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RAGHIDA DERGHAM with:

Sir Jeremy Greenstock;

HE Nassif Hitti;

HE Terje Rød-Larsen;

and Mr. Edward Luttwak.

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN6Chg6YFw4&t=11s>

Raghida Dergham: Good morning [Chevy Chase], Washington otherwise. Good afternoon London and Paris, and good afternoon also good early evening Beirut. It is great to have this wonderful combination of brilliant minds join me this week for my 20th e-Policy Circle of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. It's a wonderful conversation because it's timely that promises to take a very huge tour from the elections, the US elections, into the Middle East, into the accomplishments of the past and aspirations for the future.

As usual, we will start with four minutes to each of the speakers to bring to us what they want us to learn and then we engage in the conversation for the next hour. I will start with Sir Jeremy Greenstock, I give you four minutes and please go ahead, enlighten us.

Jeremy Greenstock: Thank you Raghida and congratulations on what you've achieved so far with the policy circle, it's a very interesting seminar room. I hope we can get together in 3D at some stage in the future. I'd like to build on e-Policy Circle 19 Raghida when Carl Built and others talked about the advances in identity politics and social and political polarization in the world which is, I think, the big trend at the moment. I want to add three big factors to that conversation.

The first of those is the fading of the international institutions in their effectiveness. The habit of collective agreements and collective discussion has diminished over the past few years, and policy is increasingly made in national capitals, in ad hoc ways, usually putting national interests first. And there's an opportunity in that for nations but too many people are being selfish in their approach from capitals.

The second big factor is the tendency for this period to create vacuums in the absence of norms being followed, the constraints on selfish or unruly behavior are too weak at

the moment. There's a vacuum also I think in 'America First' exceptionalism because the US is partly withdrawn from collective approaches or involvement in keeping international order, and that's been noticeable not least in the Middle East but there are other areas where the US has seemed to withdraw from UN institutions for instance.

And thirdly, I find that the Policy Circle tends to focus on what governments are doing and what policymakers are doing and what's happening in capitals, but the popular voice has grown stronger since the advent of greater freedom and social media and digital communication. And so, the gap between governments and their own people has become a big theme of this current era and is growing wider. And as the world gets more unpredictable, shall we say, I think insecurity grows and the politics of insecurity is different from the politics of a secure world. And new technology and the COVID virus have increased the general feeling of insecurity as jobs in particular disappear.

So, my conclusion from that is that competition is growing in the world between nations, even between individuals and organizations, and that competition risks turning into a conflict which must be avoided obviously in an era of such powerful weaponry. Those who possess resources will tend to move ahead, those that are losing out will tend to lose further in this sort of crisis, period. And that's very dangerous. And we must discuss what policymakers do about that, because there's no substitute for dialogue and communication, even about radically different approaches. No country can go to loan and still succeed. New partnerships are going to be necessary in business, in international relationships, even with people our countries disagree with – we disagree with. So, leaders need to move out of their comfort zones because this is no longer their familiar world and we need the kind of leadership that understands that and reacts differently from the tendency to need populism and nationalism in the moment. That's what I think we should be discussing. Thank you.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Sir Jeremy Greenstock, there's a lot to talk about and dissect in what you distinguished between insecurity and instability, or is it the same, but we'll do that during the discussion. I'll go now to Nassif Hitti, four minutes to you Nassif Hitti please.

Nassif Hitti: Thank you, let me make very few remarks first about my country, Lebanon and the Middle East. As you could see, Lebanon has never been influential in the region, it has been most of the time a playground rather than a player in regional affairs, they always have the price of all forms of conflicts in the region. In this region, we have what I called, a 'very disordered regional border', we're witnessing regional civil war where people from one country are fighting in another country within transnational solidarities, so the nation state was not consolidated, it was broken down in a way,

adding to that the economic crisis with its social repercussions. So, it's really a very difficult disordered regional border in which we feel we're living today.

At the international level, I think, the rise of illiberal values, perhaps as a reaction, or fear, or phobias against excessive waste of globalization is again, reviving the concept of identity and into its forms sometimes, in the form of phobias, of hating the other next door. Nation states are not, no more [?], nations states are not fitting with the nation states that are in a different part of the world. And this is a main source of challenge and threat, and we need to find a way of cooperative behaviors and cooperation to install in order to be able to address these matters. The Middle East is a 'terrain fertile' as we say in French, it is a very interesting, unfortunately, to put it this way, place to study these phenomena. And when I talk about a regional cold war, I could talk also about a regional civil war, where as I am saying, people from one country are fighting another country for different identity-based slogans. So, the nation, the concept of the 'umma' is different, it doesn't apply to what we've learned, what we work with, or live with, and this creates more tension and more instability at the larger level. We see today in the Middle East two important hub spots: east Mediterranean from Libya, from Tripoli of Libya to Tripoli of Lebanon. The sorts of all fighting going on, of transnational similarities in terms of fighting, and the Gulf, how things are changing. We need to develop new tools to address these problems, because we have new challenges and different forms of conflict in front of us.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Nassif Hitti. We're going to go now to Terje Rød-Larsen and four minutes to you, Terje Rød-Larsen.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much, Raghida. It's a pleasure being with you, as always. And let me [inaudible]. I will start with the Middle East. In the Middle East, it's the only region in the world where you don't have a regional organization which encompasses all the countries of the region, friends and foes. You have the Arab league, which is pretty dysfunctional now because of the Qatar-Egypt-Saudi Arabia-UAE conflict. You have the GCC, the Gulf Cooperation Council, which is marked by the same conflict. You have the Maghreb Union, which actually never functioned. And there is no organization in this region, which encompasses all the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, and the Israelis.

And one very positive, in my opinion, development lately has been that the UAE and Bahrein, and now the Sudan, have established relationships with Israel. But we have to create one table where everybody is sitting, including the Turks, including the Iranians, and including the Israelis. If this is not done, I don't think we will get out of the crisis in the Middle East. And this is deeply in the European interests, because if you look at the

demographics here, Egypt's population will double within 2050. If you go back to 1950, the population of Africa had half the population of Europe. In 2050, Africa will have two thirds of the population in Europe. So, what we're seeing of immigration crisis, over the last few years, is just the beginning of a massive crisis to Europe. So all this needs to be addressed and the only way to go, as I see it, is through multilateralism, and here I'm underlining what Jeremy said, but it has also to be done over the establishment of a regional mechanism for the Middle East and North Africa which will also, I think, be the only possibility to [inaudible] a further influx of refugees from deep down in Sub-Saharan Africa. I would like to add here that, the developments with Bahrain and the UAE, I think is the most positive development that has happened in the Middle East over several decades. And I think the Palestinian leadership's interpretation of it is deeply misunderstood. Thank you.

Raghida Dergham: Yeah, I want to take many things up with you, but I need to first go to Edward Luttwak, but you know, as far as the Palestinians are concerned, they feel they were left out. And then as far as this very interesting regional mechanism that you're talking about, I just want to know what frame time frame you have in mind, Terje Rød-Larsen because it seems to be totally premature given the relationship between all the players and including Israel's continued occupation, refusal to have the two-state solution but not to forget Iran's project in the region, Turkey's project. How on earth are you thinking that this is going to be surmounted, and within what time frame, Terje Rød-Larsen?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you Raghida. Well I'm just stating what I think is necessary. I'm not a planner for time frames, but I think this is absolutely necessary to do, but it's up to the players in the region and beyond to decide what the time frame is. I cannot determine that.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, Edward Luttwak, four minutes to you, just take it from here and say what you want to say and then get back if you want to some of the points made. I'm sure that Nassif Hitti would want to make some comments on what Terje Rød-Larsen said, but we'll do this after we listen to you, Edward Luttwak, four minutes to you, please.

Edward Luttwak: Well, this morning's news is that Tehran has suddenly discovered the UN resolutions that favor Azerbaijan. What's happened is that the Azeris in Western Iran, the ones who are still Azeris who speak Azeri, have rebelled. And Iran is just about the last multinational state, it's right for breaking up. The Tehran authorities this morning decided that they don't want to risk. So, things are moving, under the surface, and on top of all of that, very much not under the service, is the shift of conflictuality

from the Atlantic and Middle East, to East Asia. Conflictuality line is now the periphery of China, Vietnam, Japan, and Australia, India, and the United States. So, the main power has shifted to over there, this means that France for example, can be a significant military power, very significant, by using the British basis in Cyprus, which the British will be very happy to let them have. They are investing some money to upgrade them. So, Macron can step in and stop Erdoğan's attempt to sort of dominate the eastern Mediterranean with his cardboard navy. Because now we move to second fact, which is that in the in the underlined change in the military balance of power, as I think people do understand, sort of cardboard forces like the Turks have can only function if none of these serious people intervene against them. So, what we have in Turkey, however, is not an explosion but a resolution because, as you all know domestic support for Erdoğan and his Neo-ottoman project has been declining in every election and in the next one he will go. So, Turkey will still remain a very important country but not one adventuring across the place. In its role as an important country, it would continue to balance Iran.

Now, as for the recommendation of Terje Rød-Larsen, that could be dismissed as a fantasy in the past, that is no longer the case. It is no longer the case because if you go down country by country, every one of them has one reason to have such an organization. I don't include the Palestinians in that because the Palestinian record of the last century is very consistent. And it could change of course, we can all change, but their consistent record is that they cannot fight wars, and they cannot make peace. Whenever peace came here, it had to be kicked back with things like uprisings, intifadas and so on. So, the exclusion of the Palestinians from the current peacemaking is not some willful desire to keep these unfortunate people from their rights, but the possibility of doing things with them. You know, if they get into the car, the car doesn't drive. People do want to drive, and apart from the ones you heard about, there's of course Morocco, and in reality, there's everybody else. So, I believe that the Middle East will benefit enormously from the fact that the access of conflict moves away, and it makes it, at least, theoretically possible to re-establish the Lebanon, that in reality every country in the region would like to have. The stable, internally balanced Lebanon which had all kinds of pressures, but contained them, and which provided a platform for everybody, and everybody wants it back.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much, I think we are going to engage in the controversial points made by Terje Rød-Larsen, to begin with. Let's start with Sir Jeremy Greenstock, what do you think about the proposal of Terje Rød-Larsen, and you know, why on earth are the Palestinians, why is everyone feeling that the Palestinians are fine if excluded? Yes, they made mistakes, but my goodness this people suffered and they have been under occupation and thanks to the British history that brought about a lot of

misery to the Palestinians, not alone obviously, there's been Arab contribution, Palestinian contribution, of course American and Israeli. So, let's take up these points right now with Jeremy Greenstock, tell me quickly what do you think of this proposal? Is it a fantasy, or is it really an innovative way to take a look at it?

Jeremy Greenstock: Raghida, I entirely agree with Terje, that there needs to be dialogue in the Middle East, going beyond the Arabs. The Arabs are not even talking well amongst themselves. As he says the Arab League is dysfunctional, but I don't think we can move at an early date to a discussion of something like the organization of security and cooperation in the Middle East to copy Europe. I think one of the models that the Middle East should think about, to include the Turkish, Iranians, and Israelis, should be closer to Asean rather than to Europe where they talk about trade, and economics and infrastructure, before they talk about security, and then they develop a security sub-committee of that, the Asean regional forum, and get into some of the security questions. Life and conflict are too raw at the moment for that to happen soon, but there does need to be dialogue, and we can talk about that further.

As for the Palestinians, we have to face a cruel and a difficult fact, which is that the Palestinian administration is in effect in league with Israel to continue the occupation because that serves the best of interests of the Palestinian leadership. Yes, they've been denied an opportunity for a full negotiation, yes the Arab sort of deserted them, yes the international community has – to some extent – deserted them, but they have not built a unified position that is clear enough or united enough to deserve the attention of the outside world.

Raghida Dergham: I think that's rather, I think it's a bit cruel [?] Jeremy Greenstock, I mean, I agree with the analysis but after all they have been under an occupation by Israel, supported by the United States, by the United Kingdom, by the world. I tell you that, I think Nassif Hitti would like to come in on this especially calling everybody calling the Arab League 'dysfunctional', you were the Ambassador of the Arab League to many places, so Nassif Hitti, to you.

Nassif Hitti: Let me make two remarks. First, absolutely [inaudible] and I have argued many times in the last years to open the doors particularly for Turkey and Iran, for a return of Turkey and Iran under different Islam slogans, was the weakening of the Arab League and the power vacuum created by this weakening. But let me pick up on one point, regardless of what we think about the balance of power and the fact that the Palestinian leadership has done this and that, I think like any people in the world, the Palestinian nationalism, the Palestinians have the right to have their own nation state, in the West Bank in Gaza, as we have agreed and as I have spoken on that. And this will

allow to inject a realistic strong shot in the region and allow for stabilization and not to allow for use and misuse, by many powers, Arab and non-Arab powers of the Palestinian issue for different purposes. I'm not only saying that a typical balance of power should allow that, allow them to have their nation state, nobody is perfect, no leadership is perfect, and not allowing for a revisionist policy such as the policy of Israel in the West Bank and other places would be extremely helpful for those who want to see stability being, you know, established in the Middle East. And this will allow for a new opening, to go for a conference on security and cooperation in the Middle East.

By the way Raghida, I've argued in 2014 in an article, you know, co-signed with a with an Iranian colleague, Mousavian at that time, and that was an argument I made in a conference about the importance of having a conference on security and cooperation at the beginning having the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey, to establish sort of healthy process. The main problem in the Arab world, and the Middle East, is that you have governments which speak over the heads of other governments. We have to have a sort of neo- [?] system. It's not for me to decide as government what should be the good government of the other country. So, this injection supranational element used in transnational ideologies in the region is extremely hurting and extremely destabilizing in the region.

Raghida Dergham: Let me ask you a quick question. You were a Foreign Minister for Lebanon. Do you think Lebanon can, does it matter, is Lebanon irrelevant when it comes to such a discussion about the larger picture of having the Arabs or the Arabs, Turkey, Iran, Israel under one, what did we call it? What did Terje call it? Mechanism, 'regional mechanism'. Do you think Lebanon would have a say? Would you have advised it? If you were still in office and someone came up with this issue, with this idea, whether it's something you had in mind or whether Terje Rød-Larsen did, would you do?

Nassif Hitti: The day I assumed my functions as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I made the argument about the importance of having Lebanon being a firefighter or contributing to a group of countries that could be a firefighter, with a firefighter role in the region where all interest is seeing stability and seeing a sort of rule of law, a sort of against valiant system. We could have differences in countries, but we don't have the right to speak over the head of other countries. The danger in the Middle East is using certain transnational identities, whether sectarian, ethnic, religious, or others in order to give ourselves the right to speak as governments over the head of another government. We have seen this practice by Turkey, by Iran and by others in the region. We need to normalize the relationship to have interstate relationship and then to see how to manage conflicts and to build on cooperation and find possibilities of cooperation among different states.

Raghida Dergham: Terje Rød-Larsen, you had a very important think tank, the International Peace Institute, and you are in touch with major players in the Arab region, leaders in the Arab region and probably also definitely in Israel and Turkey most likely but I don't know if you still are well connected with Iran, I know you visited Iran. But have you come up with this idea based on prior conversation that you felt that there is readiness for this to be launched, or is it sort of a testing ground and you're just going to just throw it out there and we see? Specifically, that you've been very critical of the regime in Tehran and that you have said in the past that it is the result that of this regime to have its own project regionally. Terje Rød-Larsen.

Terje Rød-Larsen: I've been promoting this idea of establishing a mechanism or an organization for the region for many many years and I've had the pleasure of sitting with my good friend the Iranian Foreign Minister to discuss it and actually he agrees, with the exception of Israel...

Raghida Dergham: ...I mean if there is exception of Israel, then it's a different regional structure. They were talking about the Iranians about the...

Terje Rød-Larsen: Raghida, I'm not arguing I'm not arguing I'm just telling you what he told me, okay? Because I mean you don't make peace between friends, you make peace between friends and enemies and you have to have everybody around the table. And this is one of the reasons why Europe is as peaceful as it is today because you have the Council of Europe, you have the European Union, you have other mechanisms in Europe where everybody's sitting by the table including Russia and the old Soviet Eastern European states. And this is one of the reasons why this is functional, I mean there are disagreements, there are conflicts, there are power struggles there's everything. But in the Middle East, it's the only region in the world where everybody's not sitting at the same table. So, this is why the policy of the 'empty chair' as I call it, hasn't functioned. This is why I applaud the UAE and Bahrain, and now the Sudan, who are sitting at the table with Israel. There are huge issues here, there are huge differences of interests, but at least they are sitting at the same table. And I think that Egypt and Jordan have been the most efficient Arab partners for the Palestinians because they could talk to the Israelis. This is why, go to the table, fill the empty chairs, create a mechanism whereby everybody can talk, including Iran, including Turkey.

Raghida Dergham: Alright. Well, I still am going to tell you that lofty and somehow, you know, I mean I know that Iranians have put forward systematically an interesting proposal of theirs which I find that it has a purpose that serves Iran which is to basically have the GCC countries plus Iran plus Iraq into a new regional structure, mechanism and

that has been really not met in in any welcomed way by the Arab region, or especially by the GCC because they said this would be a dismantling of the GCC to open it up and have the security structure where Iran will be the one who holds the biggest cards and plus we have heard proposed by Russia, similar proposes by Russia to say the new regional security structure. Edward Luttwak, do you want to address this regional, new regional structure, where do we go from here? Well it's a lofty thing. How would you think Iran and Turkey would do with this? I mean this is the least problematic problem but Iran-Israel is a huge problem, Arabs-Israel is a semi-problem or a problem. But what about Turkey, Iran?

Edward Luttwak: First of all, don't speak of Turkey as a parameter, because as you know, the politics of turkey are changing, Erdogan lost Istanbul, he lost Ankara, the next election he's going to lose Turkey. Turkey will not disappear, but the neo-Ottoman project will be drastically diminished. As for Iran, Iran's big power role is built on the basis of a miserable economy, which has caused already a lot of rioting by people complaining in the streets of Tehran that you are running an empire with the economy of a small country, and there are constraining mechanisms. But in regard to the proposal, the important proposal. Please notice how these things really work out. Asean was mentioned. Asean started when three of his parties were practically at war with each other nevertheless they set it up. When they set it up, they discovered it was very useful to resolve problems between various parties within it, which before had no mechanism. For example, let's assume you persuade Morocco and Algeria and Tunisia to join into this organization and this organization then solve the problems of the world, probably not, but it would give a framework so the Moroccans and the Algerians could resolve their problems and the Tunisians, etc. In other words, once you start this machine, I'm sympathetic to the idea of building the structure and then allowing the different left substance into it. I think it's a struggle.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, so let's move away from this one, I don't want to spend the whole hour talking about that. Let me ask you why do you think Erdogan, who looks mighty right now, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey, why do you think or at least you're insinuating that he's not there to stay, although the impression he gives is that he is, you know, like he's mighty and even Vladimir Putin...

Edward Luttwak: It's soap opera, it's not the reality because one of the things Erdoğan has not done is to keep the promise he made to his original supporters, that he would ride democracy only until it brought him to an Islamic Turkey and then he would get off the bus. Well he hasn't kept that promise, there was an election in his base which is Istanbul – remember he starts with a football club, you know, football hooligans is the best – he loses Istanbul, he's lost Ankara, he's lost Antalya, he's lost every place in

Turkey where people don't go around with big mustaches and everywhere in Turkey where they shave their mustache and use deodorant don't vote for Erdoğan and fewer and fewer people have mustaches, more and more use deodorants and they don't vote for Erdoğan. So, Turkey is resolving its own problem. There are too many educated people in Turkey to allow Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman soap opera to continue.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, alright, okay. Alright, okay. Let's move on, I'm going to go backward now in terms of the order that I started. I'm going to go back to Terje Rød-Larsen, what is the Iran that you see now in this in this particular time, the Iran of today and its functional policies in Syria, and Lebanon, and Iraq, on the internal and within the US, in the context of the US relationship, whether it's with president Trump if he continues to be President or with Joe Biden, the Vice President, if he becomes president? Can you discuss Iran with me Terje Rød-Larsen?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you Raghida, I can't go into the heads of American politicians, say what they are thinking but if you look at the broader picture in the region, if you go back a couple of decades, the central gravity of everything in the region was the Israeli-Arab conflict. This is no longer the case, this has been moved, unfortunately, into the periphery. The Palestinian people deserve justice, they deserve a state, they deserve identity but unfortunately, it's been pushed into the periphery of the minds of the peoples and the leaders of the region and the world and the central gravity in the region. Now, it is perceived – and I'm not saying if it's correct or not, but this is the perception – that it's an Arab-Iranian conflict and it's a Sunna-Shiaa conflict, and this is the center of gravity in the region as it is perceived. This is most unfortunate, but this is the way it is perceived. But this brings me back to my main point. What is important now is to bring the Iranians to the table, to bring them into a regional mechanism where everything can be discussed, and to find peaceful solutions to all the conflicts which are raging the region from Yemen, to Libya and beyond.

Raghida Dergham: Terje Rød-Larsen, Iran has is on the record, the Iranian leadership is on the record, to say that no way Israel is the enemy, so are you, I mean again where is this coming from? You said you've been speaking to your friend the Foreign Minister Zarif, who was we all know him, Jeremy Greenstock, remember him when he was the Ambassador at the UN? Mohamad Jawad Zarif? I'm sure you remember him from that time but where are you, Terje Rød-Larsen, seeing there is an interest by Iran now to ease up with Israel?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Actually Raghida, Zarif who I know very well from his time at the UN, has exactly the same opinions as I have, but that everybody has to sit at the table with the exception Israel. We need Israel at the table as well, not only Turkey and Iran, we

need Israel, this is how civilized people resolve conflicts, they sit at the same table. I mean there's no use to negotiate peace between Sweden and Switzerland, but we have to get the foes to sit at the same table. And the foes here in the region are on one side, some of the key Sunna Arab states and Iran, Turkey and until recently, Israel. So, we need everybody to be at the table, including Iran.

Edward Luttwak: Raghida, may I remind you that the whole Iranian discovery of Israel was part of a project where Iran becomes the leader of the Middle East because it doesn't matter that they are not Sunni, but Shia, because they hate the Jews more, that's why they went into the holocaust story and all that. Secondly, they said, it doesn't matter that we are not Arabs but Farsi, so to speak because we hate the state of Israel more than you, we hate Jews more than you, and we hate the state of Israel more than you, therefore you can accept our leadership. That project failed, it failed. It cost him a lot of money, it failed. When the people go in the streets in Isfahan and demonstrate, they're saying it wasn't a good idea, it didn't work, stop it. That's why I believe the things are really changing.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, let me go to Nassif Hitti. Nassif Hitti, let's just move on, again I don't want to get stuck with this idea. Talk to me about the demarcation talks that are happening, the maritime demarcation, the talks between Lebanon and Israel right now. How fundamentally important are these? Are they part of that process of easing up within the context of what's on the mind of Terje Rød-Larsen, it seems that, you know, when people are ready to talk things could go places? And by the way, I want to go back to Terje Rød-Larsen, and speak about the blue line after I hear from Nassif Hitti.

Nassif Hitti: Very briefly, before Terje perhaps will pick up on the blue line issue, the time has come to sit and discuss under the UN flag of the demarcation of the maritime borders, it's very important, it was expected, it should have happened but, as you know, like in other countries also in Lebanon sometimes, external affairs are part of domestic politicking concerning the timing of launching this process. I would have expected it to start before, and we should engage into this matter sooner than later.

Raghida Dergham: And are you for the demarcation not to be exclusively maritime? That it should be land demarcation as well, not only with Israel but also with Syria, Nassif Hitti?

Nassif Hitti: My view has always been – before I became Minister, when I was Minister, and after – that we must demarcate all frontiers, all lines, whether with Israel, or even before that, with the Syrians. Things must be clear here just to address the basic source of tension that could be used and misused again and again for different purposes. Now,

whether we can do it or not, that's another story, as you know Lebanon, as I keep saying, it's a 'terrain', it is a playground of different kinds of conflicts in the region, unfortunately for us as Lebanese, we have been playing a very heavy price for that for two reasons: the weaknesses of the state as itself, and the ideological, political and other solidarities, between sometimes part of a certain national point Lebanon and a certain particular political power in the region. We've seen that in our modern history. The actors change but the principle is always there, this kind of trans-national really solidarity. This is a key problem in the Middle East, we are not talking about normal states having normal differences, we're talking about sometimes states that allow themselves for ideological reasons to speak over the heads of other states and say 'I have solidarities with a component of our population because of sectarian reasons, because of ideological reasons, religious reasons or ethnic reasons sometimes'. That's a key issue that we need to address at the base.

Raghida Dergham: Nassif Hitti, has Saad El-Hariri, the designated PM, has he spoken to you about coming back to serve as a Minister in the new government?

Nassif Hitti: Nobody has spoken to me, I'm with you on the problem now, so my phone is off. No, nobody has spoken to me about that matter. Raghida I was very clear during the time I was Minister, I just want to say one thing, I advised about having what I call an "active positive neutrality" situation in Lebanon. All of our problems basically were instigated, not that we don't have domestic problems, from alliances here and there with regional actors at one point of time. This is why our domestic problems are externally provoked political problems that we ourselves as Lebanese, you know, fall into.

Raghida Dergham: You mean neutrality as proposed by the Patriarch El Ra'hi, is this what you mean? Are you saying we need to endorse the proposal for neutrality?

Nassif Hitti: Positive neutrality, not taking sides but sometimes if there is an issue which isn't, you know, an issue that fits 100 percent international law that the country's borders are being violated, I will go for that. Let me give you an example, I was criticized by some factions in Lebanon when I condemned the attack of the Houthis against Saudi Arabia, I said I'm not talking about different religion actors being involved in Yemen, but I'm saying about a country being attacked. These are some basic principles that you have to abide by.

Raghida Dergham: But you didn't tell me, sorry just to be clear because we didn't understand, there was a bad connection, you are endorsing the proposal by Patriarch El-Ra'hi for neutrality of Lebanon, yes or no?

Nassif Hitti: Yes. Well, the proposal – to be clear – it's about 'positive neutrality', it's a political matter not legal matter as it's, you know, it's known in the world, that we don't side entirely, for instance, like we're taking today and the confrontation in the region into the de-facto situation of being part of a certain block by certain factions in Lebanon.

Raghida Dergham: Jeremy Greenstock, I bet you want to say something on Lebanon before you say whatever you are ready to bring to us. I know that in your family there is a love for this country, I know that, so do you think it's already written off, will you write off this country given where we are, with such corruption with a situation where we know with there's no real independence, if you will, with a paramilitary force aligned with another capital with all the disasters of the economy and otherwise? Jeremy Greenstock.

Jeremy Greenstock: Raghida, yes, I weep for Lebanon, it's such a lovely country and the people are such lovely people who have not been served well by the elites, by their governance. Raghida we have to recognize that the standards of governance in the region we're talking about is not the highest in the world. The Arab people are perhaps the people who are suffering most in the world from the gap between their talent potential and their actuality. They have not been well served by their governments and Lebanon is a bitter example of that. But of course, we're dealing with the intrusion of the older Lebanese compromised arrangement of Hezbollah under Iranian influence. So, that is extraordinary difficult to deal with and they are being, Hezbollah in particular, completely irresponsible of their mission for the people in Lebanon. But let's talk about something a bit wider which we have talked about which is very important which is that the number one priority of every government in this region is to preserve its power domestically. As I said the gap between peoples and governments is the big theme of this era, it's growing wider and governments are getting more desperate about holding on to power. There is a mutuality even within a region like the Middle East for governments to work together, to hold on to decent governance and to their position as the regime responsible for their peoples. They need to talk to each other about this, they need to think about growing their economies together. After all every conflict that's coming out of the Middle East is coming out of an internal situation in Iraq, in Syria, in Yemen, in Libya, it comes out of an internal situation, it's under the surface in Algeria, elsewhere, they need to talk to each other about this is what Jawad Zarif really wants. The Iranian number one priority is to keep its people under the regime's thumb through their rotten governance, of course, but that they're not territorially aggressive they don't want to kill everybody else in the Middle East, they don't want to take over any other territory, they want to control their own people.

Raghida Dergham: Well, I mean no, they want to control other people Sir Jeremy Greenstock, I mean the control of Lebanon is not a picnic it's, [inaudible] and especially when in Iraq, I'm going to come to you Edward Luttwak, right now, but you were in Iraq, Jeremy Greenstock, and you know what, the contributions, the likes of the UK and the US invasion and occupation of Iraq has contributed greatly to the way these societies have become, the dysfunctional countries that they are the misery in which Iraq is now, or Lebanon. I mean, you know, there's been an enabling, a systematic enabling by the UK and other countries. Why can't you take responsibility, at least partially, for where things have gone South?

Jeremy Greenstock: You haven't asked me. The era of conflict in the Middle East started with the Iran-Iraq war, that's what set Sunni and Shiaa against each other, and the American invasion, the American-British invasion of Iraq furthered that, made that situation worse. It was the first breakout of the Arab spring, it was in Iraq, not Egypt, or Tunisia, or Libya, it was in Iraq. And, of course, we left a vacuum of order there because the Americans wouldn't take the responsibility for security. Read my book, I've taken responsibility for that, but we must talk about now is proper policy formulation of the idea of dialogue, and communication, and mutuality in the Middle East because if they don't do that the region is going to go backwards.

Raghida Dergham: Alright, Jeremy Greenstock, one day we're going to dedicate a whole hour to see how did things go so bad by the international community in places like Iraq and places like Syria. But Edward Luttwak wants to come in now and I'm sure he's got a lot to say on these issues, go ahead Edward.

Edward Luttwak: Well a country that develops ballistic missiles and tries to have nuclear warheads and says that is to attack Israel is not a non-aggressive country. But, in regard to the demarcation talks between Lebanon and Israel, in the old days each side would try to burn the others natural gas facilities. Now they want to develop side by side, but overall since I've traveled all over Lebanon, with the jeep but I did, I can tell you that Lebanon is the victim of divine justice. God sees how people live in Riyadh, and Kuwait then goes to Lebanon and they see how they live, what the landscape looks like, what the food is like and the sea, and you go to Jbeil, and you water-ski there and it's divine justice: the Lebanese got all of this, they can't have good government as well. It's like Italians, the same thing. It appears to be contingent on this or that, but they're condemned to it and the resolution was to have less government and that is the future that the world would want for Lebanon would be lower key more going back to a quieter, more distributed, decentralized government and so on.

Iran is running out of money, no matter what, and therefore Hezbollah is getting less and less...

Raghida Dergham: But China is looking up for that.

Edward Luttwak: Sorry?

Raghida Dergham: China is looking up for the money.

Edward Luttwak: The Chinese are not going to finance Hezbollah, not in a thousand years. The Chinese in the Middle East have never played that role, they're not giving a dime to the Iranians or to Hezbollah, the one thing the Chinese will never do is to go against Israel. In Israel they're not buying high-tech companies, they're buying the dairy and milk and yogurt companies. So, China are going to play this role.

Raghida Dergham: But the pact, they signed a pact between Iran and China.

Edward Luttwak: Yes, "the pact", they're going to develop a huge support, this is part of the famous Belt and Road fantasy project, this is not China. China commitment – the Chinese are not going to commit strategically in the Middle East, because even at their level of strategic competence, they understand that they have taken on by aligning the Australians, Vietnamese, Indians, Japanese and Americans, they've taken on 150 percent of what they can take on. So, don't see them supporting Iran, that is a fantasy.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Edward Luttwak. Terje Rød-Larsen, you have played a role in the Oslo Accords that promised the Palestinians something they believed, and then really, the jury was still out once I asked you, 'do you think it was a success story or a failure', you said 'we will see'. A lot of people feel that the trouble with Oslo is that the Palestinians believed in the promises, and the Israelis never did. Do you regret playing a role in this? Because it led to a big cost for the Palestinians, a big price. Terje Rød-Larsen.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Actually, I profoundly disagree with you, Raghida. Oslo is, one – an ideology, which is a two-state solution, which I think is now unanimously supported in the international community. There's only one way and that is two states living peacefully side by side, and that ideology is standing. And number two, it is the establishment of the Palestinian authority, which is still standing with Abou Mazen, Mahmood Abbas as President, with ministries etc., which are managing the West Bank and partly, Gaza, with the issues of Hamas etc. And then thirdly it is a mutual recognition of the PLO and the State of Israel. These are the three elements of Oslo.

And the alternative to Oslo is to abandon the two-state solution and we will be backed into an impossible conflict again, and it is for the Palestinian authority to be dismantled and the PLO to return to terrorism and go into exile again. [inaudible]. But if you compare now the situation to more than 25 years ago, I mean we are in a much better state and the living conditions of the Palestinians are much much much better today than they were before Oslo. I'm not saying it's the [best] deal, but it's better.

Raghida Dergham: Okay, well anyway the deal now is the American, the one negotiated by Jared Kushner, much more, nobody speaks about Oslo at this point, but, you know, I'm glad to hear you believe that there's still a chance for it...

Edward Luttwak: Reality is on the ground, reality is on the ground. Palestinians go to the beach in Tel Aviv, and Israelis take the cars to be repaired in the Casbah of Nablus where they last went with tanks, now to go and bring a car to be repaired. Oslo has changed real relationships. The Hamas exception itself is diminishing, it changed human relationships, so Oslo is a giant success.

Raghida Dergham: So Oslo is what? Finish that sentence.

Edward Luttwak: Oslo is a giant success because in reality, Palestinians go to the beach, Israelis have their cars fixed where before they have to go with the tank. Oslo made that, so Oslo changed the real life of people.

Raghida Dergham: I have got to do something and I'm going to be running out of time, and the electricity will be cut off, and if it does stay put don't go away till I tell you please you're gone, you're able to leave. But listen, I never had anybody come into the conversation but I have a persistent and insistent former Secretary General of the Arab League Amr Moussa, and he's a member of the board of Beirut Institute, then I really must take him for one minute please, he needs to come in. Elyssa is telling me that he can, please bring him in for one minute.

Terje Rød-Larsen: We love Amr so we welcome him, he's the best.

Raghida Dergham: Exactly, Amr Moussa, everybody is welcoming you for a minute, please. This is an exception, okay you're upside down. Amr Moussa, please. Okay there you are, but please one minute because we're going to finish before the electricity cuts off, you have to unmute, no you're on mute, we cannot hear you, you are muted. Okay, go ahead, one minute please, one minute we're running out...okay shall I go ahead somebody else Elyssa? Do I? Alright listen, Amr Moussa can you say something? Okay, I

don't think this is going to work. If it does, we'll try to fit it in again because I don't think it's working. Let me do the one minute closure. Amr Moussa say something please. I told you it doesn't work, hello? Okay, I tried, forgive me, I'm sorry, I tried, I tried, I'm sorry.

Let me do the one minute, it's even 40 seconds, 45 seconds each. It's in the opposite order, so I'm going to go with uh Edward Luttwak first, 30 seconds to you for your concluding remarks, because we have three minutes left. 40 seconds.

Edward Luttwak: All historical evidence supports Terje's idea that structure precedes the improvement of political relations, that happened in the European case, they were just finished a war, they were hating each other, and they set up structure, they called it, the famous initial community called steel. NATO, the Dutch entered NATO when every coastal hotel had a sign saying "no Germans", but they entered NATO. So, it's not going to be different in the Middle East. When it happens, it will precede the resolution of conflicts and not afterwards.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Edward Luttwak. Now I'm going to go to Terje Rød-Larson, 45 seconds, 40 seconds, to you please.

Terje Rød-Larson: I think Edward actually echoed my basic thoughts and my simple suggestion. In order to make things work, you have to make things simply: that is, everybody has to go to the table – Iranians, Israelis, Turks, and the Arabs. And if they don't do it, the chaos and anarchy in the Middle East will continue and Europe will suffer the most. So please, go to the table.

Raghida Dergham: Nassif Hitti?

Nassif Hitti: Allow for the declaration of the Palestinian state and then proceed to that kind of normalcy and creating a sort of cooperative framework. One last thing I need to say which we didn't address here because we're talking about the geopolitics of the region, there is a need for an inclusive social contract in most of the countries we are discussing about in this region, an inclusive social contract that's the basis of what I call societal stability.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Nassif Hitti. Jeremy Greenstock, 40 seconds, and then I have 20 seconds.

Jeremy Greenstock: The people in the Middle East must take responsibility of their own future, they can't rely on outsiders. They've blamed outsiders for too long. Outsiders can help by suggesting ideas to try to bring them together, they must talk to each other

and they must take responsibility of their own people or they will be getting nowhere. It's getting very selfish, very conflictual at the moment, they've got to stand back and think about it.

And as for the Palestinian issue, give the Palestinians equal status with the Israelis in any negotiation without that you won't get a resolution.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Jeremy Greenstock. I can't thank you enough for this enlightening conversation.

Let me announce quickly to you who's going to be with us next week for e-Policy Circle number 21. They are watching you, some of them anyway, and hopefully you'll watch them next week, next Wednesday. We have His Royal Highness, Prince Turki El Faisal, of course he is the co-Chair of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi, and he's a Chairman of the board of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies and he was Saudi Arabia's Director of the general intelligence before serving as Ambassador to the UK and the US, as you know. Jeremy Greenstock, we have your friend, a friend of all of ours, definitely a friend of the Terje Rød-Larson, and he is Kevin Rudd, he is Former Prime Minister of Australia, currently President and CEO of Asia Society Policy, he is also the Chair of the International Commission on Multilateralism, and Chair of the board of IPI, the institute, the board of directors, the institute that of course Terje Rød-Larsen heads. And we have General David Petraeus, partner and Chairman of KKR Global Institute, he served as the fourth Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, he was also the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force, and commander of the US Central Command.

This would be next Wednesday, at the same time, and it's wonderful of you to join me, and I thank you most sincerely. You have a great afternoon, great evening and thank you very much, until we meet again. Goodbye everyone!