

UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT OF e-POLICY CIRCLE 27
December 16, 2020

RAGHIDA DERGHAM With:

HE Tatiana Gfoeller;

Dr. Lina Khatib;

Dr. Ellie Geranmayeh;

Dr. Florence Gaub;

Dr. Karen Young.

Youtube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dE2BFWxHKr0>

Raghida Dergham: [This is] the 27th Circle, it is the last one for 2020, we will take a break so that we'll be back in 2021, in principle January 13, for the 3rd season. We had remarkable guests and we had these virtual policy circles with the idea of waiting until we really go to Abu Dhabi for the summit, and we hope so, Covid-19 permitting, we're hoping to do June 12-13th, pencil this in.

Both the co-chair for the Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi, His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al Faisal, and myself are ever so grateful for all who tuned in and for all of you who took part of this e-Policy Circle. Since May 6th, seven months ago, we held 27 circles and we had the honor of hosting one hundred and eleven delegate speakers, who participated from 31 countries. So I think that this is an absolutely great success, I would say, and I hope it will continue to 2021. This particular e-Policy Circle I'm very proud of. It is such an honor that we were able to manage to bring in 5 women who are policymakers, who are part of this world that we need to increase the number of women in. It is a great finale and so I want to thank you for this honor all of you, it's going to be great fun, and let's just show them what women in policy can do.

We'll start with Tatiana Gfoeller as usual, we'll have four minutes for each of the speakers, and then we'll have a very engaging conversation. One hour, but warning as always, if the electricity goes off, don't go away, I shall be back to retrieve, you know, the collectiveness of this fantastic session that I know it will be. Tatiana Gfoeller, why don't you start please with four minutes, tell us what you have for us to learn, please go ahead.

Tatianna Gfoeller: Good morning, it's great to be here, and an honor for me as well to be among such great company. Not surprisingly, as a 33-year veteran of the State Department, my main point will be a plea for more diplomacy. Diplomacy is an alternative to war and I think none of us like war, in this group at least. What I'd like to say is that great powers compete, but they can also collaborate, and they can coordinate. Now, in the 90s, we had an anomalous situation where we had a unipolar world basically

run by the United States. And the United States was able to impose, and in some cases persuade other countries to their values. Well that world is over. China has risen, Russia has risen, the EU though slightly shambolic, is still a factor, and the United States can no longer impose its values on anybody. So we need to cooperate and collaborate.

So I would like to propose a return to the great power symmetry of the past. Frankly, it worked pretty well, it provided a possibility of no nuclear war, let's remember, we were very close to a nuclear war back in the day. We have been collaborating already through the years on terrorism and that is a very good thing. But I would propose that terrorism is not the only thing that great powers can collaborate on. Another one is stability because it really is in all our interests to have stability. Now there were actors obviously who are against stability. In the precursor of this discussion, one of our panelists mentioned that she's been studying ISIS, obviously ISIS is not interested in stability. But ISIS has been defeated. And I think the rest of us, of the great powers, are interested in stability.

Very briefly, in my experience as Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, I had two main projects. I wanted to keep the Manas airbase open because 98% of the American service men and women flying in and out of Afghanistan were going through this base and I wanted to promote democracy and inner-ethnic committee.

The beginning of my tenure, Russia and China, the two main other powers, were certainly to close the American base, because they felt that it was an intrusion in their part of the world. I was able to persuade them that actually having this base, keeping our service men and women in Afghanistan was to their advantage because it provided stability in their neighborhood. Once they started actually to believe that, we were able to work together on keeping the base open.

Afterwards we had a revolution, we had an inner ethnic massacre, we had to work together again to try to restore or even promote democracy because there wasn't actually democracy in Kyrgyzstan at the time. And again, the two great powers, China and Russia, began to agree that 'yes, it is in our interest' and through the OSCE, which is kind of umbrella organization, which is a very saving way, because it is not like just to like triumvirate the US, China and Russia posing their will. It is the OSCE, with many smaller powers in it. We were able to promote democracy, have parliamentary elections, presidential elections, reform the police force, etc...

So I'm just giving these little examples as ways where great powers when they think about, when they really think about it, they realize that, for the sake of stability, they need to work together and I'd like to promote more of that in the future.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Tatiana Gfoeller, we got the point but I'm not sure that many of us will agree that it's quite possible given the state at which all these superpowers or big powers, great powers, have reached. Maybe, we'll talk about it during

the conversation. But I'm going to go now to Lina Khatib to hear her views on Iran and the region in 4 minutes. Go ahead Lina Khatib please.

Lina Khatib: Thank you so much. First of all, it's a pleasure to be here with really great colleagues. And thank you Raghida for the kind invitation. As this is the last e-Policy Circle of the year, perhaps we can start with looking back very quickly at what happened this year when it comes to Iran's regional role. Of course, the year began with the assassination of Kassem Suleimani in January. Now, did that lead to a great reversal of Iran's role in the region? Well definitely not. But equally, it did not lead to a great retaliation on the part of Iran and I think both these things are telling. What this tells us is that decapitating a figure like Suleimani is not going to be the way to try to contain Iran's regional involvement. Yes, it did have strategic implications, especially for the popular mobilization forces in Iraq because Suleimani was not assassinated on his own, he was also assassinated with Mohandes who was a key figure in trying to coordinate the different popular mobilization units in Iraq. And with his absence, there was, let's say, a lack of a reference point for a lot of these groups which allowed some of them to perhaps act more recklessly than usual. And perhaps, the assassination of Hisham Al Hashemi in July of this year, could be linked to a degree to that, in that the group that has been linked with this assassination Kataeb Hezbollah just had no person who was able to perhaps try to steer it away from such an action with the absence of Mohandes. I'm not saying that if Mohandes was alive, he would not have authorized this assassination, but perhaps, you know, things might have been handled a little differently. So that is one side of the story.

The other side is when it comes to Iran's own capacity to retaliate, we also saw strong language being used, but not much in terms of action. If anything, if we look at Lebanon just as an example, we will see that in fact the US's maximum pressure strategy which is mainly to target Iran economically is yielding results, very slow results, but it is yielding results. And I think we can see that in Lebanon. The fact that Hezbollah in Lebanon engages in bombastic language but not much action, the fact that it is worried now about its own constituents because the economic in Lebanon is deteriorating and Hezbollah doesn't have a strategy to be able to deal with this situation. All shows us that ultimately Iran and its allies in the region are as not comfortable as they would like us to think. And so there is, in a way, a limit on the capacity both of the United States and Iran to take the military route to confront one another. The economic pressure route seems to be working, the sanctions that are imposed on Syria and I put Syria as a part of, of course, the big Iran regional role picture. They are yielding results, even President Assad himself said that, not too long ago, saying that the financial situation in Syria is mainly because the collapse that is happening in Lebanon and we know that sanctions on key figures in the regime play a role in that, because this is also part of why the situation in Lebanon is what it is with the banking system. So, what I'm saying here is that 2020 has not resulted in any radical change when it comes to US pressure on Iran or when it comes to Iran's own kind of stance towards the west and I think the maximum pressure should basically

continue because, yes, it is going to take a while but hopefully this will be the path towards bridging Iran to the table to discuss things diplomatically.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Lina khatib, I think it is just the right moment to go to Ellie Geranmayeh, you are from Iran so I guess you're going to talk about Iran as well from a different point of view, it seems. Go for it, four minutes.

Ellie Geranmayeh: Thank you very much Raghida for the invitation, and for your colleagues for bringing us together. It's great to be among a great panel of women colleagues. So, Lina and I know each other from London, and it won't come to a surprise to either of us that we slightly disagree on the maximum pressure policy so it should make for a good debate. So my work is mostly focused on Iran and the nuclear deal and the involvement of both the US and European partners in that agreement. And I think, with the forward-looking lens on to next year, the most defining characteristics in my view of the Biden administration's Middle East policy will be connected to the approach his administration takes on the nuclear agreement and whether and how fast to rejoin this agreement.

So in my view, the sorts of statements that we've had from the president-elect in the last few weeks combined with the statements coming out publicly from senior Iranian officials, including today Iran's supreme leader, in my view indicates that both the Biden camp and Iranians want to see some sort of a swift stabilization of the nuclear deal within the first few months of a Biden administration. We've heard the president-elect talking about wanting to walk the path of diplomacy with Iran and seeing that as a two-phase approach, first beginning with a return to the nuclear deal and then second pivoting towards broader sets of negotiations, including a follow-up nuclear agreement but also regional de-escalation efforts including on the issue of missiles which remains a hot topic in the Middle East. Now, there is a debate still I think in Washington particularly about whether the Biden administration should look to "leverage" the maximum pressure era sanctions and campaign that was started under the Trump administration or actually have a clean break from that and look towards reentry to the nuclear deal as swiftly as possible. Now, in my view a continued policy of US sanctions and doubling down on it is essentially a reiteration of the maximum pressure campaign that president Trump has undertaken in recent years, which in my view, has just backfired not only against US interests but that of the security of particularly the GCC states. So we have seen Iran reverse its nuclear steps and is now closer in its so-called breakout time towards a nuclear bomb and we have seen Iran retaliate not just in places like Iraq against the US maximum pressure campaign, but also as reports go directly against Saudi Arabia and the UAE in terms of the oil facilities in earlier part of last year.

So in my view, if we see a doubling down of this policy we will see Iran's so-called strategic patience over the past year come to an end and we're likely to see a greater degree of escalation both on the nuclear file and on the regional file. Now in my view,

what Iran needs to see in order to both cool regional escalation and come back into full compliance with the nuclear deal is going to be quick efforts from the Biden administration that show that concrete economic relief is on the table and there is a quid pro quo to be had. Happy to go into details about how we can make that happen later but I look forward to the debate ahead, thank you.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Ellie Geranmayeh, I just want to tell you quickly because as you know I am a columnist, not only am I the Founder and Executive Chairman of Beirut Institute, so my views are written and signed, my name is signed on them, so I also want to say that I differ with you in a very strong way and closer to the point of view of Lina and for a very important reason. You seem that you are promoting this two-phase approach which people in this region look at as a very dangerous approach, it's a two-step two, two-phase approach, you called it and the swift stabilization, you didn't mention anything about the regional, you said after that, Iran will probably, you know, look at its behavior in the region. For me, this is a very dangerous approach that I would want to debate you when we go into the discussion because I think there's a bit of a blackmail element in it 'okay, you give me my JCPOA, then I may think of leaving havoc in Syria, and Lebanon, and Iraq, and in Yemen. So please keep that point in mind debates me and remind me when we engage and I look forward for your comeback on this. But now, I'm going to go to Florence Gaub to give her four minutes.

Florence Gaub: Thank you, you know, I started out as a as a regular Middle East analyst and I've come since to the conclusion that in order to solve some of these protracted problems we need to take a longer view. Now disclosure, I think that in general of all problems. So Europeans too should, I think, take the longer view. The problem is that with this repetitive short-termism, we will not get to actually a better future and I think that's actually the real question that we're asking here, but future I don't mean 2021, I really mean 2030 and beyond. And the question is, you know, we're looking at geopolitics, but can you actually have a geopolitical role if your domestic house isn't in order, and I don't think so. You already see those states in the region, whose domestic houses under better control, they play a geopolitical role and others that don't have their domestic housing order, they don't. So, what is the future? Quite simply put it's a combination of things you control and things you don't control. It's a very important point to make because of this whole 'you can't predict the future, etc', but the fact is that there's a risk important responsibility for everybody to contribute to it now what is under the control of people in the region. I see a number of issues, firstly under the control of decision makers, the first is of course delayed reforms. So of course, you know, a lot of them are known but let's just say those while we're rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic if you don't mind me saying, so i.e. discussing, you know, things are around the corner, we're heading straight towards climate change. As we know, the region will be hit the hardest, the hardest hit region in the world when it comes to climate change, so by 2030, will feel the effects of two to three even four degrees hotter in places and the region does absolutely zero, *zero*, to combat it, we have no climate proofing. Do you know how much

solar power, how much of the energy mix is drawn from solar power in the region? Just take a guess in your head? 0.3%. So the entire region produces more energy than itself and Europe could use in a single day, but it doesn't rely on it. So that just shows you that the entire mindset, I think, is quite backward looking. Of course, by 2030, we have 83 new citizens in the region, so younger people are growing etc. So then these reforms need to be undertaken because while you're busy re-arranging of, you know, putting a band-aid on a major issue such as economic reform in old industrial systems, it's a very 2010 mindset, you are heading towards an iceberg. These are of course just the decision makers' decision, so climate change, economic reform, solve the conflicts that stop you from actually engaging in the future. But of course, there is the population as well and I think this is something that people, you know, the so-called 'Arab street' as some western colonists call it, it's not like people in the region have no voice and we've seen that repeatedly, not just in 2011 but for the last three years demonstrations and riots have gone up. So the question is also, what choices will Arab citizens make? Will they emigrate? Will they continue to demonstrate? Will they perhaps turn to even more violent methods? I think these are really important questions we have just started a survey amongst Arab youth in Libya, Palestine and Morocco to find out exactly how we can get to a more productive future.

Raghida Dergham: Oh good, so is there similarity? Did you have...

Florence Gaub: Results are coming in January.

Raghida Dergham: In January, okay we look forward to that. I don't know about the word 'Arab street' a lot of people in this region object to it but there's also an objection to the use of the word 'Arab Spring' for example, and as far as the point that you made about immigrating, Arab citizens immigrating, look at what's happening in this country in Lebanon, you know, yeah the young people the talented people are being driven out, and it's as part of a policy by some, I'm sure Lina will tell us a little bit more about it later. And as far as the energy, climate change, and what this region is doing, I guess Karen Young will know much more than I do about this matter. Karen Young, you don't have to address it now, but keep that in thoughts in mind. Take your four minutes first and then we will look at the other points that came through the presentation so far. Karen Young, four minutes to you please.

Karen Young: Thank you Raghida, it's really great to be part of your Beirut Institute series, congratulations on really a fantastic pivot this year, as an example to us all of how to make lemonade when life gives you lemons. And I really commend you for what you've been doing.

Let me speak on some of the points that have already been mentioned, particularly kind of looping back to what Ambassador Tatiana had to say, you know, she was calling for more of a stability through great power balancing, but I don't think that's what we are

going to get, even if we wanted it right? So I wanted to focus on four externalities, things that are out of the control. Florence mentioned choices, right? But I'm talking about things of which we have very little control, very little choice over, and how that will influence stability in the Middle East as a region and the actions of external powers. So first energy markets as you say, what we know that's happening is that the oil producers inside of the region are looking at a future in which their product is plateauing in demand, certainly by 2030 - 2035. And so, if you know your revenue stream has, you know, a flattening and perhaps an end cycle, that will influence your behavior tremendously. And the only thing right now driving oil prices higher is political crisis, right? It's going to be attacks on tankers in the Bab Al-Mandab, which we saw this week, it's going to be attacks on oil facilities inside the Kingdom in Saudi Arabia which we saw in the last year, and so it's not about supply, right? It's about political action, terrorist action.

The second externality or constraint is really, you know, related to that revenue streams and the fiscal decisions that states have to make, and this also relates to Florence's comment on the reforms necessary. And the future is, particularly for oil exporters, that they will be making less money, and so they have to spend less, and that creates political consequences, right? That means that citizens have now a very clear idea of that the state will not be able to provide for them in the ways that it did in the past, and so there's going to be some sort of reaction to that. Does that mean protest in the streets? Not necessarily, but it means new politics, it means new business interest groups, it means new mobilization and behavior and reactions.

The third is about, of course, the pandemic and the way that we will see the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic differentiating, particularly across the MENA region, so recovery will be different for oil importers versus oil exporters. It's actually slightly better in terms of a percentage of GDP rebound for oil importers in 2021 but you're starting from a low base, you're starting in a place where jobs are still, you know, the main issue for young people, that's not going to get easier. The kinds of stimulus and support that oil importing governments have been able to offer to citizens has been quite poor, even in a case like Egypt, we're not seeing a real effort to provide support to small and medium-sized enterprises and get them kind of into the system and support in oil exporters. It's pretty much the same thing, it's basically been providing liquidity to banks and to state-related enterprises. So that recovery is going to be tough and it's certainly going to be particularly hard in the way we think of oil exporters providing financial intervention and support to importers in the region. So the kind of lifelines that Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been able to provide to Lebanon in the past to Egypt, to Libya, perhaps and then broader to Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Yemen are all under stress.

And then the fourth point is domestic politics, right? The externalities in what happens in the US in terms of pressure on the US-Saudi bilateral relationship will make it very very hard for cooperation, particularly on the Iran issue. That relationship needs to be grounded, and communications need to be really expanded and be very very clear early

on so that cooperation can happen because the binding administration will not achieve its goals in a new JCPOA or even further negotiations on missile issues unless Saudi Arabia and the UAE and gulf states are engaged and at the table.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Karen Young. Okay, so let me go back to Tatiana Gfoeller, let's take a look at your notion that they need to talk about it and they can fix it, talking about China and Russia and the United States. Take a look at what they're doing in this part of the world, look at what Russia is doing in for example in Syria, and what China has been aiming to do with Iran with the pact that Iran is very happy about to play that, you know, Chinese-American card, so how do you figure we are going to get from one place to another Tatiana Gfoeller, given that I don't think that President-elect Biden will depart completely from the policy that president Donald Trump pursued with China, he would depart on the policy of Iran and I want to get into that a little more. So how do you propose things happen Tatiana, what would make it click between China and the US right now so that there will be that collaboration that you're talking about?

Tatiana Gfoeller: Well, you know, diplomacy is all about quid pro quo, it's not about good sentiments or, you know, clapping each other on the back. It's about what do you want that I can give you and what do I get in exchange, that's the bottom line of diplomacy. So for the past few years, I think that we, the United States, have been making grave mistakes because we have been slapping sanctions on countries, on individuals, particularly I'm thinking about Russia and the Ukraine situation, and we haven't been giving anything in return. I mean we haven't said to Russia 'okay, withdraw from Crimea, and we'll give you this.' No, it's always been holier than thou, you know, 'the right thing to do is withdraw from Crimea and then maybe we'll lift the sanction', but I heard earlier in our discussion, you know, maybe where, you know, Iran will stop meddling in the Middle East but first it needs to get all of these advantages. Well that's not how diplomacy works, or at least that's not how effective diplomacy works. Effective diplomacy is like I said earlier, you know, some sort of summit meeting or it could be not a summit meeting could be behind the scenes meeting, but it has to be I will give you this if you give me that. And then you have to stick to your word so with China, I'm not a china hand, I spent all of my career in the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. So I cannot tell you specifically what China would want from US that would be effective, that would have to be a China hand, but I can tell you about Russia, you know, what the Russians want. And so, what we need to do is to start that discussion. I remember president, then running for president, Barack Obama, who said, I think very cogently, 'we need to talk to the bad guys, we can't freeze them out'.

Raghida Dergham: President Obama did talk to the bad guys from, as you said, from his point of view, and he did reach an agreement on the nuclear deal, the JCPOA, and deliberately with the Europeans with the Chinese, with the Russians, went ahead and made sure that to bow to the Iranian demand, that you do not touch the regional

dimension. That was a precondition by Iran that President Obama responded to and embraced, and then look what happened in this region, I think I'd like Lina Khatib to take this up. Do you think president-elect Biden is going to do exactly what President Obama did? He's been hinting that he's ready but then there's been walking back some quarters. What do you think of the two-phase approach as well, Lina Khatib? You're muted.

Lina Khatib: Yeah, well basically, I at the time when President Obama was in power, I said that negotiations over the nuclear deal should be tied to the big regional picture, the two issues are not separate. Of course, there was no appetite for that in Washington. Now, there is a lot of talk that president Biden would want to re-engage the United States and the JCPOA, I think that is a good thing, however it should not be a case of let's just restore the JCPOA to how it was and then talk about regional issues. I think the JCPOA should be the carrot dangled at the end of a process of negotiation. It should be a case of if Iran were to cooperate on regional issues and on the ballistic missile program, then we can re-engage when it comes to the JCPOA, that's what I think should happen. Now will it happen is another story, however, when we look at some of the figures who are nominated for positions in the Biden administration, I have a bit more hope than I did under Obama because some of these figures like Anthony Blinken are known for not being too shy when it comes to intervention, and here I'm not talking military intervention.

Raghida Dergham: But then you have Jake Sullivan, who was one of the people who held the secret talks, so it's not good example to say you know we don't know who are on the second level.

Lina Khatib: No but we have a combination whereas under Obama, I mean, it was very clear at the time, in my view, when Clinton was Secretary of State, she did not want to take any action that could jeopardize her chances of becoming President, and she played it safe accordingly. Right now, I don't think Anthony Blinken has that ambition, as far as I know, so I don't think, you know, he would be a shy Secretary of State. I think he's already acknowledged that the Obama administration made mistakes when it comes to the Syria file. Again, I'm not advocating for any military action, I think that would be the wrong path for Syria and for Iran but I think engaging in diplomacy, you need to have some muscle and I'm hoping that the Biden administration will have some muscle, but at the same time, yes as you said, some figures may be a bit more let's say accommodating. But that is also needed, in my view, so that the carrot on the, you know, at the end looks credible as well.

Raghida Dergham: I'm going to...Ellie Geranmayeh, I really want you to address a few things on this matter, but I need to go to Karen Young first because she is, you know, DC's based think-tank, and they know a lot about who's in and who's out. What do you hear Karen Young? What kind of administration are we going to have? The one that says

‘oh I’m sorry, *mia culpa*, we really made a mistake in Syria but that we really need to be practical’? It's that fear of revenge by Iran and the need to revenge from the administration of Donald Trump for what he's done to the JCPOA. What is happening there? Who is going to be in charge of what? Karen Young.

Karen Young: Well I mean I think Lina's point on sort of balancing of personalities and people's positionality towards Iran and the new administration is a good one, but you know, there are also so many of these externalities the things that are outside of the control of this incoming administration which I think will really determine whether they can achieve even a limited goal of, you know, re-entering the JCPOA, getting compliance from Iran, and then perhaps pursuing subsequent negotiations on the regional role. And, you know, I mentioned some of the domestic constraints in the US, I mean the Biden team will be consumed by COVID and the domestic recovery – that's going to be their number one priority. Foreign policy will take a back seat. The problem is in the first six months of 2021, you've got to set the stage for that potential negotiation, and that's where I see problems. It's in the price of oil which makes Saudi Arabia very very vulnerable and prone to lashing out, let's be honest, we cannot predict what Mohammed Bin Salman will do. He may come to power as king in this period and the and the kingdom is facing, you know, really an economic crisis. And he doesn't have that knowledge or that sense of comfort of US support, right? That's a vulnerability. And the second is also about domestic politics in Iran and I'd love to hear what Ellie has to say about this. We're running up into Iranian elections, Iranian citizens are not seeing economic relief, they're not seeing, you know, a way out. And so you know, these things don't fit together very well, they don't really lay the groundwork for the successful diplomacy that Tatiana is envisioning, right? I mean, you know, your domestic constraints are really going to underpin that. So for me, you know, what's quite worrying is that, you know, our first six months are a period in which kind of the, you know, the stars are not necessarily aligned for good diplomacy.

Raghida Dergham: I want to go to Ellie Geranmayeh, and then I'll go to Florence, I'm sure she has loads to say about all of these things but Ellie, yeah we you have elections in June in Iran they have elections that, you know, it's not clear who's really the great beneficiary from the Biden victory. But some argue that it will be the revolutionary guards because they will get the relief from the money and they will go on with the executing the foreign policy of Iran in the Arab geography and, you know, including the place where I'm sitting. But what about Iranians I mean, you know, what is the domestic situation? Do they want the continuation of the behavior of this regime because people in Iran went out on the streets and they said ‘pay attention to us, get out of Syria, get out of there supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, etc.’ Do you see any of this happening for the elections? Give us the picture.

Ellie Geranmayeh: Sure, right before I come to the domestic point, let me just respond to a couple of things that have been said and questions that have been posed to me as

well. Look I think on the Obama deal, I'll just say one thing, that we may be working from two different sets of facts because when you speak to Obama officials and European officials that were engaged with the run-up to the nuclear diplomacy, they all maintain that it was Israel and some GCC partners that insisted that the nuclear agreement that was being negotiated by UN Security Council members in Germany was not going to discuss regional issues because they wanted to be at the table when discussions were being had with Iran on the region.

Raghida Dergham: Ellie, sorry you have to permit me on this one because, you know, I'm somebody who was at the United Nations covering these things. It was never, I mean, they wanted to be at the table, but it was Iran and everyone, every historian tells you that Iran insisted, including Iranians, that they did not want this nuclear discussion to be about anything else but nuclear. They very clearly stipulated that there will not be a discussion of Iran's regional behavior. So it is not something that even the Iranians are hiding, I don't understand why you are you know laying it...

Ellie Geranmayeh: I don't know the facts that you've heard from the Iranian side, I'm just presenting the facts because there was criticism of how Obama and the Europeans handled the negotiations and I'm saying that this was a negotiation on an arms control agreement with Iran that was being led by the world's nuclear powers with Iran. And going to Ambassador Tatiana's point about diplomacy being about a quid pro quo that is implemented and confidence is built, well the JCPOA is an experience of failure in terms of diplomacy so far as Tehran is concerned. So the way that you want to actually get the Iranians to concede more and come to the negotiating table on other issues is to first implement a deal that was made at the UN Security Council level and enshrined at the UN Security Council level before you can pivot onto other issues. Now I think that this can be done in a very back-to-back process and actually what we've heard from president-elect Biden is that if Iran indeed doesn't come to the further talks then the US always has at its disposal US sanctions, unilateral sanctions, that have been proven much more effective than multinational sanctions going forward. And in terms of why would Iran entertain the idea of further talks, well it's because actually Iran also wants to get certain things from a quid pro quo whether that's from the United States in terms of further sanctions and relief and important access to the US dollar, or whether that's because Iran also needs to have a greater degree of regional stability in order to have a more operational domestic economic model going forward.

Raghida Dergham: Ellie, Ellie Geranmayeh, can I ask you just a very straightforward question? Do you think it's necessary for Iran to have paramilitary forces outside its own borders, reporting back to Tehran as a matter of stability? I mean do you agree with this very notion that it's the right of Iran to violate the sovereignty of other countries via these paramilitary forces? Is this something you support Ellie Geranmayeh?

Ellie Geranmayeh: No, it's not something I support but I think if we want to try and change that behavior, we have to try and understand why Iran views it as part of its security and defense architecture. Iran is a country that for the past two decades has had to live with US troops on very porous borders with Afghanistan and Iraq and Iran is in a region where in its view since the Iran war of the 1980s, it has essentially been in a state of maxim pressure campaigns from US sanctions policy and from the regional picture. So that's where I think if we want to make changes, we need to understand everybody's security needs within that.

And to your question about the domestic issues, yes my view, what has happened in Iran's domestic sphere is that as a direct consequence of the maxim pressure campaign and unprecedented sanctions on Iran, normal average Iranians are now thinking about bread and butter issues and making ends meet and what that means, I think, is that it's distracting away from pushing for major political change in the country, despite the fact that yes there have been many protests in the country, but we have not seen a sustained leadership movement either inside of the country or outside of the country that can sustain a direct opposition to the system. So what we are just seeing is that Iran's middle class is just getting poorer and poorer without having the ammunition to actually mobilize some sort of a political pushback against what's happening in terms of the political establishment in the country.

Raghida Dergham: Florence Gaub, you're watching this region, and so when you hear this discussion and obviously we are a bunch of quite highly opinionated women here. Each one of us has got a very strong point of view, when you're someone from Europe and I'm going to just, you know, hit on Europe now, it is crazy to think that the Europeans think that they have a big role to play. I mean I know three members, three countries are members of... or two countries are members of the Security Council, France and the UK, and Germany is part of the JCPOA. Do you really think that the Europeans are going to be able to broker the return, the swift, as Eddie calls it, the swift stabilization of the nuclear deal? Or do you have something that to say about what Ellie Geranmayeh has described in terms of the what is first and second in the two phases? I'd like to know your view on all of that.

Florence Gaub: The first thing is that, I think in general before I say something about this, I think that we are that we are having a discussion that's supposedly about the outlook of the region and we've spent now over 30 minutes talking about Iran, I think it's very telling about the mindset because none of us are thinking really about what is actually beyond the Iran deal, so is Iran between us and the future? Is that all there is? Because we've just come out of a year that has seen record demonstrations in Lebanon, even in Syria, in Egypt, in Algeria, everywhere and yet we seem to think that none of that is really important. But I'll get back to you, if you allow me later on. Now on Europe, I think Europeans are really at an important intersection in their own soul-searching and their geopolitical soul-searching. We are being squeezed on the left by Russia and on the

right by China, when it comes to our geopolitical approach, you know, when it comes to economics, Europeans always thought 'well, you know, for those Arab states that don't have the funds, we can always unconditionally get them to do what we want them to do because we have the money and they don't.' Now China is overtaking us and there is a different conditionality attached, I think a more attractive one than ours. And then on the other hand, when it comes to Russia, Russia uses military force, Europeans are not really into military force. So what options does that leave us? You might be talking about the JCPOA here, of course that was seen as the big success, the showcase of what European foreign policy can achieve and then it was swiftly shown that yeah without American support, European diplomacy is pretty much worth nothing. So if you go back into the Brussels bubble and you see all these conversations about strategic autonomy, sovereignty, military capabilities, etc...the way I see Europe is, you know, if the world geopolitics is a football game, we're on the bench at the moment and having to warm up and rethink how we want to run this game because we, I don't think, are not a decisive force in the middle eastern game.

Raghida Dergham: Yeah I totally agree with that and do you want to say something about, I know we did spend a lot of time on Iran but since Europe is also quite frightened of what Turkey is doing, shall we just go into the other direction and speak about Turkey?

Florence Gaub: Only easy topics today. It's part of the larger quagmire right? I think that as a collective, the 27 are struggling with what they want to do, what is it that they want to achieve. You know, as the 27, they always had these very long-term goals, you know, like human economic development etc... but then at member state level, it tends to fall into the discussion that we're having here. It's very what can I achieve this year and Ambassador Tatiana, she reflects in her remarks, it's obvious that diplomacy thinks, you know, next six months, this year, maybe the year after. So you can see now that this is breaking apart and what Macron is doing, you know, Macron's reception of President Sisi and so forth, a lot has been said about this being allegedly anti-Islamist. Frankly, I think it's just geopolitical politics. France feels that to counter Turkey also in Libya, it will have to be friends with Egypt. So we're back in this alliance game, you know, shifting your chessboard figures around and here EU as a collective is not active, it's really at the member state level. Now for Turkey again we are, I would say still on the bench in the football game because Turkey is a partner for the migration deal. But on every other matter it is on the other side of the game. So, you know, if you have these two together, it means that the Europeans really are, you know, 'hands up, there's nothing we can do really in this regard.' It's a difficult moment to be European.

Raghida Dergham: Yeah I guess this is very telling. It is a difficult moment to be European. Tatiana, I think the Russians are very nervous as well, they're very nervous about what's happening in Syria. I wrote my column last week partially about that and I thought that Syria is going to be probably the first victim of the Biden administration's

potential swift return into this two-phase approach. So I'm consistently of that point of view and I argued that, you know, to relieve, to let go of the leverage, the leverage which is this maximum pressure, which is sanctions is really a huge mistake because by the time it gets into the wrong hands, it is very dangerous and it will get into the wrong hands or the hands that it's meant to get to go to – that is the revolutionary guards. So the Russians are very nervous in Syria, they're very nervous about the relationship with Turkey, they don't trust Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and they probably are totally right not to. So now as someone who is watching that, and they're not very comfortable, you know, you would hear Dmitri Trenin the other day he was with us and he was saying, you know, a presidency of Trump, a second term for Trump is bad for us and so is the Biden presidency because then we have both the congress and administrations against us. So what is to do about a country like Turkey? If you want to talk with the Russians and the Chinese, you need to really address this issue, the Iranians and the Turks, and the leadership of both. Tatiana Gfoeller, have you got something on that?

Tatiana Gfoeller: Yes, I certainly do. I think that we, as Americans, tend to forget that countries have histories and in particular great empires have histories that they're extremely proud of and that they have a really hard time letting go of. Now, the United Kingdom is maybe an example that proves the rule because they really have given up basically on being an empire. But I believe that Erdogan is very busy trying to recreate the Ottoman Empire. I don't know if you are aware but when he built his palatial residence in Ankara, he actually created houses for each Muslim country in the world situated around his own house, now that tells me a lot of the psychology of the gentleman. He sees himself as the Ottoman Sultan, and he wants to recreate a united Muslim empire. The same with Russia...

Raghida Dergham: The Sunni Muslim empire, versus the Iranian empire. This is what, you know, the rise of that imposing religion on state is taking place right under our eyes so, it's the project brotherhood...

Tatiana Gfoeller: Yeah and I think that... I actually worked at the NATO on the international staff for three years and there was a time when Turkey truly wanted to join Europe, to be a good constructive member of NATO, that time has gone by. At least as far as Erdogan is concerned, he is a rogue member of NATO, he knows he'll never become a member of the EU, and his focus is truly on recreating the Ottoman Empire. Newt Gingrich very famously said that Riga, the capital of Latvia is a suburb of St Petersburg. He's right, it is a suburb of St Petersburg. And so, to your point that Russia is very scared, I think that we in the United States tend to believe what we want to believe and not necessarily the facts, we want to believe that Russia is very scared when in fact Russia has held its hand on a number of things that it could do to truly scare us, because right now the Baltic states basically have switched from being suburbs of St. Petersburg to being suburbs of Berlin. But they're still closer to St. Petersburg than to Berlin, so if Russia were truly angry, it could just roll into Riga tomorrow.

Raghida Dergham: Okay, but I've heard, speaking to Russians these days, that they really feel surrounded, totally surrounded. They feel very weak on multiple levels, including in their relationship with Iran, never mind only with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. But I want to go to Karen Young. Karen Young, how about the sanctions that were imposed on Turkey? Because of the s400, the Russian s400. What do you expect that this will be? More of that? Or what's the value of this in the congress?

Karen Young: Yeah, I think with the new administration and new congress coming in January, we will see a toughening on a number of bilateral relationships that the United States has in both the MENA region and beyond. And so a toughening in the US Saudi relationship, the toughening against Turkey, and you know, the use of sanctions that was, you know, popularized under Trump will continue. And so, I think this has been found to be a very effective sort of tool and I believe the Biden administration will continue to use it. This kind of portrayal of where Turkey goes and its aspirations for the region, I mean this is anybody's guess but certainly it's moving more into an autocratic tendency, but this is true as, you know, many others have mentioned in other places as well. And so you know, we're not getting to a stability that's anchored by bipolar forces, we're getting into a kind of system that has a lot of these little moving pieces, these bilateral engagements, these tit-for-tat, quid pro quo, whatever you want to call it, that make the system as a whole less stable. And so, there will be odd trade-offs and you know you're going to see players like France wanting to have role and wanting to feel significant and being able to do so whether it's through weapon sales or it's through, you know, these kind of convenient alliances in acting somewhat as proxies in the region. I think that kind of behavior by all kinds of states will continue.

Raghid Dergham: Yeah but Florence, quite quickly on France. France is trying to play a role sometimes, every now and then President Macron says well I can be the broker. He did say that in the past between President Trump and President Rouhani and that just ran into a glass door. Now he's trying to do something on Lebanon, he threatened with the idea of sanctions if people don't deliver, if the politicians don't deliver, and he backtracked. Is that something that can help France exercise a particularly special kind of policy? What do you know about what he's trying to do and if he's going to be able to do it? And combine with this answer please your 30 minutes closure, or one minute closing statement. 30 seconds.

Florence Gaub: 30 minutes, are you sure? I don't know if you saw the politico piece by Rym Momtaz calling Macron think-tanker in chief. She was quite severe with him, she drew a balance sheet of his foreign policy achievements. I think that's always a bit unfair as Ambassador Tatiana will confirm that foreign policy is of course a difficult one and you can start a lot of initiatives and you will not get results. But the fact is that he is the great disrupter, so he sees himself as a great disrupter not just in foreign policy, also at home. So he will continue to shock with initiatives that make people go 'whoa', but they

don't necessarily lead to results. Now interestingly, I think the French public doesn't mind so much. I think for the feeling of having a geopolitical impact, it's enough to make these proposals in the spirit of disruption and perhaps not necessarily so much to have the results. I'm not saying he doesn't want them, but I think for his political standing at home, other things will matter more. But you can expect from him, for the next year certainly more, disruptive things.

As my closing remarks, I want to say something about Biden. If I were in the Biden administration, I would not just take return to the JCPOA, because it's important for Biden to not just be Obama 2.0. And so, he will have to leave his imprint on a lot of these foreign policy issues. If I were him, I would take the JCPOA and at least to give it a Biden (?) and renegotiate. Now that opens the door for what you also just said earlier for the regional dimension. So, if they are clever, they use that opportunity because it's also in the interest of Biden.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Florence, well stay with us, of course, till the very end. Lina take a look at the potential of Macron succeeding in Lebanon and you have been writing, preparing or doing a piece or study with Hezbollah, and of course we have corruptors in chief in Lebanon, all the political ruling class, they are corrupt as it comes. So, it's not only Hezbollah, but Hezbollah is at the forefront of the battle for Lebanon. Lina, say what you want on this issue and then you have your 30 seconds – not minutes.

Lina Khatib: Personally, I'm very critical of President Macron and what he's doing in Lebanon. It seems to me that he simply does not want the status quo to change, he's doing his best if anything to preserve it. That disturbs me. And the partnership, the legion, given to president Sissi is also perhaps a step too far. I worry about the good old stability over democracy basically formula that to me Macron seems to be adopting.

Just to close I want to say that the s400 sanctions imposed on Turkey are mainly about Russia really, not about Turkey. The United States wants to send a message to Russia that this behavior will come with implications. And so, I see in the Biden administration a bit of a change towards Russia, which I think is needed. Let's hope that this can be not just used as Florence was saying regarding the JCPOA negotiations, but also hopefully regarding the issue of Syria.

I think if we are to see US – Russian engagement on Syria this is the only thing that would drive this conflict to a resolution, it would go a long way towards containing Iran's role in the region and there is definitely an opportunity there.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Lina Khatib. I'm going to go to Ellie Geranmayeh and you've, you know, obviously there's several of us who are not holding

the same views as you. I want to give you the chance to get back at us and do your 30 seconds after, you know, a total of one minute to you please and I've enjoyed the debates.

Ellie Geranmayeh: Look, I think that the issue of renegotiating the JCPOA has already been put there to rest the Biden transition team has already come out with several statements to say they are interested in rejoining the deal and pivoting onto follow-up talks rather than renegotiating the Iranians have also said renegotiations is out of out of the question you can't buy a house twice on the same price. So it's not going to happen. So I think the people in the region need to look at ways to constructively influence the follow-up phase of these talks which are going to include regional de-escalation tracks and to prepare their own proposals for what concretely they want in terms of behavioral change for Iran and what will be the quid pro quo. And finally, I would say the idea that Iran is on the verge of collapse and the establishment is about to crumble, it's just not supported by the economic data if you look at what the world bank is saying, what the IMF is saying, under the most unprecedented sanctions Iran is looking at a two percent growth for next year. So if this is even under covert conditions. So I would say it's time for the regional powers to come together and talk out their differences rather than waiting for the global powers to resolve their differences.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Ellie Geranmayeh. Tatiana, really 20 seconds, because I'm going to lose the electricity that's why 20 seconds. Just leave me with thought.

Tatiana Gfoeller: Okay, I'm going to go politically incorrect and very negative. There are failed states out there and while we had the unipolar world, the United States insisted that we keep these states together even though, say in Africa and in parts of the Middle East, these states have borders that were created by colonial powers that make absolutely no sense. And as the unipolar world has disappeared, we have these failed states falling into spheres of influence of other great powers and that's inevitable.

Raghida Dergham: Thank you very much Tatiana Gfoeller, Karen Young, if the electricity goes off this stay and I'm coming back. But go for it your 30 seconds please.

Karen Young: Well, I just will say thank you for having us and I think the future is one in which the big players become less relevant and consumed in their own domestic instabilities. And that the regional players and powers that want to have influence, the middle powers so to speak, are what's going to be rising and determining stability globally, but particularly in MENA, in the decade to come. So multilateralism is our only hope.

Raghida Dergham: I thank you for this very special finale of 2020 (before we go to 2021). 111 great delegates like you spoke from 31 countries, 27 e-policy circles. Meet us next year, God willing. Have a wonderful ... [electricity cut off]

