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RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Ayad Allawi;
General Joseph Votel;
Dr. Philipp Ackermann;
Dr. Nouriel Roubini.

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ0vGUpUgE>

Raghida Dergham: Good morning Lake Elmo, Minnesota where General Joseph Votel is coming from. And then, good morning still in New York where Nouriel Roubini is and where I miss most after Beirut, this is my city as well. Good afternoon Berlin where Philipp Ackermann is coming to us from. And good early evening from Baghdad, right? Dr. Ayad Allawi I think you are in Baghdad.

HE Ayad Allawi: I'm not in Baghdad.

Raghida Dergham: Where are you?

HE Ayad Allawi: I'm in London.

Raghida Dergham: Oh you're in London! Good afternoon to you in London, I'm glad that you are in London... We combine both cities.

Welcome to the 26th e-Policy Circle of Beirut Summit in Abu Dhabi. Hopefully we'll have you all with us next year. We're all hoping it will be by the summer at least. It looks like we're not going to be able to do it in March like we had hoped for, but we will watch and see.

Thank you very much for the honor of joining me. I'm very proud of this e-Policy Circles. You make me even prouder that you have agreed to be my guests. We are grateful both co-chairmen of Beirut Institute Summit. Prince Turkey Al Faisal and myself have been so delighted that we were able to gain your confidence in us, so thank you very much for this opportunity.

I'm going to start with the usual four minutes each, and I'm going to go to Dr. Ayad Allawi who will tell us of course about his thoughts, where next for Iraq? Ayad Allawi, four minutes to you please.

HE Ayad Allawi: Thank you very much for inviting us for this nice forum and with the nice gentlemen who are assembled here now. And let me start by saying that I stressed always before occupation of Iraq to our American and allied friends that the stability of Iraq is very important for the security of the region and the instability of Iraq always will spill over also instability to the region. Unfortunately, not much attention was paid to these views. However, we have now an Iraq problem, a big problem, and this problem is composed of failure of democracy, failure of ...

[inaudible]...that are intimidating the streets and controlling the country. And we have also rising extremists as in ISIS. And let me say something... [inaudible].

Raghida Dergham: Doctor Allawi, I'm having a problem with your sound system, sorry to interrupt you. I'm having a problem with your sound system, maybe your assistant can help us out because you are disappearing, the voice is going in and out. Can you seek her help? Try again or go closer and let's see if that works, if not we will go to General Joseph Votel then come back to you. Can you try one more time please?

HE Ayad Allawi: Let's go to Joseph Votel and I'll call her because she's in another room.

Raghida Dergham: Try one more time, Dr.Allawi, please go ahead. One more time, try.

HE Ayad Allawi: Anyway, so really the rise of the ISIS is becoming a troublesome for not only for Iraq, but rather for the region. Yesterday [Inaudible]...

Raghida Dergham: We're going to have to go to General Votel. Sorry about that. You're going to have to fix your sound system while we go to Joseph Votel, if you don't mind Mr. Prime Minister. I'm sorry that I have to do this because it's not fair, we cannot hear you, it's being cut up to pieces. So we'll come back to you, if you don't mind.

Alright, so I'm going to go to Joseph Votel. Four minutes to you, please frame it for us, we are very interested in your views on not only what's going on in Washington DC in the United States of America, but the impact of that on the world in general, and our part of the world in particular.

Joseph Votel, four minutes to you.

General Joseph Votel: Thank you very much, it's great to be with all of you. Thank you for the invitation to be here today. So I would just share three key points with you and I'll cover them briefly up front then I'll talk in a little bit more detail within my allocation of time here.

First and foremost, I think it's important to recognize that the United States, and I would suggest many of our western allies and partners and friends, retain important interests in the Middle East across the region and the region will continue to be very very important to our broad geopolitical security strategy. I think that is the first point I want to make to you.

The second point is that going forward, the Iranian problem that we have been dealing with, the conundrum of the United States and in Iran will continue to be a challenge for us. But I do expect that it will be more about diplomacy than perhaps about military force in the in the future. And I'll talk in just a moment about that.

My third key point to you is that US military presence in the region which has been very very high for a number of years, I believe will continue. It will be at a very sustained level and it will principally be focused in two particular areas: One is our traditional security cooperation activities that we do with partners in the region; and secondly, we'll be focused on an assisting encounter in counterterrorism objectives.

Those are three points, let me just briefly hit on each one of those again. You know, I'll start with interest. While 2021 is not 2016 when we did our last administration change and it's certainly not 1945 when Franklin Roosevelt met with the first Saudi King and began a relationship that's endured to what the region has endured to this day, the US – and I think western powers – retain important interests in the region: preventing this area from being a platform to attack our homeland or the homelands of others of our friends is an important interest. There is the presence of weapons of mass destruction and proliferating preventing proliferation of those, it is important to us, we want to ensure that instability in this region does not seep out and impact interest in other regions. We want to ensure access to resources and the commerce routes for which this region is so important to global commerce and freedom of navigation. And then finally we want to maintain a favorable balance of power. I believe all of those interests remain very very valid, as they have for a number of years going forward. And as we look at the future US security policy, I think these will have to be taken into consideration. I think it's also important for our listeners to recognize that national security policy in the United States right now is focused heavily on maintaining our competitive advantage against China, and to some extent Russia and other growing powers. But the Middle East will play a critical role in that, and this will be an area where competition pays out, so it will be important to us.

My second point here is on the US-Iran relationship. This has been a troubling conundrum for a number of years. We have been pursuing a maximum pressure campaign that has, at least minimally, created an uneasy deterrence, as one of our recent commanders characterized it. A tenuous achievement that is kind of minimally keeping things in check right now. Military actions going forward without an effective diplomatic component will likely not change the situation in the near term. And while it will be challenging to return to the now abandoned JCPOA, at least from the US standpoint, I do expect that we will see some new initiatives to establish diplomatic channels with the Iranians. I would expect to see that from the new administration. And I'm hopeful that we can find a way to leverage the recent Abraham Accords put in place or at least supported by the current US administration in the relationships that have been developed between Israel and some of the gulf Arab nations. I think these are important, they send a message of unity and they offer an opportunity to create diplomatic pressure, but also an opportunity to address other issues related with this. Importantly is that we get a diplomatic communications channel in place.

And my final point here regards US military presence in the region. It is in fact time to end the endless wars in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria for some extent and in other areas where we are much much less direct participants like Yemen. These are drag on the region, they're a drag on us and we have to address that. We will have to reconcile and make sense of some of the recent US troop decisions. Some of these seem to be devoid of strategic ideas here, we have to do that. I think that the presence will take on two components, it will be security cooperation efforts, which will be more prominent than large-scale forces that we have seen. These will be focused on building partner capacity and moving forward our partners. And finally, CT will remain a focus. We will continue to keep some forces in the region to protect our interests and work with partners.

So I'll stop there, thank you.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much, very important food for thought and lots of follow-up questions I'll have for you afterwards when we engage all four of us, five of us rather. And Dr. Allawi, is it possible that we try you again now?

HE Ayad Allawi: I think we are okay now probably.

Raghida Dergham: Please go ahead, four minutes please. Thank you General.

HE Ayad Allawi: I'm going to leave the Iraqi issues, the details of Iraq until the questions and answers later, but let me point out the five challenges that we are witnessing in the Middle East.

The first challenge is the Palestinian issue, and the peace process how [return] is taking now and probably there should be a kind of solution for the Palestinians, not only a rapport or a friendship and non-aggression pacts between Israel and some of Arab states, but we have to find a solution for the Palestinians.

The other problem that the Middle East is facing is the rising of the of the Islamists the extremists and the terrorists and this is becoming a problem, a big problem. Yesterday fifteen hundred people escaped from the Irbil prison in Iraq and today they burned two oil wells in Kirkuk and they attacked the army in Anbar and they killed about 12 people and [inaudible] a number of people. And those [inaudible] very hard and ISIS guys [?].

The third problem is a failure of some of the states like Syria, like Iraq, you know, like Lebanon, like Yemen, like Libya, and then you can count other countries. And this is really a big challenge because the balances of stability is being lost and the lines of demarcation between a good country, a solid country and another country is lost, and we would have liked to see Iraq as returning to normal and becoming one of the major powers in the region, but unfortunately this did not happen. On the contrary, what happened is during occupation and especially after occupation, the exercises were very wrong, and the policies were wrong also.

Then the fourth problem is the regional powers in the Middle East, especially Iran as directing a lot of economy on the region and especially on Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and they are making it very clear, I mean they are not keeping silent but 'we are going for five capitals in the Arab world'. And in Turkey, we have a problem with Turkey because Turkey is occupying part of Iraq, is also involved in Syria, involved in Libya and the world elsewhere, and now involved in the Mediterranean Sea. And one needs to really put this into perspective and put all of these problems into a real kind of diplomatic initiatives and get rid of them.

And the final indeed, the final point that we are facing is the transfer of power in the United States. This is very important and to us. The United States, how we share a lot of common grounds with the United States, the rule of law, freedom of speech, and so on. But really, we are not very sure now the United States is passing through a very good phase and there are definitely problems. We hope not, but this is causing a lot of imbalances in the region, and also [inaudible] more and more active, and we can see the Iranians and the militias; the militias now in Iraq are hitting the American embassy as usual, they are even hitting the army, anybody in the army who

is a prominent officer, they are trying to hit them with rocket missiles. And Iran have developed the position of their rocket missiles and they also have invented the precision of their drones.

Raghida Dergham: That's right. That's okay I was going to ask you to conclude your opening remarks because I just need to go on to give everybody four minutes, and there's a lot that you said that I want to build on. Is there a sixth point? Because we got to your fifth point about the transfer of power and, you know, the US policies and what's next, and there's lots of questions on that in particular. Do you want me to take this up later or do you want to continue the thought?

HE Ayad Allawi: No that's it.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Ayad Allawi, thank you very much. Philipp Ackermann, four minutes to you please.

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: Thank you Raghida. Let me start by saying that Germany is, and I think everybody knows that and it's not a secret, one of the closest allies for and with the US of America. And at the same time, I think it's also not the secret that we had a tough time in the last four years, and especially Germany, we were very much on the spot in some aspects and I don't want to go into all the details. But one of the aspects where we had profound disagreements was the Middle East and I think I would like to pick up what both General Votel and also Prime Minister Allawi said. At the end, one area where we really did not agree with the US not in analysis, I think in the analysis we were very close, but in process or method was the Iran question. You know, I think everybody agreed between Washington and Europe that Iran is a very problematic partner in the region, it's a very very difficult country to deal with and not only for the regional neighbors, but also for countries that are further away and the question is how to deal with it. And I think what we think, and this is a European point of view, is that JCPOA was the best vehicle to move on, JCPOA not being about trust, being about control.

So what we have seen is that, well once the US left the JCPOA and started the maximum pressure campaign, I think what we've seen is that this maximum pressure campaign did not only not come up with clear results in, you know, making Iran a more digestible or more you know acceptable partner in the region, the contrary is the truth, what we've seen is breakout time has shrunk and we see that in Iran has, you know, broken many of its commitments in the JCPOA and we are closer to the bomb, let's say, than four years ago. I think that's the fact that when you listen to Secretary Pompeo's 12 points he made as a condition for Iran in 2018 as an outline what kind of behavioral change the US expected from the country, I think when you take these as a benchmark, you will find out that maximum pressure has really not brought anything to results.

So what we hope is to go back with the next administration and I think General Votel hinted at that when he said that he would think that President Biden and his administration would take up more of a diplomatic approach to things to sit down with them again and try to figure out what to do with the JCPOA but also with the question that comes along, you know, missile question, regional behavior question at some stage. So this is something that we are very much looking forward to, we feel that going back to this vehicle of the JCPOA on its surroundings of diplomatic channels of mutual, sort of, talks and understanding is something that we feel that

moving on this rail gets us in a better direction eventually. It will be difficult, but I think we have a new partnership with this new administration.

Second point I want to make, and Prime Minister Allawi, I find it very very interesting that the first of the five challenges is the Palestinian issue. I find that so speaking, so talking actually, because you know you would think the Middle East is in such a difficult situation, yeah? Wherever you look, that you come up with the Palestinian question as the first challenge is very interesting because I would say, you know, Yemen or Syria are 10 times more problematic but still the Palestinian question is what is in the region's mind, and that's what people feel when they talk about this Middle East. And therefore I think that, and again we were in a certain disagreement with the Trump administration where they felt that the Kushner plan would maybe lead to some new negotiation negotiations but didn't turn out to lead to these peace organizations, I think we should not forget about this question, it's an essential and pivotal question in the Middle East. So, let me say that in the context of the normalization, which I find I must give credit to the United States of America that they have really broken this relationship between the Emirates, between Bahrain and Israel, between Sudan and Israel. But in this equation, must be included the Palestinian question now. That's what we hope for the new administration to come up with, an idea how to link the two. So far, there is a deep or a high wall between the two. And I think we have to think of ways and means to link one to the other and that's sort of the second you know element in the Middle East where we would hope that with the new Biden administration we get in some dealing and some diplomatic activities to bring them together to find a way towards a peace negotiations, a two-state solution between Israel and Palestinians.

Raghida Dergham: Philipp Ackermann, thank you very much but I think there is a big role for you as the leader of the EU, Germany to really do your thing, as well, not only the Biden administration...

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: ...No no no no no, together...

Raghida Dergham: ...there's a huge role for the Europeans and I don't think they have exercised that leverage that they have with the Israelis, so maybe it's time that we push you on that and that you...

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: You want me to answer right away?

Raghida Dergham: Well go ahead quickly on this one, I'll make an exception, yeah go ahead.

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: What we have, we are sitting down together with in the so-called Munich group with Egypt, Jordan, France, Germany and the EU and trying to figure out now, right now, how in this sort of environment we get Israelis and Palestinians back to the table. So it's a format which is pretty new and trying to use this moment now and we will be happy to bring the US in once the new administration is in, but now, we are sitting the four of us plus the EU and trying to together.

Raghida Dergham: That's great. Hopefully you'll use your leverage. I'll get back to you on this because that's an important point I want to push you on that. But let me go to Nouriel Roubini

first, he's waited too long and I want to give you the four minutes. Nouriel Roubini, enlighten us, I know you're specialized, I mean, you are a leader on the economic policy, but I know that you do the geopolitical including the economics. So, do whatever you want to do with your four minutes and then we will take advantage of further matters later in the discussion. Go ahead, please.

Dr. Nouriel Roubini: I've muted myself. Thank you very much. Since the topic of our discussion today is 'Stability Redefined', I'm going to start with the world view and then of course I'm going to also zoom in on the Middle East, even if I'm not an expert in the Middle East. First of all, we live in a world that is an unstable world where there is no clear world order, you know, before the collapse of the Soviet Union was a G2 world with a trans cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union, when the Soviet Union collapsed of course we had a unique polar moment where the US was the global hegemon, but then we tried to build the multilateral arrangements like the G7 and the G20, but the reality was that as I wrote in a paper with Ian Bremmer in 2011, this looked more like a G0 world, an unstable world without a clear hegemon that would provide global public goods. For a while, people thought that there'll be a G2 world where US and China, America will corporately run the world, but the relation between US and China has become now a cold war, and to see these traps and therefore there is also instability. I'd like to say something about the policies of the new Biden administration, I don't have time to talk about the domestic policies and those domestic policies are going to be constrained by divided government unless the Democrats win the two runoff Senate races in Georgia, but as we know the President has greater power on foreign policy and national security, on immigration, on global climate change and on trade policy, but even on some of these elements especially if you want to have a trade deal or do an immigration policy with legislation or spend money on global climate change, you need legislation. And therefore, if there is divided government, that's going to be constrained.

Now in foreign policy, you can expect that this Biden administration is going to be more multilateralist rather than unitarist, working with the allies in Europe, in Asia, the Middle East rather than bullying them, support international organizations like NATO, UN, return to the Paris Accord and other international organization, stronger relationships with Europe maybe even a transatlantic partnership to deal with the rising power of China, it's not easy but it's necessary. Of course, there'll be greater rivalry with Russia, North Korea and less coddling of dictator and authoritarian regimes. I unfortunately think that we'll still have a cold war with China and there'll be an attempt on one side to compete on technology, on trade, on indices of the future, on the East South China Sea and Taiwan but also try to cooperate maybe on global climate change, maybe on pandemics and things of that sort. But there'll be a rivalry on who's going to be the hegemon in Asia. So the cold war between US and China, whether we like it or not is going to get colder.

Now on the issue with Iran, I think that yes Biden is attempting to go back to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but I think that the members of the Biden administration realize that there are other issues with Iran: regional hegemony, ballistic missile, precision missiles and otherwise. So I'm not totally sure that by then, in spite of statement he has met recently, he's going to jump right away on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action without any of other topics on the table. I would argue also that the relation between the US and Saudi Arabia and Israel are

going to be more complex as the unconditional support by Trump or Netanyahu is going to be different than the past. The US is now semi-energy independent but of course has important interest in the Middle East, especially with issues of terrorism and nuclear proliferation, but as the General said, the US also has an interest to end some of the regional wars that don't have a strategic importance for the United States. So there'll be an effort to do something along those lines as well.

Final consideration, the overall relative and absolute power of the US is falling, with China rising. In the last four years I've seen the fall of the soft power of the United States. A lot is going to be needed to be done to restore the damage of abusing allies and cuddling up to dictators and authoritarian rulers, but the key geopolitical issue of our time is going to be US and China. And the Trump administration was strategic in competition and even attempt to contain China. The question is whether we can have a manage of strategy competition where you compete on some things and you cooperate on others, whether that's possible, feasible, to be seen. Thanks.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Nouriel Roubini. I'm going to just hop in here on the common denominator and what you all gentlemen spoke about, which is the JCPOA. And also, the interest that Nouriel's last point is, about human rights. Let me before I go into the JCPOA, I want to go to Philipp Ackermann and I want to ask you about this new development in the European position, 27 countries, you are now enacting or deciding to enact the Magnitsky Act for accountability, for violations of human rights, and you also, your foreign minister spoke of, you also repeated it actually 'it's not about trust, it's about control' in terms of the JCPOA. You've hinted that you don't want to just a quick return to the JCPOA, that you're serious about the missiles, precision missiles, and behavior in the region. You are heading the EU, so what are you doing about it?

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: So let me...Raghida, let me start by saying that we don't like to hear that we implant Magnitsky Act, that's an American legislation, but we have [faith?] indeed, a sanctions regime that somehow likes a bit or is similar to the Magnitsky Act, it's an overall sanctions regime for grave human rights violation where you can pick out one or another person, or entity to be sanctioned under a general human rights violator system. This is a very new development for the EU and we have to see how it works out. The one condition we have is the 27 must be unanimous on the human rights and that shows you...

Raghida Dergham: Oh my God, that's going to be bad...

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: It will be difficult, it will be difficult, but then again, I want to say that you have a lot of, sort of shaped and clearly focused sanctions regime on human rights violation, for example in Syria, in Iran, we have different sanctions, but this new human rights violation sanctions regime covers everything. So every member state can come and say 'in Ecuador, in Yemen, in Central African Republic, you have this and this grave human rights violation we want to sanction', and then we have to find unanimity. Sometimes it's easy, sometimes it's not so easy.

Raghida Dergham: So one cannot read that for example, the new development, we're not going to call it the Magnitsky Act, but the fact that you're going to hold their feet to the fire over that day is, for example in Iran, the human rights violations in Iran, it's not going to be a priority over the JCPOA because that is your priority, right?

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: Let me say that, you know, most of the human rights violations in Iran are sanctioned in the EU right now. We have the huge Iran sanctions, it covers human rights, it covers missiles, it covers technological developments we don't like. So many many people in Iran, many units, many entities are on the sanction list in the EU already. So that's not new, but what we can do is, if we have sort of super great human rights violations, we can take them out and say 'this will be sanctioned under the new sanctions'. It's a very symbolic step, and I think it will be used to a certain extent, but it's not the first time that the EU is sanctioning people for humanized violation. And in Iran, we have them on the list already.

Now we're coming back to the JCPOA, your second question. You know, I beg to differ a bit with Professor Roubini here. The Biden administration, Jake Sullivan who will be the new NSC, head of the NSC, he was one of the negotiators of the JCPOA, he was in the negotiating team. Always, from the very beginning, missiles and regional behavior were part of our thinking. Now, the JCPOA is indeed exclusively focused on the fact that we don't want Iran to have a nuclear bomb, that's sort of the tool for not having the nuclear bomb. At the same time, from the very beginning, missiles and regional behavior were very much on our minds. So what we want now is, you know, trying to open up new diplomatic channels, and I think the JCPOA is a vehicle and sit down and try to, at some stage, you know, discuss with Iran and others maybe the question what to do with other things than the nuclear weapons and that's missiles and that's regional behavior.

Raghida Dergham: I definitely want to go to Ayad Allawi on that one because I'm not so sure he would agree that you leave it till later, but before I do that, Joseph Votel, I'm sure the Biden administration, the Biden team rather, is probably seeking your advice on how to do this. Let me just stay with the JCPOA. We hear that whether it's Jake Sullivan or the whole national security team, they want, or Biden himself, Joe Biden himself, they want to go directly to reviving the JCPOA and then talk about the missiles, and then talk about the behavior, the regional behavior, while giving up the leverage of the sanctions. Is this an advice you would give them? Is this the right thing to do? Particularly that it would probably backlash in the region because we've been there, we've been there, done that when the Europeans and their Chinese and Russians and Americans agreed to postpone the other stuff and focus only on the nuclear, and then look what price we paid in this region. Joseph Votel.

General Joseph Votel: Yeah thanks. I would not recommend that as a principal approach or that we, you know, single-mindedly be focused on that. I think there has to be a more comprehensive approach to the region to set us up so that we can in fact do the things that we want to do with respect to addressing our relationship with Iran. And those things, I think, include one – being very very clear on what our strategy is for the region and what our approach is going to be. Clarity is really important here and so we have to do that as we look at our emerging national security strategy.

Second of all, we have to look at relationships. We have done damage to our relationships in the region over the last several years with both partners in the region and with partners who have joined us as coalition members, for example. And both of those have to be repaired and we have to invest some time in that. So I think that is really really important. And then I think it's also important for the new administration to not think that they are in 2016, they are in 2021, it is a new time, things have happened, the Abraham Accords are a fact on the ground right now in a place like the Middle East and so we have to look at how these provide opportunities for us to be used as leverage against Iran, but also to be as used as opportunities to create unity in the region. And we have to recognize that a military approach in itself cannot solve this, we have to move forward on some type of diplomatic approach. But all of those things have to be approached simultaneously.

Raghida Dergham: But the Iranian are very clear that his position is...and this seems to be, and I pray not, that the Biden approach maybe will just go back to the JCPOA, 'we rescue it and then definitely we will talk about the other things'. Is this something – losing the leverage of the sanctions, Joseph Votel, is this a wise thing for the national security of the United States of America?

General Joseph Votel: Well again, I think we have to get back to a dialogue, some form of dialogue with the Iranians, and I think we want to try to address the nuclear issue. I think that's a very important one to move forward with. But I think [that] thinking that we can jump back into something that was in existence several years ago, right at this point, I don't know if that is advisable. I think there has to be an appropriate level of groundwork that really leads up to whatever we move forward with. I think it's very clear that we will have to address missiles and other activities that Iran has pursued across the region in this time since, that has to be addressed. So I don't think you can return to the JCPOA as it previously was, I think we're looking probably at some modified construct.

Raghida Dergham: Ayad Allawi, are you afraid that the regional issues, Iran's interventions in a country like yours Iraq, that this concern abuse would be thrown under the bus, so to speak, while Russia is, you know, I mean and it's understandable – the world cares about the nuclear, why should they care about what Iran does in your country or mine? Ayad Allawi?

HE Ayad Allawi: Well America has some legal responsibility and moral responsibility towards the region especially towards Iraq because they initiated the occupation of Iraq and they allowed Iran to creep into Iraq and to be a major power in the region after they dismantled the army and the [?] and so on. I think now, it's a must that there should be a structural, structured policy and in coordination with the middle eastern countries on Iran and what to do with Iran. The nuclear side, it is fine to discuss the nuclear issue. The Iranians are getting weaker in certain areas, but they are getting stronger in other areas. I saw Zarif a few months ago in Baghdad, he came to this visit Baghdad, and he wants to...

Raghida Dergham:...that's the Foreign Minister of Iran, yes, go ahead?

HE Ayad Allawi: I think, frankly speaking, America cannot withdraw its interest in the region after they have done what they have done, after the mistakes committed in the region. I think the

United States have to engage the region again. And they should not repeat the issue of, you know, when the nuclear we are against the proliferation of their program and when they signed the deal with the five countries, six countries. We were very very positive, but I said the absent, great absent thing is peace in the Middle East. Iran has wrecked the Middle East with havoc, it's very clear, we know within Lebanon, we know it in Syria, we know it in Yemen, we know it in Iraq, and we know in Bahrain, we know it everywhere.

Raghida Dergham: Yeah but if these policies from what we hear from our guests here, if these policies continue that there is a priority for, you know, dealing positively with Iran. What happens to a country like yours where you have Al Hashd Al Shaabi under the control, paramilitary forces under the control of the capital of...

HE Ayad Allawi:... The Americans need Iraq. If they... and look only on one aspect which is the nuclear issue, they'll make the, you know, the Americans leave Iraq and leave the region, not only Iraq because the pro-Iranian forces are determined not to see American forces in Iraq whatsoever. Really that's why we need a very structured, very comprehensive policies, that America should adopt in consultation with the leaders and the in the Middle East.

Raghida Dergham: And I want to get to Nouriel Roubini, but Joseph Votel, do you want to say something about the forcing the departure of the American forces from the region in commenting on what Ayad Allawi just said?

General Joseph Votel: Only what I said before. I mean, I think there is going to be a need for US forces in the region. My particular view, particularly with respect to Iraq, I, as the Centcom commander, I viewed Iraq as a linchpin country in the region where we had to have a strong relationship, where we had to have some amount of force on the ground, I don't know that it needs to be in the thousands, but it needs to be substantial enough to demonstrate our commitment and our strong belief that Iraq is an important geostrategic place in the region and it's important to our interests there and we want to sustain that. So I think what I mentioned before holds tight, but definitely Iraq.

Raghida Dergham: Nouriel Roubini, you wanted say something earlier as a comment, go ahead.

Nouriel Roubini: I understand that you know Biden himself in that interview with Tom Friedman made statements about going first to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and then bring the regional issues and the missiles after, and Jack Sullivan was behind that deal. But I think that when the Biden administration is going to think a little more carefully the entire policy towards the Middle East, they're going to realize that the world has changed and just doing that in that two-step procedure doesn't make sense. First of all, even on the nuclear part of it, probably people say that the timeline was a bit too short. Maybe you have to convince the Iranian to commit to more than 10-15 years and so on and one idea might be, you negotiate or you try to negotiate the variant of the John Comprehensive Plan of Action on the nuclear, and you start in parallel negotiation also on the regional stuff, on the missiles, on the ballistic, on the precision missiles and you do give them some carrots by having some of the sanction phased out if you commit a nuclear deal, but not all of them, because the last thing you really want to is that Iran starts using that financial power to help his own proxies and right now given the COVID

crisis and the sanctions, the power of Iran of supporting even Hezbollah and others is constrained. And the US is realizing that in the Middle East, you have a bunch of semi-failed states, if not utterly failed states, and this is a try to the US national security whether it's Libya, whether it's Yemen, whether it's Lebanon, whether it's Syria, whether it's trouble in Iraq, this is something that is attracted to the United States. And therefore, the regional issues are important for the US because chaos in the Middle East is something not good, [it leads to terrorism this instability the various sorts]. So I think that once they sit down, they might have a much more nuanced view of how to approach the Middle East in a more holistic way and therefore it's not going to be jumping in automatically in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, but think of something that has a sequence that leads you to deal with the broader regional stability issue. Maybe that's the way they're going to take eventually, when they think about it carefully.

Raghida Dergham: Well I think this is a very wise approach Nouriel Roubini, I hope they hear you and that they listen to the wisdom and what you're saying. Philipp Ackermann, not good to do a two-step approach. Is Germany, for example, I don't know if you agree with Nouriel Roubini, but is Germany, for example, willing to come in, step in, on this one and basically just really give true emphasis to the fact that there has to be not a later step on the regional or the missiles, but the regional in particular, the regional behaviors of Iran in the countries, such as Iraq, and Syria, and Lebanon, and Yemen? How ready is Germany in its capacity as in the presidency of the EU to step in on this one and make sure there's a structure?

HE Ayad Allawi:... It's support to Hamas also...

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: Yes support to Hamas also...let me say that first of all, I have to say that our presidency will end in two weeks, right? The Portuguese will take over on first of January but the fact remains that Germany will be an important player in the EU also in the in the month and the year to come. Now let me say that we agree on the analysis completely, I mean there is no difference between us and whatever I hear here, you know, when it comes to the regional behavior, when it comes to the regional behavior but also missiles, you know. And when the Kuwaiti say to me 'we don't care so much about nuclear, because when they do something nuclear to us, they will be hit also, they don't do any nuclear, we have we are afraid of missiles', and I understand that, the short-range missiles for Kuwait is 10 times more dangerous than nuclear is. So this is all taken into consideration. The question is, you know, the relation is pretty damaged over the last four years, you know, the economy is in shambles, nothing has changed basically. You are right, they are not as rich or they don't have as much money as they used to, but is there any change in their behavior? The reaction is no. So, I think what we have to find is an entrance, you know, how do we sit down with them and take all these matters up? And I will not, you know, it's not the time for me to say here we will get back hundred percent of the JCPOA as we know it, because of course, General Votel is right when he says 2021 it's not 2016, you have four years in between, four tough years from various point of views - of a point of angle of views. But we have to find an entrance for all these matters and this entrance needs to be somehow to go back to that what we have agreed to, in which ways, whether we lift all sanctions at a time, whether we go incrementally, that remains to be seen. And I think the E3 will be sitting there with the US and try to figure out how to do things and we have to take up all these questions at the time. But I think we cannot sit down with the Iranians because what we've seen

maximum pressure is nothing, leaving nothing, you know, Raghida I am sorry to say, Hezbollah support of Iran has not been an iota less in the last four years, so sorry...

Raghida Dergham:... As Germany, you have a new relationship with Hezbollah but have you considered sanctions...

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: We have no investment and what we did was we had - what we say - a law that forbids activities for Hezbollah in Germany. So we have forbidden Hezbollah activities in Germany which is basically a sanctions regime, if you will, so Hezbollah is for us, we see Hezbollah in all its glory he sees as one of the spoilers of Lebanon. Only one Raghida, it's only one. There are a few couple of others, but it's the main spoiler maybe.

Raghida Dergham: Of course, listen Roubini, please Nouriel Roubini, quickly I want to go to Ayad Allawi, quickly.

Dr. Nouriel Roubini: Yes, I just wanted to make two points briefly. One is that from the European point of view having a bunch of failed states in the Middle East is a try to the security of Europe. We saw with the refugees coming from Syria and a whole bunch of other states may collapse and you'll have millions of other people going or trying to go into Europe. So, I think that the regional issues are actually of key paramount importance because more than the nuclear threat for Europe, is really the chaos in the region and the migration is going to be a try to Europe, first point.

Second point, I fear that Iran, and I'm not taking the part of Iran, has sort of given up on the US because even if there is a new deal with Iran, what if in four years from now Trump becomes president again, or Pompeo, or Mike Pence, or some of those right-wingers. The Iranians feel like even if you do a deal, the next US president may just undo it and I think that the Iranians have made a strategic decision to have an alliance with Iran, sorry with China, economic financially, politically, even geopolitical, even militarily exercise in the gulf between the Chinese and the Iranians, and at this point we have to think about whether we're giving up on Iran because Iran is going to China, or we want to re-engage Iran to make sure that Iran actually is not ending up into an implicit, if not explicit, alliance with China. That's another issue that the west has to think about carefully.

Raghida Dergham: That's right, Joseph Votel take note of that because I want to when I give you the floor for doing your concluding remarks before you depart earlier than others, please take note of what Nouriel Roubini just said, I'd like you to address that issue please but I want to go to Ayad Allawi. Please we didn't speak about Turkey. Of course, Turkey is also a threat to Europe and it's in a certain way... pardon?

HE Ayad Allawi: Especially now with the Middle East.

Raghida Dergham: All right, go ahead, please.

HE Ayad Allawi: But you know let me tell you something, then tell our friends. I took an initiative with the in 2005, to invite Iran and Turkey for a conference under the auspices of the

United Nations. Mr. Mubarak, the late Mubarak hosted the conference and we of course, the five permanent members attended, on the level of foreign ministers. And it was under auspices of Koffi Anan. And Iran attended and also Syria attended and there were obstacles against Iran, against Syria, from America every few years. But I insisted that they should come because they were causing problems and we need the Mubarak arranged a kind of a minutes for the meeting including to form a group with each country, American Iraq and Syria, America Iraq and Turkey, and then we were working towards Iran also, including Iran. In that period of time, after the conference, Iran never really tried to do anything in Iraq or in the region, at all. They were kept at bay and they played a constructive role.

I think now also we need to have a comprehensive structural policy towards Iran. We can't leave it alone, given the fact that the international global problems are increasing, you know, with China and with the Russian federation and so on, between the states. And we like to see the forces of moderation working together to bring about a reasonable and sensible solution, permanent solution for the region. And this cannot be done unless there is a kind of discussions with the leaders of the region.

Raghida Dergham: So absolutely, but isn't that also [the honest?] is on the leaders of the region to make sure that they are seen and felt and they also have leverage they should use with everybody, with the Americans, with the Europeans, with themselves amongst themselves.

HE Ayad Allawi: Yes Europe is very close and Europe, I think Ackermann pointed out, we are flooding Europe with refugees...

Raghida Dergham: Let me do something here which is a little bit not the norm. I promised General Joseph Votel that he can leave exactly in four minutes so I want to start earlier the idea of giving each of you two minutes for conclusion, because we're just about to finish up our time but I'll start with Joseph Votel and he will have to leave us even when you are still talking because this is the agreement we had made. So I want to agree two minutes General Votel, try to address this China-Iran pact which is very important and what will the US do? And you know, I mean, why are we so nervous about what the Biden administration is doing? Because they're not really reaching out to make people feel a little more secure in this region. Is there something you are telling the Biden team to do? And actually is that something that you can carry to the Biden team from this conversation in order to pay attention because I think a lot of points were made to say, 'just don't jump, don't go fast'.

General Joseph Votel: Sure, thank you and it's been great to be with you. First off, I would I would say this is that the competitive advantage relationship that we have with China will be a principal driver of US national security strategy for the foreseeable future. And that is going to be a fact, I think that has been a case with this administration, I think it will transcend to the next administration. And so, as we look at that, as we understand that, that means that's not something that's just playing out in the south China sea, that plays out globally. So when you look at a relationship between Iran and China long term and the impact that that has on US, not only the region but our interests in the in the region, I think it should stoke strong interest in the United States in terms of an approach that tries to nullify that and offer other opportunities rather than pursuing that. I think that has to be considered. We have to think about our relationship with

China much more globally and how it plays out in other areas where we have important interest for the country.

To close, I would just say this with respect to the Biden administration. Now I think is a time for clarity: clarity in our strategy, clarity in our communications, clarity and the things that we are doing. I think it is a time for relationship building and rebuilding. And that will be absolutely vital to this and if there's one thing that they can do, this would be the most important piece, I think, is to restore some of these relationships. And then third, would be to ensure that our diplomatic outreach to the region equals, and hopefully exceeds, our military emphasis in the region. This is, I think, extraordinarily important and it has led to an imbalanced approach to the region in my view, one that is overly heavy on military response and military approaches. And we need a much more aggressive, sustained, diplomatic approach to the region.

Thanks again for the opportunity.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you for joining me General Joseph, thank you very much for the honor. And I'll let you go, you're off the hook. But I'm going to continue the conclusion remarks with the rest of my distinguished guests. I'll go now to Ayad Allawi, two minutes to you quickly please, and then I'm going to go to Philipp Ackermann and Nouriel Roubini. Ayad Allawi.

HE Ayad Allawi: Again I think times are changing and circumstances are changing and conflicts are changing and I think the Americans do not have the superpower image anymore a global unipolar power. China is emerging, the Russian federation is coming back to the scene and we need really to consult, and I regard the United States and Europe are the moderates. I regard also many Arab countries are moderates and we need to put our minds together to develop policies on what to do and what not to do, and to have a structural policy. And I think, one should think also of changing, creating, some new agencies, changing probably some of the of the United Nations' bylaws and trying to achieve peace in the world. Otherwise, I can see that things are moving in a very difficult position.

Raghida Dergham: Ayad Allawi, I want to push you on one thing that is, you know, Iraq and Lebanon are in a very similar situation, and I know that you are very close to a lot of the people we are no longer close to in government in power in Lebanon, do you have one quick advice for the Europeans? Should they sanction them like the Americans started, in support of the French initiative?

HE Ayad Allawi: With all honesty, sanctions to make people suffering, it's not going to pay dividends. They did it with Iraq and they didn't pay, they did south Africa didn't pay. That's why we need to have a selected and controlled sanctions against individuals rather than...

Raghida Dergham: Yes, we're talking about that. I'm talking against individuals like the Americans have done against individuals in Lebanon, in power. At any rate, I'm going to take that question now to Philipp Ackermann that, you know, there's talk about Europeans or some Europeans being ready to back up to back up the French initiative by considering sanctions against individuals who are blocking the French initiative for Lebanon is this actually true? Is this being considered?

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: Frankly, I mean the Americans have sanctioned Gibran Bassil because of his closeness to Hezbollah, and of course many Hezbollah people. The French are adamantly against any sanctions against individuals totally, they think that this is what [is] very detrimental and basically the French, as you know, in Lebanon they have taken the lead very strongly we had last week a long conference on Lebanon again with no result, I'm very sad to say. But I think our strategy for Lebanon is when we are to give money for reconstruction or development, this money will not flow until a deep and profound process of reforms are underway. So what we have said to the Lebanese current government is 'don't expect us to come up with help – and I'm not talking about humanitarian help, that is of course independent – but don't expect us to come up with help unless and until you have formed a new government and, you know, implemented or at least started a new program of reforms' and otherwise it's not going to happen. And I think at the end of the day, they must abide because Lebanon will not survive if it just doesn't get foreign aid. It is completely dependent on us, on the donor community and so far, they play, I must say it's like gambling with a very small reserve they have in the national bank, and one day they will be bankrupt and that's very bad.

Raghida Dergham: I can't pursue this a little further because of the time. Nouriel Roubini, really take a look at whatever you want to say for conclusion, but one word about what Philipp Ackermann said about Lebanon, just one quick word and then you have 40 seconds for conclusion.

Dr. Nouriel Roubini: Well I don't follow Lebanon as much but I'll start with the big picture and the big picture is that there is a strategic rivalry between the US and China, and I think in order to address it the US first of all is to work with his allies in Europe, in the Middle East, in Asia, because they're not going to be able to manage the rise of China on its own, so that's clear and it's going to go in that direction. The question mark however is what you do with the implicit new allies of China because China is building implicit, if not explicit alliances, with Iran with Russia, with North Korea, with Pakistan. One way is to say we give up on them and we cannot do much about it but there may be ways of engaging Iran or even Russia on this issue in a way that they're not going to go with China fully and completely. So we have to think not only about working with the allies, but also working with the strategic rivals and that has implication for what the approach of us towards Iran and the region should be. You don't want them to end up in the arms of China so you have to think about that.

Raghida Dergham: I totally agree with you and thank you very much. Hold on, don't go away I want to tell you who do we have for next week, it's going to be an all-female cast of policy makers, five women are going to be my guests and we're going to talk policy like you have not heard policy being spoken about. I'm going to give you the names quickly before the electricity cuts me off. We have Tatiana Gfoeller, Lina Khatib, Ellie Gerenmayah, and we have Florence Gaub and Karen Young. You will look them up we will tell you who they are shortly.

[Electricity cut off]

Dr. Philipp Ackermann: Bye bye, pleasure to speak to you

Dr. Nouriel Roubini: Bye, great being on this call, goodbye to everyone, cheers.

Raghida Dergham: Okay don't say I did not warn you I'm so sorry, allow me to thank you all for the most enlightening conversation. It's always too short, it's always too short. But thank you so very much for joining me and please join next week for the fantastic five female or actually we're going to be six, policy influencers, policymakers in Beirut Institute. It would be for the 27th e-Policy Circle next Wednesday, always at the same time. Thank you for joining me everyone, goodbye for now. Thank you