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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:  
HE Carl Bildt;  
HE Paula Dobriansky;  
HE Michael Gfoeller;  
Dr. Dmitri Trenin.

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6lpqWGBx5U>

**Raghida Dergham:** Good morning Washington, Georgetown specifically, as I'm told by two of my guests Paula Dobriansky, former US Under-Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Michael Gfoeller, former US political advisor and regional coordinator for the coalition provisional authority in Iraq. And good afternoon to Carl Bildt in Stockholm. Carl Bildt is of course, he is the former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Sweden. And also, good afternoon to Dmitri Trenin, who is now heading the Carnegie Moscow Center and he was former Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Europe in Moscow. Hello everyone, welcome to the 19th e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. It is a pleasure to have you, it is always a great conversation, but this is really, as always, with you, a stellar of a cast. Thank you for agreeing to come on and join me for this conversation about what's happening in this very simple world where nothing is happening. So I want to start by giving each of you four minutes exactly to tell me what you have on mind, and then I would start in this case with Paula Dobriansky. Please Paula Dobriansky, it's over to you.

**Paula Dobriansky:** Thank you so much, delighted to be here and yes greetings from Georgetown in Washington DC. I, as you know, one of the issues of course that's front and center not only in the United States but around the globe, is the fact that in the United States, we have our upcoming presidential elections, but what I want to address is an issue that's going to be sustained beyond the elections and regardless of the outcome of the elections and that happens to be great power competition: competition among the United States, Russia and China. I think that we will certainly witness a continuation of this strategic competition and particularly here where US power will be challenged by Beijing and Moscow, and there will also be continued attempts to fragment our alliances.

But let me go to the second, there's also an interesting development that has stemmed from the great power competition in which I think you could say that the geopolitical landscape has shifted, and that is in terms of what constitutes new alignments, new coalitions, new partnerships. Let me mention four in those four very brief minutes, and that is first Russia and China have certainly expanded their relationship politically, economically, militarily and I think we're going to see a continuation of that expanded relationship.

Secondly, I would pick out what the developments in the Indo-pacific, they're very striking. Here, back in 2007, then Prime Minister Abe actually launched what was called the quadrilateral security dialogue, which brought together Japan, Australia, the United States, and India. And that particular quad came about to counter China's actions in the south China seas, and just overall the rise of China. Well if you look at it today, that quad has been expanded, it's been elevated, it's now operating at the ministerial level and very significantly earlier this last year, in March, in April of this year, you had other countries that were included in a discussion on economic issues. This included New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam. And what this portends in the Indo-pacific is a new alignment of countries that are very concerned about China's actions, Particularly, one of the topics that is front and center happens to be supply chains. We look over the last number of years Japan and South Korea have been moving many of their critical industries out of China, and look at Sony, Samsung, electronics they've moved out of China, to India, to Thailand. So this is a key area.

Let me mention the third. The third is Europe. I have witnessed in recent months a shift in Europe's thinking on how to handle the strategic competition, and by the way, here, China and Russia. With regard to China in particular, it's noteworthy the EU held its annual Summit with China, there was no final communiqué – there always has been, but there wasn't. And instead, there was a statement that was made which called attention to the issue of cyber, and cyber-attacks on Europe, human rights, the national security law of Hong Kong. And then let me also mention there was a recent poll, and even European attitudes have shifted – in the UK and also France some over 60 percent of the public have said that they're very concerned about Chinese, the Chinese government and its actions. And the same in Germany, some 47 percent concern about the Chinese government actions.

I have one last and I'm going to wrap up and that is, so here let me at least just say there's a shift in the thinking there and also I'd say with regard to Russia, particularly because of the poisoning of Navalny, we've seen some direct actions related to that, then we got Armenia, Azerbaijan, we got Belarus, the last one Middle East. I have to end, and I'll end on this note: the historic dramatic breakthrough of the diplomatic relations established between Israel and also the UAE, and Bahrain. Very groundbreaking, it really underscores the striking geopolitical shifts. Thanks.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much, a lot to think about and a lot to enrich our discussion later on but now we'll go to Carl Bildt, please, four minutes to you.

**Carl Bildt:** Thank you very much, and an honor and a pleasure to be with you, would be even more of an honor and a pleasure to see all of you in person but I hope that will happen at some point in time. Yes, some remarks on what I see is the slightly bigger trends, I'm trying to avoid sort of elections that are coming up in different countries, but say I normally try to think of the word in terms of three megatrends that we've been seeing for the past, say, 10 years. The first is that after, say, a quarter of a century where the megatrend that we all talked about was globalization, the further rapid integration and that bringing prosperity and that bringing also

somewhat of an easier tension I mean not a black and white picture that was 911, quite a number of different things but I would say globalization was the trend.

Now, as Paula said as well, the rise of geopolitical tension is clearly the dominating trend. We see the shift in power relationships, notably of course the rise of China, which is dramatic, but we also see other powers throwing their weight around, that might be Russia, that might be Turkey, that might be others that are doing it with destabilizing consequences. We also are living in an area of slightly unpredictable, to put it in diplomatic terms, the United States. This will continue respectively. I think the rise of China will continue if I just look at the sort of economic figures that we see coming out of the IMF at the moment, this year we have European economies down, or the euro economy, or the UK, down eight, ten percent, US economy down four or five percent, and the Chinese economy up two percent. China is the only place in the world that is growing, so the relative weight of China in the global economy, as a result of the COVID crisis, is actually increasing, and that has political effects further down the line.

Second mega trend is of course the fact that we are leaving the industrial age and entering the digital age. That's a revolution that will change virtually everything in our societies over time. We are only in the beginning. What we see and hear, the intersection between geopolitics, and this is of course a way for control of the technologies that will shape the new future. We see it primarily between the US and China, but we see it also as well. And we [inaudible] to see the shift in demand for raw materials of different sorts because we're getting out of the fossil age. So, it's not necessarily oil and gas that's going to be the raw materials of prime importance from geopolitics, it's other things, [inaudible] conductors and rare earth minerals and those that changes the geopolitical landscape.

And then the third trend which we've seen, is that we have left the age of what I would call 'the politics of ideology' when we were discussing socialism and communism and those things, Dmitri might remember some of these things, and we are entering the age of the 'politics of identity'. It is ethnic, it is cultural, it is nationalist issues that are dominating the politics in all of our countries. The inter-relationship between these three tents is that we are entering, or have entered, a far more turbulent, and for more unpredictable time and of course that is, I think, something that, in one way or another, is going to continue to dominate the reality for the years that are ahead of us that we have any possibility of having views on.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much Carl Bildt. Yes, it is turbulent times coming up and we will discuss where are these turbulent times going to be more acute worldwide when we engage in our discussion. But let me go, right now to Dmitri Trenin, four minutes to you, tell us what you've got.

**Dmitri Trenin:** Did you hear me?

**Raghida Dergham:** Now I do.

**Dmitri Trenin:** Very good. Thank you very much Raghida, thank you for this invitation. I subscribe to every one. And as Carl has just said, all the mega trends [inaudible] that absolutely. I very much appreciate Paula's tour d'horizon, as far as particularly US foreign policy is concerned. So, let me add my two topics based on essentially three things that I see that can't be easily subsumed within what Paula and Carl have just laid out.

One, something very close to home the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the south of the Caucasus, it is, to me, a sign of the times, the way this conflict is developing. This is one of the frozen conflicts that remains frozen, and as they say, it's not an accident. This is something that exemplifies some of the major trends that are shaping global and regional geopolitics. I think my takeaway from that conflict are as follows: what is frozen will melt. And I think we need to take a very close look at a lot of conflicts around the world that we thought will remain frozen.

My second takeaway is that the mechanisms, international mechanisms, of mediation and keeping the status-quo that essentially satisfies the international players, these mechanisms fail to perpetuate the status-quo. Again, we need to look at these mechanisms with a very hard eye, and see what works and what doesn't.

My third point is that in many of these regional conflicts, and Nagorno-Karabakh is an example of that, the two superpowers of the 21st century world, the United States of America, and the People's Republic of China, will not be directly involved, not be really very much interested. They're staying away.

Which takes me to point four, my fourth takeaway is that the regional powers, the countries in the region, in this case Russia, Turkey, Iran, will have a much bigger role than they would have had in a bipolar world dominated by the United States and China.

Coming to the US election, I think, what I expect is more change of style in US foreign policy and less change of substance. I think that the United States will stay focused on its domestic needs, and domestic problems which are many and serious. I think that the United States will remain focused on China. Russia is more of an add-on. I think that the focus very much is on China, and will continue to be on China whoever wins the election. Now this major power competition is essentially between Washington and Beijing. And three, I think the United States will be leaning harder on allies. It will be the time when the United States will be asking the allies what they are doing for the United States, not what the United States will be doing for them.

As far as Russia is concerned, I think the relationship is going to be bad and even deteriorate no matter who wins in in the US.

And very lastly, although I spoke about bipolarity in the 21st century world, between the United States and China, I do not see, at least for now, I do not see a block division the way we experience during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. Which means that other powers, bigger powers, smaller powers, medium powers will have a chance to play

bigger roles. I'm talking about Europe, I'm talking about India, I'm talking about Japan and Russia. Let me stop here.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much, good timing for stopping. And now I'm going to – again Dmitri, I think the three of you are bringing in such rich elements to the conversation. I'm going to be fascinated when listening to this engagement amongst the three, or four of you rather. I still have one more person and that is Michael Gfoeller, four minutes to you strictly.

**Michael Gfoeller:** Here we go, now I can speak. Very good, thank you Raghida. I promise to do three and a half minutes there, I don't want to steal your time. Yes, I would like to echo what His Excellency Dr. Bildt said regarding the technological revolution. In my latest, I'm sitting on the board of an artificial intelligence company that's working on predictive analytics, using all sorts of mathematical tools and if anything, he may have understated the case a little bit. I mean in this country we're really looking at an economic revolution taking place. In the coming decade, thanks to artificial intelligence, a vast categories of jobs will be eliminated or transformed beyond recognition. Just to give you one example, everyone knows about self-driving cars, it's actually one of the simplest applications of AI in mathematical terms but it's going to have a tremendous impact. The number one career field for American men who lack a college education is driver, there are truck drivers, there are chauffeurs, there are taxi drivers. Within a decade, all of these jobs will be done by artificial intelligences. There will be a wave of unemployment as that particular job category is eliminated. The same thing will happen in higher status professions, I mean, pretty soon in the United States it will be illegal to have a surgical operation that is not carried out by an artificial intelligence because the precision of these machines is just so high. I would remind everyone about Moore's law which has been doing pretty well since, predicting pretty well the development of computer technology since 1975. It says, briefly, that the capacity of computer technology to process information doubles every 18 months. This is why people like Ray Kurzweil are predicting that we'll have functional artificial intelligence in the sense of programs that replicate human intelligence by 2030. I think that's almost certainly true. So that's going to transform the United States economy at least in our country, it's going to drive a renewed domestic political emphasis on the labor market, unemployed workers will still vote, and it'll probably drive the continuing trend toward focus on domestic affairs. It'll distract us from foreign policy to a large extent. So that's one megatrend.

I think you'll see the same trends happening across the world, and what happens to the poor and less stable countries in the world that don't have the financial and economic muscle of the United States when they largely disappear or excluded from a transformed international division of labor. That's going to drive extremism and nationalism I think in a whole host of countries. And refugee flows, right? Particularly economic migrants. So, I think those are some of the [inaudible].

The real question is: can the global political elite deal with this challenge? Can they deal with the political challenges coming out of a technological revolution that will lead us if we manage the political politics correctly to a new age of abundance? I'm not sure we can, we'll have to

see. The big challenge will be politics, not technology. I'd like to echo what Dr. Trenin said about Nagorno-Karabakh, just to remind everyone this is the largest war in Asia at this time, tens of thousands of people are fighting on both sides, after just three weeks of fighting, the casualty is already numbered in the thousands. This is a long conflict that goes back way to way before 1988, and I really think that Russia will play a key role in resolving it, only Russia can reach out to all sides, at high level, with a great deal of influence. It represents a significant, I want to point out, Nagorno-Karabakh represents a significant threat to territorial integrity of Iran, 20 million Azeri Turks live in Iran, they're the second largest population group after ethnic versions. And so, the government in Tehran has to be very careful as it seeks to balance its own position between Baku and Yerevan. If they lead too far toward Yerevan, they can cause significant domestic instability.

**Raghida Dergham:** All right Michael, I was going to go to the elections, US elections, but why don't I stay a little bit with this issue because we're going to go to Karabakh, and what the four of you have been talking about. Let me go to Dmitri, do you agree that only Russia can solve this? But isn't Russia possibly in the danger of being pulled in to the conflict because of its security pact with Armenia, if things get out of hand? And do you think there is a role for the United States to come in and say to Turkey: maybe it's time to just hold your horses a little bit? I'll go to you first Dmitri, and tell me if Russia feels really comfortable or does it feel intimidated by what, well let's put it this way, does the President Vladimir Putin feel very well in his skin, or does he feel intimidated, or angry with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan? Dmitri, you can go first.

**Dmitri Trenin:** Well first of all I think that there's always a role for the United States, the issue is whether the United States wants to play that role – or any role – in this or that conflict. That's a question that only the United States can answer. The United States, of course, can do a lot in a lot of places.

Second with regard to Russia, this conflict became a war, rather than remaining another skirmish, thanks to the increase of Turkish interest and influence, in the south Caucasus. At some point, I think that the balance of power that was tilting toward Azerbaijan for three decades, or slightly less than three decades, was going to lead to an attempt to replay the war that Azerbaijan lost in the early 1990s. But this time, Azerbaijan got a lot of help, a lot of guidance I would even say, and encouragement from Turkey, and Russia.

**Raghida Dergham:** And Israel too, Dmitri Trenin.

**Dmitri Trenin:** Oh yes, yes yes yes absolutely. Israel did supply military hardware systems, but Turkey was politically and strategically involved, and I think that made the difference. Had there not been for Turkey, I think Russia would have been able to stop the conflict, to nip it in the bud as it did earlier this year, as it did in 2016, as it did on other occasions. So Russia is not looking at the situation as being comfortable. In fact, it's very discomfoting and Russia is looking at the Turkish challenge in much broader terms than the Caucasus, and certainly much broader than Nagorno-Karabakh.

**Raghida Dergham:** Yes Libya, for example. It takes me to Carl Bildt, because later I'll go to Paula Dobriansky because I want to go back to the elections with you on top of this conversation Paula Dobriansky, but I'll go to Carl Bildt first. And Turkey's really feeling rather empowered, I don't know what makes the leader, the president of Turkey, he's so empowered and it seems that Europe is rather sort of hesitant, or weak, or not interested – I don't think it's not interested because it's afraid of the revival of Daesh, the ISIS element of the immigration, forced immigration of opening the door. Carl Bildt, shed some light for us on why Turkey feels so empowered, and could get away with it, and could you also address the issue of Iran that Michael Gfoeller referred to when he was speaking about Nagorno – Karabakh, and Azerbaijan, and Turkey? Please Carl Bildt.

**Carl Bildt:** Well starting with Iran, I mean they have for partly the reason Michael mentioned, they've been extremely careful to be as neutral as they can. The fact that they have not only fighting on their border, in certain cases they even have fighting affecting them across the border. So it requires an amount of patience, but so far they've been very quiet. Overall, I think the explanation with Turkey and others lies in what Dmitri said. We are in a situation where there is not a bipolar world where sort of other powers feel more contained or constrained. We are in a world where, sort of medium powers, or whatever we call them, can do things in a way they couldn't do before. Turkey uses that. And there are two reasons for it I think, several reasons for it. One is the domestic situation, I mean President Erdogan knows that if on [press and trends?], he faced difficulties in the election in 23, nationalism is always good, I mean sort of I can think of X numbers of countries where sort of leaders who have been in difficult disabilities that are boosting their popularity by some successes. And he has so far sort of grudgingly grown up being fairly successful. The intervention that he did in Libya did work. He has demonstrated tactical and political capabilities. I think this is a more daring adventure, I think what he's done is sort of the situation with Greece is not black and white, with Cyprus it's more complicated. He's throwing his weight around, as long as he succeeds.

**Raghida Dergham:** Yes, but is he being allowed to succeed Carl Bildt?

**Carl Bildt:** Well he's allowed to succeed, because...

**Raghida Dergham:** ...*being* allowed.

**Carl Bildt:** In this particular world there's more room for medium powers, I think someone else said it, to throw their weight around. Who can, who can constrain him? Can the Americans do it? I doubt it. The Europeans can't, the Iranians can't. Who can constrain Russia? Difficult to say as well. We are in a sort of more turbulent world.

**Raghida Dergham:** Paula Dobriansky, is the US not willing or unable to constrain President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as he goes into his adventures in Turkey, in Nagorno – Karabakh, etc.? Especially that he's accused, at least by some, especially Russia, that he is trying to revive the capabilities of ISIS and every time the Russians try to say something, he waves Idlib in their face.

Not that I'm on Russia's side on any of this, I'm just putting to you what I've learned, Dmitri will correct me if I'm wrong, but to you Paula Dobriansky, please.

**Paula Dobriansky:** Well my response to it is, first of all, the relationship with Turkey is a complex one, it has been a complex one. And when I look at every US administration, whether be it Democrat or Republican, each has had to deal very carefully with Turkey - why? Because Turkey at times, we have witnessed it's aligned with Russia, we have witnessed at times it is doing its own, or following its own path, the path set forth by Erdogan, and then also we know very well in terms of recent Middle East crises, Syria being one, where there's also an alignment.

So, there isn't a simple answer. I think one has to look at each situation. But let me make these comments. I think that first the fact is that the US has been following closely the situation, in fact there was with the recent, just October 16, the missile s-400 missile fire test, by the way the US congress, even in the midst of our elections, has indicated that it is on the verge of deploying sanctions and wants to put sanctions in place. So, there's interest.

Secondly though, I think that Dmitri well-articulated Russia's interests, and where Russia has been on this, where it is now. And Russia also was the first mediator. Now I understand that when that didn't take, you know, unfold in the last week, it's over to France. But Russia has certain stake, certain interests, clearly in the resolution but so do other countries in this, because no one wants this to get out of hand.

And I'll make one last point that Dmitri mentioned in his own comment about international mechanisms or institutional mechanisms. It's striking that there have been a number of articles in the US about the situation recently, and what Turkey's doing, and it was said why earlier in the summer, that when Turkey was providing actually and undertaking military exercises, and supporting military exercises in Azerbaijan, why at that time was there no kind of negotiation, or effort, to stem the tide that maybe we wouldn't be where we are now if we had taken and there had been certain measures taken then.

I do think, and I'll conclude on this, I do think that a comment made about regional powers is apt, and I think we've already seen it. I went and looked at great power competition, but great power competition also impacts regional powers, as we know very well in terms of arms being given to a variety of countries whether be it Turkey that we're talking about, or Iran for example.

**Raghida Dergham:** Very good, I want to get back to Iran and the US in the conversation later on. Michael Gfoeller, in one minute because I want to get to the elections with you. Does it make sense to you, or first of all, is it true that Turkey is taking some fighters that are in Syria and that Turkey had taken along, if you will, with the Turkey to Libya, and now Turkey is taking such fighters to the Nagorno-Karabakh fight? Is it true that this is the case, in which case, does that mean it's ISIS elements, Al Nusra, etc?



And secondly, if this is the case, does it make sense that it is Turkey and Israel who are the suppliers of arms and they're allies in this situation, knowing that Israel claims that it is going to fight ISIS wherever, and however? Can you address these points for me Michael Gfoeller?

**Michael Gfoeller:** I'll do my best in one minute. So, Israel's interest in Azerbaijan is clear. Azerbaijan is one of the two top suppliers of oil and oil products to Israel, that's a long-standing, you know, economic interest. In addition, Azerbaijan is a major arms market for the Israeli arms industry, and so there are two major links right there. And thirdly an alliance, not an alliance really, but a relationship with Azerbaijan gives Israel extra geopolitical leverage vis-à-vis Iran, which is its primary concern of the region. So, I think these are the motivating factors behind Israel's stance in this particular conflict. Obviously, the Armenians are not very happy with this they see themselves along with the Jews as one of the two nations that underwent a genocide in the 20th century and they don't understand why there isn't a more Israeli sympathy and support for their own position. What was the rest of the question?

**Raghida Dergham:** Let's see, now what was the rest of the question? I was asking about the Israeli...

**Michael Gfoeller:** Oh the foreign fighters. There's no question, but the thousands of foreign fighters have been transferred mostly from Idlib province by Turkey into the Nagorno-Karabakh theater. I talk with Armenian friends every day about this, they're showing up with great frequency on the battlefield, there appear to be several thousand of them.

**Paula Dobriansky:** Sorry I just wanted to add a two finger, there also were military exercises as I mentioned that had been taking place for months.

**Raghida Dergham:** So I want to give the floor to Carl Bildt because he wants to come in, but just somebody put some sense in my head as how can I understand that Israel is helping Turkey bring in the fighters, the Daesh, or the Nusra fighters from Syria to Nagorno – Karabakh, to fight in Armenia. I mean, how would that make sense, and how come the US doesn't just say 'excuse me Israel, you are an ally and you cannot do that, you cannot really be an accomplice to Turkey in bringing the fighters from Idlib into Europe, into a friend called Armenia'? Carl Bildt, to you on this one, or whatever else you wanted to come in with because you had two fingers as well.

**Carl Bildt:** Yes I had on this particular latest one. I have much doubt that the Israelis have been involved in that transportation of the fighters. I think that's a Turkish thing, otherwise I mean Michael explains the nature of the very strong long-standing Israelis here Azerbaijan connection. I mean that's a strong one, that has been there for a very long time. But I want to say something else concerning this conflict and really sort of say something, and would like to have a comment from Dmitri. I would suspect that Moscow and Ankara, the second and the third room, sort of both think that they can at the end of the day settle this, and be happy if they can do it Americans away, Chinese away, and perhaps Iranians. The big regional powers, Astana combination should develop a relationship that sort things out. It might be bumpy road to that particular end station, but it is that where things might be heading, for better or worse.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright, Dmitri you want to answer that quickly? But please, Carl Bildt, I was not suggesting that Israel was transporting the fighters from Syria to Azerbaijan, or to Nagorno – Karabakh, I was saying, it is a partner with Turkey, and in arms, in supplying arms, and therefore when Turkey is transferring such elements then it is an accomplice in that mission. Dmitri Trenin, you want to come in and answer what Carl Bildt said to you?

**Dmitri Trenin:** Thank you Carl, I think this is precisely Turkey's objective and this was laid out very succinctly and very clearly by the Turkish foreign minister, he basically said that they would, they are open to a resolution of the conflict in Nagorno – Karabakh with Russia, based on the Idlib formula. Now, the problem is that Russia does not – and would not – recognize Turkey as a co-equal in the south Caucasus. So, Idlib, although this is part of Turkey's near neighborhood, if you like. There Russia can deal with Turkey as co-equals but not in the former Soviet Union.

But eventually I think whatever the status of Russia and Turkey in the ultimate resolution, there will have to be a Russian - Turkish understanding about the south Caucasus for the conflict to be stabilized. I'm not saying resolved, but stabilized.

**Raghida Dergham:** Paula Dobriansky, quickly because I'm going to go to the elections and then...

**Paula Dobriansky:** Very quickly, I think it's connected. I wanted to also ask Dmitri – Dmitri what do you see as the next step then? As I understand, France is the negotiator, but what do you see as the next step leading to a resolution?

**Raghida Dergham:** Dmitri, did you agree that France is the negotiator? Not to my knowledge, I mean, but you know better. Dmitri, do you want to address this question?

**Dmitri Trenin:** France is a co-chair of the [inaudible] group, of course...

**Raghida Dergham:** And is it active? Is it useful? Are you better with...

**Dmitri Trenin:** That's part of the problem. What president Macron said did not go well with President Aliiev who basically accused France of being on the side of Armenia rather than an impartial mediator. Now, I think I hear from the French ambassador in Baku that they had patched it up. I don't know what the actual state of things is, but for Azerbaijan, and Turkey, France is clearly tilted toward Armenia. So that's where we are.

Now a resolution is a long way off. What we're talking about is a military standstill, what we're talking about is a ceasefire that holds. That's the first step.

**Raghida Dergham:** Michael Gfoeller, let me go to the American elections. I want to ask you bluntly: who will win the elections? Is it President Trump or Vice President Joe Biden?

**Michael Gfoeller:** Speaking as an independent voter, neither Republican or Democrat, I think President Trump will probably win in both, the popular vote and the electoral college. I think most of the polling, just as in 2016, is essentially paid for by political parties, and therefore reflect their desiderata. One should ignore it, I think, to a large extent. The best polling research I've seen is based on the pattern of votes cast in the primaries, and they have actually a much higher accuracy, and they show Trump winning a large majority in the electoral college. This is the same teams that came up with the decisions in 2016, I think they're right again. I think what's driving Trump's campaign, you know the main sources of its strength, are the fact that unemployed and underemployed industrial workers are going to vote for him in large measure. And here's a big idea for you, the Republican party in the United States has become transformed, it's no longer the party of large business owners, it's now the labor party. Some people over here jokingly refer to the Republican party as the 'Trump labor party', they're not far off the mark. And if you look at who attends his rallies, you can see it.

**Raghida Dergham:** Michael Gfoeller, if President Trump is re-elected, what does it mean to this region, where you served in the Middle East, and will there be continuity of his doctrine as it's called? And what shape will... everybody has sort of predicted that the issue of China would remain the same, and whether it's Trump or Biden, but in terms of the relationship with Iran, if it is President Trump, how will this relationship develop? Will we see confrontation? Since you predicted is President Trump, I'll stop there, unless you want to say something should you be wrong and it's Joe Biden President. Go ahead.

**Michael Gfoeller:** Well, I'll just talk about what will happen if Trump, assuming very likely, wins. Obviously, the sanctions will continue vis-à-vis Iran, and be intensified. Their crushing impact on the Iranian economy will continue. Iran's oil exports will continue to be surreally constrained. I think Iran's going to come under a great deal of internal political strain because of the gravitational pull of the Nagorno – Karabakh war, and the Azeri population, that's been a long concern in Tehran, ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union as a matter of fact, Dmitri knows very well. Trump will maintain a very strong alliance with the UAE, and with Saudi Arabia. The US will continue its efforts to encourage Saudi Arabia to establish formal relations with Israel; and will maintain strong relations with traditional allies in the region, including Israel and Egypt. Trump will do everything he can to maintain US influence in the Middle East, while avoiding entry into any new wars or military conflicts. He's going to continue to draw down our, or continue to draw down, involvement in existent conflicts, in a way, as much as he can, in a way consistent with the US interests.

**Raghida Dergham:** Well that's very clear, Paula Dobriansky, predictions on the elections and impact on relations with Iran, and policy in the Middle East, please.

**Paula Dobriansky:** I'm going to be able to give you a very brief answer, because I agree with everything that my Michael Gfoeller said. So let me just start, I think he is correct, I also agree that President Trump will be a victorious in the upcoming election. But the thing that I would add is that here, I think the issues that also matter in this, the economy during the coronavirus

period it's been very tough but yet he has managed it where the unemployment has gone down significantly, people have taken note of that, small businesses, it matters greatly. And also, the issue of how he has dealt with the kinds of riots, the looting that has taken place and in terms of putting in place a rule of law and emphasizing the kinds of steps that need to be taken in order to deal with that looting. And then with regard to the Middle East, the only thing that I would add, because I think Michael articulated it very well, is I believe that certainly with regard to Iran it will be the continuation of maximum pressure and sanctions, but with regard to the historic alignment of Israel with the UAE and Bahrain, I think that we are going to see an emphasis on Saudi Arabia in terms of it having diplomatic relations with Israel.

**Raghida Dergham:** Very fascinating quite indeed. Carl Bildt you don't vote in the United States but you do have your point of view as to you follow, what do you predict, if you wish to predict a victory for either Donald Trump or Joe Biden, but if you don't want to predict, can you tell me how do you project that policies will impact Europe, and this region? In particular I'm talking about Iran.

**Carl Bildt:** Well I'm very good at predicting elections in Sweden, so I'm normally wrong on Sweden...

**Raghida Dergham:** Predict and be wrong on the US, go ahead...

**Carl Bildt:** We have had two American who are sort of far more knowledgeable, and who are sort of, who feel this man of the election campaign. And also, as an active politician, I know that two weeks is a very long time in politics, particularly during election campaigns – anything can happen. Will it make a difference? You talk about Iran, yeah Biden, if it is a Biden-win, he has made clear, on CNN, he wrote a thing that it would be sort of a clean return to JCPOA, clean compliance from both sides. Slightly easier said than done, but I think that would be facilitated then by European, Russian, Chinese diplomacy. How that can be arranged.

If it's a Trump, on Iran, as said, maximum pressure. I heard Trump saying the other day that he expects then the Iranians will very soon ask for negotiations. I don't think so. I think we should be aware of the fact that there's significant faction in Tehran that actually wants Trump to win because they have an interest in continued confrontation, they have no interest whatsoever into going into negotiations. And even if sanctions continue, I mean we see that in Venezuela, in other places, I mean it can go on for a very long time and it often saying sort of makes that sort of regime even more secure because they can go back to what we talked about earlier, playing on nationalist things. So, a continued confrontation then in the Middle East, I think the place that will suffer the most is Iraq, because Iraq will be the battleground even more than it has been so far, which of course is slightly worrying. Lebanon perhaps somewhat less, but still.

**Raghida Dergham:** I want you to it elaborate a bit, if you don't mind, Carl Bildt, about the dangers for Iraq and Lebanon, can you elaborate what do you mean and why do you put both Iraq and Lebanon in the forefront of danger?

**Carl Bildt:** No primarily Iraq, because the Iraqis, I mean, ethnic composition or whatever. We have substantial American interests, although they are withdrawn. We have substantial historical Iranian interests, and it's a very emotional issue in Iran that goes back to the Iran-Iraq war which was the formative experience of practically everyone who's in power in Tehran today, and is where the US is vulnerable. So if there's a stepped-up confrontation, we've already seen it I mean, Secretary Pompeo the other day threatened to close down the American embassy in Baghdad if there are more rocket attacks whether those rocket attacks are controlled by Tehran, or not, who knows. But you can see all of these scenarios played out.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright, I'm going to go to Dmitri Trenin, are you going to venture into predictions Dmitri Trenin? and I want to ask you immediately after you answer me about the elections prediction, I have a couple of questions for you on the US and Russia in light of the relationship with Iran, in particular, if Russia decides to resume selling arms, or to increase selling arms, if it is doing so secretly to Iran and the threats of crippling sanctions by the US against Russia.

First, predictions. Is it true that Russia would rather have Donald Trump continue because they don't want Joe Biden to come and remind them of the fight and the accusations regarding the intervention – Russian intervention – in the elections, the alleged Russian intervention in the elections and the downfall of Hillary Clinton? Too many questions, go Dmitri Trenin.

**Dmitri Trenin:** Well I think that if Donald Trump wins the elections, Russia will be punished by US congress pretty severely for that win. If it's Joe Biden, Russia will be punished by the US congress and the White House. So I don't think that Russia stands to gain whichever way the election goes in the United States, but I would not make a prediction myself.

**Raghida Dergham:** On the issue of sanctions, you know, okay let me recap what I said the administration had been very clear and it's going to stay in power for a while, even if Biden is elected. The administration of Donald Trump made clear that if China and Russia go ahead and supply Iran with arms now, after October 18, when it says that they have the legal right to do so, and that there's going to be crippling sanctions coming your way. Do you have an idea how crippling they will be, and will they really impact your economy, and is it worth it to go ahead and supply the arms to Iran for such a big price what if they just say, swift, you know, 'you're out of swift', just as an example?

**Dmitri Trenin:** Well I think Russia has been sitting in the shadow of those potentially crippling sanctions hanging over its head for the past several years. Russia has been looking at Iran as a potential example of what might befall Russia, I think that it's important to understand that the US-Russia relationship at this point is so bad that the only real item on the agenda is preventing the two countries from inadvertently slipping into a military collision. That's where we are. So I think Russia is bracing for even the worst possible scenarios and they are coming up with their own answers, even now, to being switched off with swift and many other things.

**Raghida Dergham:** Okay, because I'm sitting in Lebanon I want to beg your patience and I want before I give you your one and a half, one and a half minute or two minutes at the end for your concluding remarks, I'm sitting here in this very wounded Beirut, the city that has suffered with an amazing and probably unprecedented explosion due to, you know, storing these incredible amounts of unprohibited material amongst civilians. And then we have a situation where the outside players, in particular Iran, the godfather of Hezbollah preventing the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, of coming in the very beginning and now that the good old players in this country, the ruling class that are that have lost any sense of dignity going back and forth and bargaining over their shares, and while the country just slips into an abyss quite honestly.

I want to have 30 seconds from each of you, where do you see this country going? What is your own country doing about it? Dmitri, start with you, what's Russia, what does Russia want from Lebanon? Why is it letting its ally do what it's contributing to this downfall?

**Dmitri Trenin:** Well I don't think Russia has much leverage with Iran over what Iran can do in Lebanon. I think Russia certainly supports a Lebanon that is active, and thriving, and prosperous and all that. There's something that Russia in principle could do, and I think it's doing a few things, to restrain those who would want to tear Lebanon apart. But if we're talking about the Lebanese themselves, the Lebanese political class, and since we have at Carnegie, we have a center in Beirut, I hear a lot of reports about what's happening in Lebanon, I think it's beyond Russia's reach, it's very much the issue for the Lebanese people and for the Lebanese elites, and unfortunately, the elites are not doing a good job.

**Raghida Dergham:** That's right, Carl Bildt, you know, we're not right on your borders but, you know we're almost neighbors. Why don't you care about us? I mean why isn't it, why don't you just stand up and say: 'this is not allowed to happen'? There has to be accountability, there has to be an ending of impunity, there has to be a respect of sovereignty. Why are you silent about these things when it comes to Lebanon, Carl Bildt?

**Carl Bildt:** Well I think all of these things are said, from the European side but do we have any leverage? I mean historically, of course, Lebanon a very complicated place I wouldn't claim to be an expert anyhow. But Lebanon has been more or less okay when all of the other powers have an interest in the stability of Lebanon. When the powers diverge, and don't have that interest, then Lebanon suffers, then you have war of conflict in Lebanon. So what is happening in Lebanon is of course the reflection of what we see overall in the Middle East, Saudis, Iranians, others, Israelis sometimes, maneuvering in Lebanon. And if that can be overcome, at the end of the day, it's up to the Lebanese themselves. I mean President Macron has been there twice trying to do things. I think he's the only sort of leader of that magnitude from any country that has been there since the horrible explosion and that shows of course a commitment due to historical reasons.

**Raghida Dergham:** Paula Dobriansky, on Lebanon, is the US doing enough? Are its sanctions enough? Are they harmful?

**Paula Dobriansky:** In terms of our very hard-hitting policy toward Iran, and the Iran support for the proxy of Hezbollah in Lebanon, which has really harmed Lebanon's own particular path forward, my answer would be yes, and as you asked the question before, that will be a continuation in a future Trump administration, if elected, that there will be a continuation of even harder sanctions, because the connection of Iran and what Iran is doing in Lebanon, I think is of serious proportions. I'd also add something in this mix. You're focusing on governments, I want to also say, to me, I'm very struck particularly with the recent tragedy, of the outpouring of the Lebanese American community and the kind of humanitarian assistance, it's not just governmental but there's also that connection into Lebanon. I can't tell you how connected we are in that regard, by the sheer nature of also the Lebanese American community.

**Raghida Dergham:** I mean, as you know, I'm a Lebanese American myself, so, I do what I can, whatever, to echo that the pain that we, the people here, are suffering. But here's what, I'm going to you Michael Gfoeller about Lebanon, and then I'm going to ask you to do your one minute conclusion, and then go backward so that we can conclude on time before we have a cutoff of electricity.

I'm sorry I get emotional when it comes to Lebanon because, if you are here, it's really painful, you don't want to drive to Beirut, it's so dark, dark in every way. And when you look at the horizon of what's going on, it is a crime, a crime against humanity, what happened and continued crime to for the politicians to go on ruining this country and turning it into poverty. Sorry, and Michael Gfoeller, to you.

**Michael Gfoeller:** I would like to agree with what Paula just said. I think she summed up very well. We're going to see an intensification of sanctions on Iran and one of the main goals of the sanctions is to block Iranian funding of terrorist groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. Eventually these flows of money will dry up, the Iranian government will no longer be able to fund these foreign adventures. I remember during the various waves of protests that have taken place in Iran over the last year and a half, which are woefully underreported in our press but covered very nicely in the press organs and UAE and other countries in the Gulf, people chanting in the streets 'no Lebanon, no Yemen, where's our money? bring it home'. I mean, you know, they're at the point now in budgetary terms where they can't fund basic domestic needs, pay salaries, and also fund these terror groups, and I think that policy will continue until the funding for Hezbollah and other groups is cut off.

**Raghida Dergham:** One minute conclusion for you, in fact make it 45 seconds, if you can so that I could fit you all in. Go ahead Michael start with you and then, I go backward with the order of by which we began.

**Michael Gfoeller:** Okay, so I want to strike a positive note here at the end, and say, you know, we should all recall, we, specialists in foreign relations, that the technological chess board where we're playing on, we talk about foreign relations, the economic chess board is moving and changing shape. We should not assume that things will always be as they have been. One

of the most remarkable developments in recent years of development is this energy alliance between Moscow and Riyadh, the two capitals that now do the most of anyone to control oil prices in the world, and yet inevitably the rule of oil will fade, and this will have a big impact on the US oil industry as well. Over here electric car sales are going through the roof, and the price of electricity panels, solar panels, has fallen from 1975 until today from 77 dollars per watt, to 16 cents. This trend will continue, and produce huge economic and geopolitical shifts in the Middle East. We need to use politics to handle the backdrop from all of that.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much Michael Gfoeller. Dmitri Trenin, 40 seconds, to you please.

You need to wrap up.

**Dmitri Trenin:** Well I think 2020 will be remembered as the year when the US-China rivalry turned into confrontation, and this sends a very important and I would say chilling message to the rest of the world. We need to adjust to that and not repeat the division of the world into blocks that happened during the Cold War.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you very much Dmitri Trenin. Carl Bildt, to you, 45 seconds.

**Carl Bildt:** I agree with every word of Michael and every word of Dmitri. Just one other factor that we didn't mention, we are in the beginning of the next phase of the demographic transition. The age of Asia will be replaced, or will be supplemented by the age of Africa. Just two figures, year 2000 not that long ago there were sort of roughly the equal number of people in Europe and in Africa...

[ELECTRICITY CUT OFF]

**Raghida Dergham:** Yes, yes. Carl Bildt, now we're back, electricity did get cut off, I did warn you. Okay please you go ahead Carl, sorry for that...

**Carl Bildt:** I'm fine, you were out there, but I finished my short pitch for Africa.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright, well deserved. I'm going to go to Paula Dobriansky.

**Paula Dobriansky:** And then I have just 20 seconds, mine is going to be 20 seconds... I want to underscore what Carl Bildt said at the beginning but we didn't really get a chance to talk about. He said the industrial age, we've moved into the digital age, he's quite right and that should be a topic of one of your future circles, that's my strong recommendation, it's worth discussing.

**Raghida Dergham:** Absolutely! That is great, so we should have one and you help me shape it and you are welcome back, and I would love to have you both, and all of you. But definitely this is a good suggestion, keep your such suggestions coming because it seems that we're going to go on for a while before we hold our summit physically and which I'd love you all to come to and it's going to be in Abu Dhabi, edition 4 of Beirut Institute Summit. Hopefully, we were



hoping March, we don't know, COVID will decide, but definitely, God willing in 2021 in Abu Dhabi.

But let me share with you my wonderful guests for next week, as usual great cast, always fabulous I'm just so honored. We have, **Sir Jeremy Greenstock**, Chairman of United Nations Association of the UK, Gatehouse Advisory Partners, and of Lambert Energy Advisory Ltd. He served as UK Ambassador to the United Nations and Special Representative of the UK for Iraq; **HE Nassif Hitti**, Lebanon's former Minister of Foreign Affairs, only recently actually. Former Ambassador of the Arab League to France, Italy, the Holy See, and UNESCO. We have **Terje Rød-Larsen**, many of you know who he is, he is President of the ICI. Former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Special Envoy on behalf of the UN Secretary General, he negotiated the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon and the Syrian military withdrawal from Lebanon. He was a central figure in the secret negotiations between the PLO and Israel that led to the Oslo Accords. And then we have **Edward Luttwak**, he is a strategist, historian, economist, and consultant on international security, and former advisor to several US presidents. He is the author of 'The Rise of China vs. The Logic of Strategy' and 'Coups d'État: A Practical Handbook', and also of 'Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire'.

I thank you, it's been marvelous, you enlightened me, you honored me. I have learned so much from all of you, and it's been a lot of fun seeing you all. Thank you very much, until I see you again. Have a good day, goodbye everyone.

**Michael Gfoeller, Paula Dobriansky, Carl Bildt, Dmitri Trenin: Goodbye!**