, I mean they're not, China's not defending Iran, China is not establishing major Chinese military bases in Iran, it could at some point in the future but it's not now. And so certainly the announcement of that agreement got everybody's attention for I think quite obvious reasons but the day after it was signed the world in the region didn't look terribly different than the day before. The question is one of long-term development of increasing Chinese potential military and political engagement in the region and Iran is a key player and of course Iran doesn't have a whole lot of options if it's looking to great power.

Raghida Dergham: I see. Andrei Fedorov, I bet you have comments on this.

Andrei Fedorov: Yeah. First of all, I would like to remember the words of one of the top Chinese leader told me a couple of years ago, he said that outside of China, first of all we need to push psychological presence of China into minds of the local people. So China is really thinking about long-term strategy, they don't want to jump into the next day. They would like to have a long-term strategy based on combination of economic, political and military things. Concerning this deal with Iran, as far as I know from my Iranian sources, China might start to place their navy in Iranian ports over the next year and it's not by chance quite soon there should be navy maneuver sometimes together by Iran, China, and Russia in the Gulf region, so things are sometimes moving much more quicker than we expect. The problem for all of us and for Russia is that we cannot sometimes understand the logic of China, we think only in a short-term way, though they're thinking in another absolutely [inaudible] way of thinking and I am sure that in the five, ten years, China's presence in the Gulf region will be much more effective than now.

Raghida Dergham: You mean Gulf meaning only Iran?

Andrei Fedorov: No no, from Iran to Saudi Arabia everywhere, everywhere. So once again, just one small comment, just a week ago I spoke with one of Chinese officials who was involved in the unofficial talks with Taliban and I asked him 'so what you will do if Taliban will come to power soon, maybe next spring?' He said, 'no it's not a problem, we can buy them', so they have absolutely different approach we're thinking, we're trying to make certain constructions, thinking about back doors etc. they're going straight.

Raghida Dergham: So you're saying, just before I go to Nabil Fahmy, Andrei Fedorov, you're saying that China will be able to do both, to reconcile both, to do parallel a military naval presence in Iran and something what in in the Gulf in the Arab part of the Gulf? You say both naval presence in the Gulf States, as well or something else?

Andrei Fedorov: I mean both, I mean political, economic presence and military presence all together because what China always needs, China needs stable presence abroad, they don't want to come for one day, they need stable presence.

Raghida Dergham: What would that mean to Egypt and I know, Nabil Fahmy, I know from the part of the region that we're from you're considered a China specialist, so and you've been going to China rather often, do you want to address that and then I'm going to Libya. And we're going to do one last thing on China through you and then I'm going to ask you to tell me about Libya.

Nabil Fahmy: Sure, very quickly China thinks long term and it moves slowly, its main interest in the Middle East, and frankly in a lot of parts of the world except for Asia is energy, rare minerals and markets. Its military, to achieve that, it will have to have the capacity to secure its interests. Watch the development of China's blue water capacity, that is a reflection of the level of aggressiveness or the lack of it that China's posture has, but it is more long-term than that than short-term. And I just find the discussion a bit strange, this is not about the Middle East alone, you'll have the same kind of conflicts as China has a greater interest even in Europe, even on the whole issue of technology, China is going to be a main player, some people will like it some people will not. They will make mistakes, there will be positive elements in certain points. We need to deal with that and again have the right geopolitical and the right balance of collective interests to ensure that the emergence of China is not the emergence of a negative factor but rather a positive one but any impression that China will not have a role long term is naive and it's also I think that the idea that China will have a military role in the Middle East that is operational is I think a bit exaggerated but they've had ports by the way in Djibouti for quite a while now. So I would keep an eye on blue water capacity if you want to understand the militarization of Chinese in region. I don't see them being a main player short-term politically in the Middle East, on any of the main problems in the Middle East although they will basically take a census position on these issues in the UN and so on and so forth. You wanted to talk about Libya?

Raghid Dergham: I want to talk about, yeah, I want to talk about Egypt, how is Egypt doing in terms of you know in the neighborhood that it's the North African neighborhood. Things are really tough rough and then you have a new big player, Turkey is coming in, the Russians didn't do too well confronting the Turks in Libya, I'm sure Andrei Fedorov would probably tell me 'no no no we've done a good job', but anyway I don't think they succeeded. But the point is that, I mean I think that, and you both will tell me, the Egyptian Russian relationship and coordination in Libya has been useful. But where are you? Where is Libya? Is it going downhill? Is it going to collapse further or is there a chance for it now?

Nabil Fahmy: Great question, I mean Libya moved from one bobbing head to a multiple bobbing heads and you don't know actually who's going to come up next and so on, that's

after Gaddafi of course. Presently we have a failed state, regional geopolitical competition, as well as semi-global complications, the US is not really a player in Libya in the short term, I don't think frankly Biden or Trump would want to be one in the future. You had in the last couple of months you had the Berlin summit, you had the Cairo meeting you had the meeting in Morocco today, Haftar and Saleh are in Cairo and on October 5th if I'm not mistaken, there's a meeting in Berlin. People are talking about the process of trying to resolve this, we can talk process all we want and that's useful and important, but unless we have a geopolitical balance of interest pre-Berlin, pre-the second Berlin, that's not going to work. So I would call for very quiet, but serious diplomatic consultations between Egypt, Russia and Turkey either directly or indirectly.

Raghida Dergham: Interesting but would leadership in Egypt welcome a discussion with Turkey on regarding Libya?

Nabil Fahmy: Well our discussion will be what they should not be doing rather than what they they should be doing.

Raghida Dergham: I thought it's something like that. Okay that is something that discussion, I mean do you mean, track two or do you mean public?

Nabil Fahmy: No I mean private quiet diplomacy led frankly by a third party. It's very difficult to have, we had security talks with the Turks the last couple of weeks that stopped. We did not have diplomatic talks, this requires a diplomatic discussion. It's difficult to do it directly so I would do it through a third party and I would frankly openly suggest that the Russians are the best out there because they have good relations with both sides.

Raghida Dergham: Oh well the Russians are having a hard time with Turkey actually, especially after Idlib but...I'll do it! No I think I think at any rate, you know, that's a good discussion. Maybe you and Andrei Fedorov could talk about it afterwards, but speaking of Russia, Danilo Turk it was a very you know grim, it's not a very encouraging description of what where Russia is according to Andrei Fedorov in terms of his relationship with Europe. It seems that that maybe Europe is going to be imposing sanctions probably because you know Angela Merkel of Germany is not very happy with the response to the Navalny affair and if there is German sanctions you think...Again the European summit was supposed to be tomorrow but it got postponed for a week, so you think this will be followed by other countries if Germany says 'no we cannot allow this to stand the Navalny issue' and goes for sanctions?

Andrei Fedorov: Well I think first, this postponement is actually an interesting piece of information because you know the cause, the parent cause was illness by one of the bodyguards of Charles Michel, the president of the European Council who has to be quarantined now, Charles Michel the president and he will be in quarantine for a week

after which the Council will be able to meet. Now just think about this a little bit, just think about this, you know this probably suggests that presidents and prime ministers were quite welcoming the possibility to delay that decision because they have to go through other complicated processes among themselves. European Union is a complicated mechanism, and when it comes to sanctions it is not easy. So first let me go, there are two situations where sanctions are already discussed, one is Belarus and the other is Turkey. On Belarus, there is no agreement yet although there is an emerging agreement about travel bans and such things which I'm not sure how effective they will be but the European Union given its commitment to democracy freedom of speech, non-violent handling of elections and such things, there will be sanctions of some kind. Now Cyprus, as you know has requested that sanctions can be imposed also in Turkey because of the whole situation East Iranian and the alleged Turkish breaches of law and security of neighboring countries and it makes it difficult because European Union and Germany would like to mediate between Turkey and Greece, Turkey and Cyprus and of course sanctions would certainly not have mediation. So that there's a little bit about the problems of sanctions in these two situations. Now add Russia to this. Obviously the whole situation around Navalny has created a sense of, you know, kind of psychological shock and political calculations and other calculations are not yet made even in Germany, as far as I understand, they are not yet decided whether to do something about Nord Stream 2 or not to and if so what, so there is the whole question is open and I'm not sure how that will end but in order to get the picture you have to take into account that there are three areas or three possible sets of sanctions put before a complex mechanism of 27 countries most of whom have quite divergent views about that.

Raghida Dergham: Andrei Fedorov, is it your information as well that the Germans have really not taken a strong position or they are not going all the way with the issue to the extent that it will impact or affect the north stream or gas you know...

Andreri Fedorov: They have a rather strong position but they also understand that the question of sanctions is a question of agreement within European Union, and the problem is that there is a group of states like Poland, like Baltic states, who are calling for more tough sanctions and Germany is trying to avoid open confrontation with Russia which is inevitable.

Raghida Dergham: Ah, so you're saying that it is inevitable that Nord Stream will be killed because of the Navalny affair?

Andrei Fedorov: It might be killed, it might be killed.

Raghida Dergham: What's inevitable? What are you saying is inevitable?

Andrei Fedorov: Inevitable are sanctions, but on that kind of things I fully agree with Danilo Turk, it's very difficult to agree even within the European Union what kind of sanctions to use.

Danilo Turk: And you know sanctions can be also symbolic, sanctions can be asset freezes, travel bans which don't affect much but create a sense all right something is being done. There is a lot of talk in sanctions, discussions which is really feeling good, rather than doing good. Now let me just as a as an anecdote...

Raghida Dergham: I'm going to have you say whatever you want to say and it's going to be almost like you're concluding remarks because I'm running out of time go ahead. No go ahead, finish up what your thought is so that you can use it for to conclude your thoughts before we wrap up. Go ahead Danilo Turk, please.

Danilo Turk: Well all right look when the latest sanctions of the US against Hong Kong were imposed some weeks ago, there was one of the council members in Hong Kong, the regional council of Hong Kong said, well assets are frozen I have no assets in United States but I can open an account deposit 100 and let them be frozen if that is what pleases the President of the United States. Now, this is of course absurd, it does illustrate the you know the complexity of the whole business of sanctions. And in case of Europe obviously we are nowhere close to anything definitive in my opinion.

Raghida Dergham: All right thank you very much Danilo, I'm going to give Richard Fontaine the moment a minute and a half to give me your concluding remarks and then I'm going to go to both Nabil Fahmy and Andrei Fedorov before we have to wrap up. Go ahead Richard Fontaine and whatever you want to take it from you whether it's on sanctions or beyond, you have two minutes to wrap up please.

Richard Fontaine: Well on the question of sanctions I think what you're seeing is a reversal in some cases of what was the case a few years ago where the United States would sort of goad the European Union into putting sanctions on this country that country or the other country and now you're seeing some reversal where particularly Germany is in the lead and then trying to get its own region on board, the EU on board with sanctions toward a particular country. This happened with Russia it may happen on Belarus and then sort of challenging the United States to join forces and place its own measures and play space. I don't think sanctions as a general matter are going to go away anytime soon because the reality is you have what at least countries like the United States and Europe and others see as objectionable behavior in different places. They don't want to go to war, they'd rather do something to issue a very strongly worded statement, well what's left in the toolkit? Not a whole lot other than sanctions. It has all of the kind of downsides that Danilo Turk talked about in terms of exit strategies and clearly defining your objectives and things like that, but it does seem to be the one thing that almost everybody can agree on when something happens.

Raghida Dergham: Including Biden if he's president?

Richard Fontaine: Yeah so for example, I mean leaving aside the Iran nuclear sanctions pursuant to JCPOA, which has a formal dynamic but there's sanctions on many different countries around the world and I don't think that Biden would come in and either lift those or sort of forswear the use of sanctions as a tool of foreign policy.

Raghida Dergham: Okay thank you very much, Nabil Fahmy, a minute and a half to you.

Nabil Fahmy: Very quickly, peace and war in the Middle East in the past was initiated by the regional players not by the superpowers. Secondly, we're not in a cold war situation, the Middle East is not an existential threat to either the Russians or the Americans or the Chinese for that and therefore they will not risk beyond a certain point in their activities. The Middle East wants to get its place in order, its regional players need to take the role in creating diplomatic channels for negotiations, directly or indirectly, and they have to be frankly with the other regional players in the Middle East including adversaries. I say this because what we're witnessing is not geopolitical competition in the traditional sense, it's the competition including direct interference in the internal affairs of states and Raghida, you mentioned correctly, the painful situation in Lebanon, but the same also applies frankly in Libya. So I call upon the regional players to engage in diplomacy, stick to rule of law, but start creating their own future because the superpowers or the foreign powers will be helpful or detrimental depending on their interests.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Nabil Fahmy, and we are trying, some parties in Lebanon are trying to get a hold of our lives and we are blocked completely not only by local players but also regional players and that is a huge problem, we can't take our lives into our own hands. But thank you for your thoughtfulness in mentioning Lebanon. Andrei Fedorov, a minute and a half and that's it because I'm going to have to wrap up, go ahead a minute, even less.

Andrei Fedorov: My main idea: coming two months we will be living on political volcano, we should be prepared for everything a kind of political Pompei. Anyway I would like to finish with the words of my friend, a top friend from kremlin, 'for US elections, we should keep vodka for Trump and we should keep medicine for the victory of Biden'.

Raghida Dergham: Oh! That's a strong one, that is very strong. Well on that note, Andrei thank you very much. You have all honored me it's been a fun conversation, you know it could go on forever but we must wrap up. And let me announce to you, stay with me while I announce who will we have with us next week, we will have which is going to be e-Policy Circle number 16 of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi and it's going to

be with James Jeffrey, Special presidential envoy for the global coalition [electricity cut off].

Okay so I'm going to tell you who we're going to have with us next week, I'm quite honored to have James Jeffrey, special presidential envoy for the global coalition to counter ISIS, and he is a US Special Representative for Syria engagement, Deputy National Security Advisor and former US Ambassador to Iraq, Turkey, Albania. And we have with us also Joel Rayburn, US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Levant Affairs and Special Envoy for Syria, former member of the US national security council staff and retired US army officer, I think some of you know both of them. We have of course the famous Staffan de Mistura, former Special and former UN Special Envoy for Syria and also former Special Representative of the Secretary General in Iraq, Afghanistan, he was also a person representative of the Secretary General for Southern Lebanon. And we have Nibras El Fadel, Founder and Managing Director at NeF Consulting; currently Member of the United Nation's Syrian Constitutional Committee and former Special Advisor at the Syrian Presidency. This will be next Wednesday, as always at the same time.

Thank you so much for joining me and my team, we thank you for being so generous with your time, and your thoughts and frankness and until we see you again, hopefully in Abu Dhabi next year take care and take care of yourselves thank you very much.

Goodbye now.