**Beirut Institute e-Policy Summit Circle 33**

Raghida Dergham with esteemed guests Stephanie Williams, Irina Zvyagelskaya, Elham Saudi, and Claudia Gazzini.

**Raghida Dergham:** Well, good afternoon, it seems to all the participants in this E policy Circle. We are number 33. And good afternoon because everyone is either in Europe or close by. I have a couple of wonderful special things to announce this time. Because I always celebrate it when I have an all-women cast, I am keen on highlighting the fact that women policymakers are to be celebrated because they don't get the chance to be there as often as they should be. So, I want to make sure to say good afternoon to my distinguished participants. But before that, I want to announce another special thing that is exciting for us at Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi. Both His Royal Highness Prince Turki Al Faisal and I, we are the co-chairs of the Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi, and we are proud to announce the anniversary of the e-Policy Circles is on May 5th. And that has started because we have been forced to go from the real meeting Summit in Abu Dhabi to the virtual get-togethers with our distinguished family. So, we are very proud to announce that marking this anniversary will be our distinguished guest, and that is the president of Iraq. Our friend, President Barham Salih. He will be there on his own, I will have a one-on-one conversation with him. But there will be a special input by His Royal Highness, the co-chair, and also by our friend, a dear friend of Beirut Institute, who has always been with us since our first Summit in 2015, and that is General David Petraeus. Please join us on May 5th for this really wonderful celebration, double celebration, our anniversary and hosting President Barham Salih. And I am going to now greet, as I said, good afternoon with enthusiasm to Gironde in France, I hope I said that right, Stephanie Williams, welcome to the e-Policy Circle number 33. And from Moscow Irina Zvyagelskaya. I’m trying not to make a mistake this time, Irina. Thank you for joining us, again, because you've been our guest a couple of times at the Summit in Abu Dhabi, and this is the second time you join us here in the virtual setting. From London, I have Elham Saudi. Good afternoon Elham, welcome. We always are excited when you have such brilliant young people of your caliber, so thank you for being with us. And from Rome, the beautiful Rome, Claudia Gazzini. Welcome and I thank you for accepting this invitation. You would think that this is going to be Libya-focused only, but this is a geopolitical conversation, a global one, as always. And as always, we start with four minutes allocated to each of my guests. And I’ll take off my glasses to rest my eyes in this case, while I give the floor to Stephanie Williams. Stephanie Williams, welcome. And thank you for joining us. The flooris yours.

**Stephanie Williams:** Thank you. Thank you so much, Raghida, for that warm welcome. And it's a great opportunity to participate in this all-women panel on Libya, the region, and I'm really looking forward to the discussion. So, look, I want to be very forward looking on the situation, particularly in Libya today. And to say that I believe that there is hope in Libya now, and that for the first time in many years, Libyans are marking the holy month of Ramadan in relative peace. The guns are silent, there is a national unity government for the first time in seven years, and there is genuine prospect of national elections on the 24th of December of this year. So those are very positive, you know, indications. But this is also not the time for complacency. And the situation is very fragile. And what I would like to suggest here is I think that there are things that can be done on the international, the regional and the national level, to sustain that momentum, and to make sure that the peace, the relative calm that Libya enjoys now is sustained.And that there is you know, indeed movement, particularly on the roadmap that was charted by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, created through the UN facilitated comprehensive process. And that roadmap set out, you know, that executive that we have now, and the elections date. But what needs to happen first on, you know, we have the international level where if you contrast the situation now internationally with the situation, let's say just two years ago, where the international scene was characterized by dysfunction and disorder, particularly on the Libya file – and this followed, you know, the April 4attack on Libya, where the Security Council became essentially mute and unable to produce even a simple statement on the unraveling of the situation, Libya-we now have the re-emergence of an international consensus on Libya, this is good. The international community has embraced the work of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, has embraced the national election state, it has also come together to welcome the new interim unified government. Most recently, we've seen the UN Security Council resolution 2570, which was passed on Friday, which, you know, I think lays out very clearly, you know, what needs to happen in terms of particularly maintenance of the ceasefire, the deployment of the ceasefire monitoring team, the need for foreign forces and mercenaries to depart the country, and what it is that the national authorities need to do. Because, you know, there are two parties here. So, on the national side, you have various institutions that need to create the conditions for the national elections, and they too, cannot become complacent. And at the same time, you have this new, it's an interim executive authority, it needs to be put into some kind of a chastity belt, let's put it that way. Let's use that term with regard to its expenditures, its ambitions, its appetites, it needs to understand that it signed a contract with the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, and the Libyan people, by extension, to support the election state, and to do very basic things in advance of the elections, which are to deliver services and, you know, to work on national reconciliation and to unify the institutions. The other national authorities, the Parliament and the Higher State Council, these two institutions, also need to do their part. Both institutions have passed their expiration date. It is time for elections in Libya. The Libyan people recognize it, and these institutions need to produce that. On the regional level, we've seen, I think, very good welcoming of the new government, the first official dignitary was from Tunis, the President of Tunis. And we've seen now a stream of visits from Egypt to Tripoli, including a visit just yesterday by the Egyptian Prime Minister with a large delegation. The Egyptians are talking about reopening their embassy in in Tripoli. On the negative side, and this is the indication of why the fragile situation in Libya can spill over to the neighbors, we saw the events in Chad over the last 48 plus hours. And this, you know, it seems, the information is still emerging, but it seems to be connected to mercenary forces that were brought from Chad into Libya to fight on one side of this conflict, who were equipped by one or more of the foreign supporters of Mr. Haftar, and now this has had a direct impact on one of the Libya's neighbors. So, the regional dynamic remains also quite fragile and needs to be, this is, this is all a garden, which needs to be tended at every level, international, regional and national.

**Raghida Dergham:** Very good. Thank you very much Stephanie Williams. This is a wonderful opening for a very thorough discussion in a bit. But now I will give the four minutes to Irina Zvyagelskaya. Sorry, Irina. I will get it one day. Go ahead Irina. Four minutes to you please.

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** Thank you. Thank you Raghida. It's a great pleasure to be here. It's always very fascinating discussion and I'm really grateful for the invitation. And so as far as Libya is concerned, I believe that probably, as far as Russia sees the developments in Libya, it sees it as positive. The formation of the national unity government is positive. The revival of multilateral institutions and multilateral efforts is very positive. And Russia really has always wanted to be a part of international efforts. And the fact that the there is a hope for stabilization, although fragile, and here I agree with Stephanie, it's also a positive step in comparison to what was a couple of years ago. But still, there are concerns, of course, first of all, these concerns are linked to the fact that the eastern part of Libya is not, as some people believe, is not properly represented in the government and they might be, I will say, might feel marginalized to a certain extent. Then we do understand that the government lacks military instruments. And we do understand that there are a lot of grey zones still left, where there are only tribes, or field commanders, and actually no one has any control over these zones. But at the same time, I would like to say that the outside powers, especially European powers, they proved to be very reliable this time because they really did whatever they could to produce a settlement. As far as some regional powers, as far as they are concerned, you know, the situation, I believe, was a little bit different, because Turkey, for example, was very much interested in keeping the government in Tripoli only because it signed a well-known agreement with the government on the delination of sea waters, which was not, in fact, very favorable for Paris or for Italy. But this, I would say, the interest in Libya, the interest of different powers, they do not correspond with each other. And we should take it in consideration, speaking about the future of Libya, and what can be done by each side, and how each side sees its role in Libya.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you,Irina. We will definitely have a lot to discuss when it becomes when we listen to the others, because you both, you and Stephanie, have laid out the regional, the international, the local, and the national, that is to say, and there are so many different points of views and sometimes finger pointing. So, we will engage in a dynamic discussion once we hear from the other two guests. And I will go to the Libyan amongst Elham Saudi, please you have four minutes, please.

**Elham Saudi:** Thank you so much. Thanks for hosting me. And also, thanks for referencing me as young. It's nice to hear. I don't hear that often these days. I'd like to bring a slightly different perspective to this. I am not a policy maker. I'm a human rights lawyer. And so, my perspective is slightly different on these things. But I think it is absolutely vital when we're thinking about transitions and when we're thinking about, you know, mapping the future that is underpinned in key principles of transitional justice and human rights. Which brings me to the question, actually, that was set in this panel, which is who authors the future? And I thought the framing of that question was really good and really important to think about. It's almost like the dream transitional justice module question on an exam that you would get, right? And I think if we take a moment about what they look like, the composition of who authors the future, because at the moment, when we think about that, we think about it from the perspective of getting a settlement and getting a piece, but without really thinking about the longevity of that settlement or the longevity of that piece. And for that to be something that is sustainable, it needs to be grounded in accountability, and it needs to be grounded in principles of the rule of law. And I think that's where there is a conversation to be had about whether that's what we have in Libya today or not. There's a lot of examples that we can give, but I won't be able to touch on those in the time allotted, but hopefully we will have the conversation. But I think fundamentals of accountability are vital. So, I want to spend a minute just thinking about what that term means. Because there's accountability, capital A, which is what we all think of in terms of trials or cases or you know, that kind of accountability, but there's a, there's an equally important lower case a which is about building trust, that there are mechanisms or there are procedures that you can trust the system because you can question the system, or you can hold it to account. And that means what? That means a process that is formulated in due procedure and in due process. And I think there, it becomes a bit more about the difficult questions as opposed to the pragmatic solutions. And what I mean by that is when we're looking at something like the Libyan peace process, or indeed what we're looking at now with the government, that there's no clear, for example, terms of reference of how things will work. There is no clear process for now to engage with this government to hold it to account, we the LPDF members, myself, one of them, we selected, well, I didn't select this body, but it was selected collectively from the LPDF. But there's no way to really hold them to account. There's no mechanism for us to bring them back to say to them, where have you got to with the roadmap? Where are we with the elections? And I think that's the kind of accountability that builds trust. And that's the kind of accountability that builds states. Because I know when you're living in a state that's functioning, that if something goes wrong, I know where to go to complain. But in Libya, we don't have that. And so, I think that is where the fight for the rule of law happens. And unfortunately, the international actors in the geopolitics have worked significantly to undermine that and not establish that. So, if we're looking at the role of the geopolitics in this, what we've seen are the countries involved, with all due respect to my fellow panelists, the countries involved in Libya do not have the best records on human rights, right? We're talking Egypt, we're talking UAE, we're talking Russia, we're talking Turkey. So, none of them are sort of phenomenal examples of human rights and citizen rights. And so, I think we need to be really thinking about, when we're thinking about who authors Libya's future, and in the context of the rule of law, our partners and our friends in the kind of region and internationally are vital. And we're seeing that, we're seeing that already in the way the laws are changing in Libya to really curtail freedoms, and especially on civil society and the press. That has happened under the previous government, that was backed by the internationals. It has not been repealed by this government, despite the fact that it's required by them in the roadmap to facilitate the work of civil society and to ease the way for elections through enshrining certain rights. And so, I think that lowercase a is vital for these next few months to get us to an election. And the less our international friends meddle in that process, the better, because they are not the best models for it.

**Raghida Dergham:** Thank you Elham Saudi. I will now go to Claudia. Claudia Gazzini, kindly four minutes to you. And then we engage in a conversation of for all of us. Please, Claudia.

**Claudia Gazzini**: Sure. Thank you very much. So, the speakers before me even talk you through the political developments that have occurred this far, international developments and internal in terms of, you know, human rights and the need for accountability. It's worth focusing a bit on the conundrum of the security sector in Libya, because really, yes, we have a unity government. From my point of view, this government does represent all of Libya in the sense that it has brought in people from different parts of the country. But in the security sector, we're still seeing a complete dominance of foreign actors, in the sense that Libya is still a country where you have Turkish military presence, Turkish military buildup in at least two military bases in the west of the country. You have a Russian, pro Russia, pro-Moscow Wagner presence in at least two, if not three, military bases in the center itself of the country. You had until recently, presumably, Emirati presence in at least one military base in the east of the country and one in the center of the country. You have foreign forces, mercenary forces, from a host of countries. Syrian fighters that are on both sides of the divide in Libya, with the Tripoli government, and with the Haftar led military authorities. You have Sudanese fighters numbering up to 10,000, if not more, guns for hire guarding military installations in the country. You have Chadian opposition forces also on both sides of the military divide. So, it's a very internationally dominated security sector scene. As Stephanie has said, one of the pillars of this transition phase, one of the main agreements that was sealed in the ceasefire agreement signed last October, was the necessity to have these foreign forces depart from Libya. But we really haven't seen any movement on that front. We've seen actually more build up by these foreign actors in their respective military bases. And we haven't seen much legwork beyond just rhetoric. We hear statements from the U.S. saying, ‘oh, foreign voices need to go’, and the subtext of that is Wagner. Forces need to go because that's the main concern in Washington are these Wagner forces. We, you know, we hear the French echoing similar statements in the UN Security Council. But when you know the French concern is primarily the Turks, so ‘the Turks need to go’. That's a subtext, when they say that these foreign forces need to go. There are very different issues that need, it's like apples, oranges, pears and bananas in the sense that every set of foreign actors presumably, from my point of view, needs a separate set of negotiations, in the sense that Turkish forces are directly responded to the Turkish Government, Wagner forces are indirectly linked to Moscow, but very much take commands and orders from Moscow. So, the departure of these forces implies a negotiation with their respective governments. The same cannot be said for the Syrians and the Chadian mercenaries, and the Sudanese. The Sudanese have a peace process to go back to, they are hedging their bets on the Juba agreement, and about a third of the Sudanese forces appear to voluntarily want to withdraw and are hedging their bets on that peace process. This leaves us within the Chadian forces. This is very different. We have about 2,000 opposition fighters present in Libya, they do not have a peace process to go to, at least they didn't have a peace process to go back to. And there was never much thinking by the internationals, even by the UN mission about accompanying or trying to force a dialogue between these opposition forces and the Déby

government, the Déby government was always saying *net*, no, no dialogue. And the result of this is this incursion that we saw yesterday, where you have one armed group that, in the past two years of the Libyan war, sided with the forces of General Haftar. Was very well armed by them, possibly also through equipment brought in by the Gulf countries, those very countries that are allied with Idris Déby, with Haftar. And thanks to this equipment, launched a raid that led to the death of Idris Déby. So, there's always unintended consequences to this heavily internationalized environment in Libya’s security sector. And I think it will be key to unblock this Gordian knot.

**Raghida Dergham:** Listening to you, I feel that it is practically impossible to unlock from the way you have laid before us all these different players, whether they are mercenaries, whether they are operating upon the direct dictate of a government. I want to ask Stephanie Williams to step in and tell me why on earth were you so optimistic saying, ‘Oh, this is good stuff that's going on in Libya’? Although you did speak of the fragility, to use your word, of what's going on? But yeah, what is the celebration of success in Libya Stephanie Williams?

**Stephanie Williams:** Well, look, I guess I take it from it's a very personal viewpoint, and that, you know, two years ago, today, I was I was sitting in Tripoli, and Tripoli was being bombed. And hundreds of thousands of people, you know, were on the move. They were leaving, they were being forced to leave their homes in South Tripoli, or into what was already a crowded, very crowded, inner city inside Tripoli. We had health clinics that were being bombed, we had ambulances that were being bombed. So, the situation, so I can look at it now and I and I, you know, as I extended my Ramadan greetings to many of my Libyan friends, you know, they came back to me and said, ‘Wow, it's, it's calm now. And we can mark this month, you know, with, you know, some feeling of serenity. So, I think we always have to take that into perspective, as well as the fact that this is ten years of, you know, since the revolution, of chaos and fracturing and conflict, and that this is not going, look, this is not going to be solved in one week, two months, or even eight months. This is a sustained effort that the momentum must be kept.

**Raghida Dergham:** But let me just ask you, let me push you on this one, Stephanie Williams. Yeah, I absolutely appreciate what you're saying. For people like the Libyan people who have endured so much, a month of peaceful transition to even the unknown is probably counted as a blessing, and Ramadan Kareem to all those in Libya and beyond. My question, is that, okay, so I, I'm not taking away from the success of your good efforts, and I'm very glad a woman sees the success, but, you know, have you gotten in your own mind the roadmap for the, you know, international players as Claudia laid it out? In the sense that, is it not, I mean, we haven't heard of having a roadmap for the departure of either the mercenaries or those who have been operating on behalf of governments. Have you just shoved this aside because that's not attainable now?

**Stephanie Williams:** Not at all. Here's where I think the process, this current process, differs from previous processes in Libya. So, and this goes back to the Berlin Conference. January 2020, in the height of conflict, there was a lot of skepticism, ‘oh, this is just, you know, another useless international meeting’. What the Berlin process set into motion internationally was a lattice and an international infrastructure to come in, and to partner with the Libyan tracks. So, there are three Libyan tracks and there is an overarching international humanitarian law and human rights track, which we can talk about in relation to I think, the very important points that Elham was making. But the important thing to say here is that the international community does not get, you know, does not get a pass here. They are necessarily involved in the process and have been since January 20, with a variety of follow up mechanisms, working level groups, working groups, which intersect directly with the Libyan tracks, as well as official senior meetings every month. And so, this involves the countries, this directly implicates the countries that have intervened in the conflict to be part of the solution.

**Raghida Dergham:** Alright. You know, Irina, I want to get back to you, because I want to discuss these points with you. But first, I want to go with your permission, to Elham Saudi. Elham Saudi, what do you have to say about this? I mean, do you think there is hope for an international understanding on the departure? I mean, like, you know, Turkey is not there just transitionally if it has military basis. I think, I think maybe you want to discuss whether the Americans really care less, or whether the Russians are coming into really, the Wagners in the way that the Americans see it, that they're coming in to expand the regional presence. Address the issues, if you don't mind that again, that Claudia laid out to us, from the Chadian, to the Sudanese, to the Syrians, to the Russians, to the Turkish, etc, etc. Go ahead Elham Saudi.

**Elham Saudi:** I think, as you'll get to hear me speak and get to know me, you'll find that in some ways, I'm quite single-track person, right? So, for me, this comes down again, to accountability, there has been utter impunity for these international actors. They have reached Security Council resolution, after Security Council resolution in terms of arms embargoes, in terms of being physically present there. My feelings about Turkey aside, it is potentially the only one whose presence is quasi-legal, because they have an agreement with the Libyan states. And so, putting that aside, I think there is zero accountability for international actors, there is a Berlin Process, which is intended to facilitate their exit, which has not succeeded on that front. I think the model of having working groups in the Berlin Process is interesting, but I'm not sure it's the most effective for one reason is that it compartmentalizes human rights and IHL into its own truck, and that is problematic. For that to have, for those wheels to move, and for the accountability wheels to move, you need those themes to be mainstreamed into all the other tracks. We have a security track that is absolutely sealed off from civil society, from oversight, from human rights, from anything. And that's the track that's charged with removing these players from Libya, right? But there's no human rights know how involved in that process. And I think that, for me is a problem. This sort of multitrack process is efficient, it's pragmatic, but it's not actually implementing the UN's own mandate to mainstream human rights into these processes that are not mainstream. And if we had a process where we could hold these international actors to account-

**Raghida Dergham:** But what is the process? What is the process you’re talking about Elham Saudi?

**Elham Saudi:** The Berlin Process?

**Raghida Dergham:** No, what is that process of accountability to countries so powerful who are looking after their, from their point of view, national interests as manifested themselves in Libya? What is that process?

**Elham Saudi:** Oh,that's an entirely different debate about the fundamental infrastructure of the Security Council of the UN, which I don't think we can reach within this structure. But we have a sanctions mechanism in Libya-

**Raghida Dergham:** No, I’m askingwhat are you saying?

**Elham Saudi:** What I’m saying is there are mechanisms that are not being utilized for the weaknesses of the Security Council. We have a Sanctions Committee at the Security Council that is designated to looking at people who reach UN Security Council resolutions in Libya. The same members of the Security Council sit on that Sanctions Committee, and so it is very unlikely to see Russia sanctioning the Wagner group through the Security Council's sanctions committee, for example. So that is the infrastructure of the UN that we're talking about, which is fundamentally flawed when it comes to crimes against humanity.

**Raghida Dergham:** So, my question to you, then, do you feel in light of that these facts that you stated, that Libya is doomed to this?

**Elham Saudi:** Absolutely not. I'm not an extremist in that sense. I'm an eternal optimist, which is why I went into human rights. I don't think you can go into human rights if you're a doom and gloom person, it's already too depressing. I think that for us, there are other mechanisms that organizations like mine use, which is looking at things like universal jurisdiction to pursue certain actors, which is you're pursuing them in other countries that have systems in place. You can look at encouraging other countries to use their sanctions mechanisms. For example, the U.S. has been quite a good figure in leading the front on pursuing certain actors with sanctions. You look to the EU to hopefully be a bit more brave in using their sanctions. And so, it's not a one-track system, but you have to be able to be one -rack minded in pursuing accountability to achieve it, because everything is working against you and the system.

**Raghida Dergham:** Irina Zvyagel- I’m having problems today-Irina Zvyagelskaya. Can you please tell me, do you think the day will come that Russia is going to say, ‘Hey, I'm out of Libya’? Or is there too many geopolitical considerations, not only via the U.S., but via Turkey, given that a complicated relationship emerged between Russia and Turkey in Syria, and but particular over Idlib. We don't know when they are on good terms the two presidents, at one point they are in the Astana Process, on another point that they are revenging, at least, as I hear it. Russia is revenging from Turkey and Libya. I want to give you the floor because many fingers have been pointed at Russia and its role in Libya. Irina, please.

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** Well, first of all, I would like to say that Libya is not the priority for Russia. It's an important country. I agree. Russia has a sort of, some geostrategic interests linked to the situation in Libya, and Russia also has economic interests. Unfortunately, they cannot be properly realized because of the lack of stability, because it's too risky. But still, there are Russian companies which want to somehow revive their relations with Libya, among them Tatneft, for example, oil company from Tatarstan, among them, Russian Railways was a company which also wants to resume its activities in Libya. But again, you know, it cannot be done just on the spot, just right now, because the situation is not welcoming. But the problem mainly there, from my point of view, is not only the activities of outside powers. Of course, it has its impact on the situation. But it seems to me that what we have in Libya, what we have in Syria, we have lack of responsibility of the local forces. Let's not forget it, because when we are speaking about Libya, we all understand that the problem of Libya was, and is, a lack of institutions. If there is no institutions, we cannot do anything. Neither Russia, nor United States, European Union. Well, they can help somehow, but they cannot change the Libyan society. They cannot introduce their practices into Libyan society, which is so much different from the European society. And what's more, this society has suffered for so many years of civil war. Is it ready for human rights recipes? I'm not sure. I would like to say that ‘okay, now, they will live much better’. But if you take all the antagonistic sentiments, which do exist within Libyan society, it will take a lot of time to come down all the sentiments, and probably to build new institutions which are badly needed.

**Raghida Dergham:** Irina, please address, the issue of the rivalry between Russia and Turkey as it manifests itself in Libya.

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** I wouldn’t say that the relations with Turkey are only relations of two rivals. They are really very complicated because you know pretty well that on one side, Turkey is our neighbor and we, Russia and Turkey, we are interdependent if you look at trade ties, if you look at the economy, if you look at some military ties. So, we shall see that really what Turkey is doing, not only in the Middle East, in the Middle East it's of secondary importance to Russia, but what Turkey is doing in the Caucuses, what Turkey is doing in Central Asia, and other parts, are much more important, is much more important for Russia. But if we take certain Arab countries where now we have interest, so yes, if we take Syria, for example, and I believe Syria is much more important than Libya, because Russia came, as you remember, in 2015, to Syria and brought its air force to Syria, and now it has two bases in Syria. So, Syria is really very important. And stabilization in Syria is very important, much more important than in Libya, actually. So, in Syria, we will have a problem. On the one hand, as you know pretty well, there is an agreement with Turkey that Turkey will take care of the situation in Idlib, that it will separate the terrorists from more or less moderate opposition. And so, Idlib will cease to be a threat to the other parts of Syria. Unfortunately, Turkey promised but couldn't do it. Couldn’t do it. Only to some extent, only to some extent. And that is why there are differences, which are absolutely obvious. And what's more-just one, one word and that's it-what's more, I would like to add to it because we seldom mention it, so the conflict in Syria right now is frozen. But the question is whether as Syria will remain fragmented. It's not only Idlib, it's also Kurdistan, it's north of Syria. And this is a big question. And this is a big question. And I'm afraid right now, nobody has an answer.

**Raghida Dergham:** I'm sure some of the participants in this session, I’m gonna get back to you on some of the points that you have made, in particular, as far as the role of Russia in Syria. I know that it's a priority, Syria is a priority for Russia, but there has been a transformation of the problems of Syria onto Libya, and some in this part of the region, say, spare us, whether it is the Russian interests, or the Turkish interest. But I will go now to Claudia Gazzini to really talk to us about the European dimension, from both angles. The oil resources, if you will, didn't it start with Italy and France really wanting to secure their own interests in Libya? Isn’t that how it started? And secondly, what are the Europeans doing right now? They're afraid that there will be a mess in Libya, and then there will be immigration into the European territory? But as some argue that, you know, this mess in Libya has been very much due to very substantial contribution by Italy and by France, not to mention others, but this is on the European side. So go ahead, Claudia, now that you made us quite aware of how stuck Libya is because of the picture you painted. Let's see the other gloomy part, I hope it's not. Claudia Gazzini.

**Claudia Gazzini:** Well, there's no doubt that an integral sort of causal factor for the Libyan conflict, or the Libyan conflicts because we've seen various rounds of fighting since the fall of Gaddafi, is linked to oil. But not in the manner that you're referring to, in the sense that there's a very sort of simplistic notion that 2011 happened because of rival interests of Europeans-

**Raghida Dergham:** That's what it's called, the Total and Eni rivals-

**Claudia Gazzini:** Exactly, exactly, you know. There's this whole myth about, you know, French supporting this war against Gaddafi for oil, and things of the like. And Eni and Total playing it out constantly. I think this is more of-

**Raghida Dergham:** Are you dismissing this Claudia?

**Claudia Gazzini:** Yeah, I am.

**Raghida Dergham:** Are you dismissing this argument totally?

**Claudia Gazzini:** I am, I am, I am.

**Raghida Dergham:** I would beg to differ, but you're my guest. So go ahead.

**Claudia Gazzini:** No, I'm happy to continue this conversation another time. I mean 2011, and French involvement in 2011, for me has more to do with sort of French hubris and belief and *naïveté*, I would say *naïveté*, as well, in the idea of going and supporting rather than, you know, looking for the money and trying to secure greater control of oil, oil in Libya. But that aside, oil is central to the conflict, it is central to the conflict, I would say, more internally. Internally in the sense that you have rival Libyan factions that, since 2011, have been jostling for power and using control of either oil revenues, or oil installations or, you know, oil fields for the purpose of securing money. Money is power. And therefore, oil is the sort of milking cow that everybody wants to [unclear audio]. But and so this, I want to set this issue clear, until now, we're seeing rival institutions bickering over how oil revenues should be managed, who should control the oil installations, and I won't go into the details of that, if only to say that one integral, you know, component of this transition phase should be an agreement on the management of Libyan oil revenues, an agreement on the budget, an agreement essentially on how to spend Libya's money which we shall remember Libyan funds are entirely dependent on oil production. It is a rentier state par excellence. But, on the European side of your question, it's not this. This is not what's playing into European rivalries. It is, broadly, yes, the search for contracts, but not limited exclusively to oil. Raghida yes, I see you. I see you-

**Raghida Dergham:** Yeah, I want to make sure that because we will have 15 minutes left, I want to make sure to involve the others. But listen, Claudia, I will tell you is that this argument that you're putting forward, it's like ‘ah, just so that we can give those Libyans freedom for Gadaffi. That's what it was all about’. You'd have many Libyans say, the fact that to get rid of Muammar Gadaffi that would be welcomed, but Irina said that this country was left without institutions, at the march on to, you know, doing whatever was to be done in Libya was such a self-congratulatory episode. And yes, indeed, there are documented facts on the role that was paid by President Sarkozy. And as I mentioned, during the time we spoke earlier, I was at the Security Council, a witness to what's happened, everybody was there celebrating. This reminds me of the Americans saying when they invaded Iraq, ‘Ah, that's because we want democracy in the Middle East’. And look, what's the state of Iraq and look at the state of Libya. And so, I have to report to you, unfortunately, many in this part of the world, just don't accept even, not only don't take this argument, that this is about liberating you and putting you on the right track, this is why we came in. Because if you look at the shambles Libya is in, or Iraq is in, they tell you, yes, we wanted to get rid of the dictators. But no, thank you, not the way you've done it. So, I'll give you one quick answer to that before I take it to Stephanie.

**Claudia Gazzini:** Yeah, no, and I totally agree. I mean, rationally you look at the consequences of these interventions and you try to find a rational reason that would explain, you know, why, why countries went to great lengths to topple a dictator. And, of course, money in the pursuit of money and contracts and so on is the logical answer. But I'm saying it, but I also underscore that there is a certain degree of *naïveté* in these interventions. In the case of Iraq, in the case of Libya, and then a number of cases.

**Raghida Dergham:** Stephanie Williams, I certainly don't believe it's a *naïveté* when the U.S. invaded Iraq, despite all the selling of the issue as ‘ah, we wanted to bring democracy, the project of democracy to the region through Iraq’. Nor do I subscribe to my friend Claudia Gazzini’s point of view that we wanted to make sure Libya is free of a dictator called Gadaffi. And so, I want to ask you now, as you go forward, what does the Biden administration want in Libya? What is it? Does it view it like the Trump administration did, from the point of view of ‘we've got to step up the Wagners so that the Russians don't come in, that’s why we support the Turks’? And although despite the clarity of the Turkish ambitions in Libya, can you address this as someone who's worked inside the country and with the international players?

**Stephanie Williams:** Sure. Well, I think the Biden administration is off to a good start on Libya policy. There have been sort of very clear and unambiguous statements from the highest levels of the administration, really, since almost since the end of January, with the first intervention at the UN Security Council on January 28, you know, up until the statement on the vote to the Security Council on resolution 2570 that was issued on, or adopted on Friday. So, I mean, what you see is, I think an administration that is, again, coming in very strongly behind the UN, the comprehensive UN process. And that's good. I mean, the U.S. voice is needed in the Security Council and I have to say, as an American who served both, as a diplomat working on Libya-I worked first on Libya, during the days of the former regime based in Washington and I traveled to Libya at that time, but I also worked on it in 2018, prior, as the head of the USMC, prior to joining the United Nations, and then as an American working for the United Nations, I went into Libya. Americans hold a special place, I think, in the hearts of Libyans, I mean, despite what was a very difficult relationship, you know, particularly over the 42 years of the regime, Pan Am, the Pan Am 103 incident, and then, of course, you know, after the revolution, the killing of Chris Stevens and our other colleagues in Benghazi. So, it's a fraught relationship. But yet, the American voice is sought, American influence is sought, the United States is seen as more neutral perhaps than other foreign actors, and more willing to speak on the issues that Elham has highlighted: human rights, accountability, transitional justice. So, what the U.S. needs to do, in my view, and I'm not working in the administration, is to lend it a little bit more of its weight. I think that the US can more efficiently and actively use its voice, use its convening authority, to you know, hurt all of these international cats, and to really help the UN in what are going to be very challenging days going forward. And also, frankly, to lend a voice to the Libyans and to end to, frankly, to battle this, this vision of this false dichotomy in the Middle East that you only have to two visions of government. It's either some kind of, you know, political Islam theocracy or secular authoritarianism. I mean, you know, having lived in the Middle East for 24 years, you know, I can, I can tell you that, I think that, you know, many people in the region, have the right and desire to choose their own form of government, and a representative form of government, and to renew the democratic legitimacy of their institutions.

**Raghida Dergham:** President Obama, Stephanie Williams, at one point, he had said, basically, although, you know, the U.S. has accused, strongly that it was very forward in making the developments and events of Libya. But he said, basically, and you could correct me if I'm wrong, but basically, the Europeans sort of made this mess and let them be in the heat of cleaning it. I’m, of course, paraphrasing. So, you think President Biden now is, is likely to say, ‘hey, leave me alone. I don't want to be involved. Let the Europeans lead. And I just really don't care about Libya’? Like, you know, Irina was saying, Russia is being very clear, ‘this is not our priority’. She's saying ‘our priority is Syria. We're focused on Syria’. Tell me what is the focus of the Biden administration? And would this be a good thing that the US just says, ‘hey, leave it to others’? Stephanie Williams.

**Stephanie Williams:** Well, look, I think we can all walk and chew gum at the same time. And surely, yes, the new administration has made clear that its strategic priorities are elsewhere. They’re looking at China, they're looking at, you know, obviously, the re-entry into many of these global agreements. And that's, that's very important. But again, I mean, you cannot, you ignore conflicts like Libya or, frankly, Syria, at your peril. So, I think, you know, even a minimal stepped-up engagement, which I see and which I think needs to be continued and sustained, will make a big difference amongst the international partners, but also, you know, with the Libyans themselves.

**Raghida Dergham:** I'm going to Elham and then Irina, then I'm going to try to squeeze in one minute, or one and a half, if possible, for each of you to leave us with: where do we go from here? What to do about it? With the one thing that you think is a priority to do, to meet the urge right now, in order to move this tortured country forward. But I’ll go to Elham Saudi first. Elham? Can you reflect on what you've heard?

**Elham Saudi:** Yes, I certainly can. I think I've heard-

**Raghida Dergham:** Go ahead.

**Elham Saudi:** I think I've heard much here, which highlights the problem we have in the situation in Libya. This concept of relativism in conflict and relativism in intervention that was highlighted by Irina is, is worth the heat of a moment of reflection. This, you know, ‘we're just dabbling in Libya, our main concern is Syria’, kind of narrative is super problematic. And it's exactly what happens when, you know, there is this kind of, again, absolute impunity for countries to intervene in whatever concept they think, and they can rank the importance of them. With little consideration. Look in the last 25 minutes of this conversation, human rights and victims of these conflicts have not been mentioned once since the last time I spoke, and I think that tells you a lot about the conflict in the country. We also see these narratives and this battle for narratives, which are so simplistic, and so lacking in nuance: ‘oh, it's an oil thing. Oh, it's a migration thing. Oh, it's, um, you know, a Russia versus USA thing’. Those are really problematic, because at the center of those is simplifying conflicts that are so multi layered and are so difficult-

**Raghida Dergham:** I’m sorry-

**Elham Saudi:** Raghida, I thought this was my opportunity to reflect? I'm trying to reflect on what I've heard. And so-

**Raghida Dergham:** Just a second. This is an unfair characterization of this conversation, because we're going on to different levels and different players. We're doing the international, the regional, the national. So, I don't think any on this panel, including the host is simple. We-

**Elham Saudi:** I’m not saying are not saying you’re simple. I'm saying the narratives are simple. And I think that's a different point. And I will maintain my point that I think the narratives that are often portrayed in Libya lack the necessary understanding of the impact of those narratives, right? The minute you start talking about a conflict like Libya in terms of migration, or counterterrorism, or oil, you dehumanize the conflict, and you militarize the solution. And that's what we're seeing. And I'll leave it at that, if all I'm allowed to do is not reflected in the depth that I would like to reflect. And so, I'll leave it at that. But I think the minute we start to simplify narratives, you dehumanize conflict, and then you get military solutions. And that's where we are.

**Raghida Dergham:** Yeah, okay, I'm going to push back with you. Because I really would like to tell you that I hear from my friends the Libyans quite often, quite often, complaints, and they are right to complain, but I just don't feel that there is enough self-criticism, that to say that we are really, have not taken hold of our own destiny. So, I want to go back to you Elham. I appreciate and respect your emphasis on the human rights and accountability and the rule of law and absolutely admire you for that. But kindly tell me, dissect for me, how do you think the Libyans, as a priority right now, should do for their own country? And rather than, you know, always complaining about the lack of whatever, the wrong address by others of the issue of Libya? Go ahead Elham.

**Elham Saudi:** Absolutely. I mean, I was referencing the international because this was a geopolitical conversation. But if we want to reflect on the local, then yes, absolutely, I would suggest that perhaps you widen your Libyan circle, because we do a lot of self-criticism in the circles I speak in. And a lot of the questions that come up are actually about holding people to account internally. And so, you'll see organizations like my own, and many other very good organizations that are working on legal reform, working on trying to hold people accountable in country, and that fails to hold them accountable outside the country. But it is also very, it's very important in this context, to understand the reality in which we work. In Libya, we have a failed justice system because of the conflict and various other institutional issues. And so, we need to rely on the international community even for simple things like holding people accountable. However, when what you see done at the Security Council level, or in the like, is that when we put forward, and others put forward, evidence against Libyan actors, that that Sanctions Committee with Russia sitting on it, and others, block sanctions, then there is a real impediment to us being able to do our work as Libyans when the international actors just dabble in Libya, but not enough to change anything in it.

**Raghida Dergham:** Irina, I need to go to you and give you also the chance to address a few things that were said. But also, I may ask you to do the conclusion, your one-minute conclusion, at the end of whatever you're going to say next, please Irina. Go ahead.

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** Well, I do believe that all conflicts in the Middle East and beyond, they have domestic reasons, first and foremost. Later on, they get internationalized for different reasons and this internationalization is started by regional actors, not by global ones. And this is important, this is really important, because the whole system of the Middle East is still based on conflicts. And the conflicts become the zones, which bring into regional powers, different regional powers, which choose their own allies, and only later there come global powers. As far as the situation in Libya is concerned, I believe that it started very soon in Libya, I mean the intervention of the outside forces, really. And this 1973 resolution was a mistake, from my point of view, or it was incorrectly interpreted. That's it. As far as serious concern there, there was a real threat, international threat, I mean, ISIS. ISIS was considered an international threat. And that is why the foreign powers came first, came the western coalition, and only later Russia. So, we see different situations. In Libya-just last point-in Libya, from my point of view, from the beginning, there was no international threat coming from the conflict in Libya. In Syria, there was one. That's it.

**Raghida Dergham:** Actually, Irina? Is it correct, that Russia is keen and working on the idea that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi will be the leader in Libya? Is this correct? What do you hear? Can you give us some insight on what's happening that in that relationship between Russia and-

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** No, I just want to remind that in 2011, Russia supported the resolution-

**Raghida Dergham:** I’m talking about the son-

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** But the problem was that it was never interpreted correctly. And it was never realized what it meant, in fact. Because what is no fly zone? How can you impose it? And that was an intervention-

**Raghida Dergham:** I wish, I wish I could get details on this. But I'm sorry to interrupt you. My question was about Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of Muammar Gaddafi is someone that Russia is supporting to take position in the country, but maybe I’m-

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** I don’t believe if he's supported inside the country, okay, it's not our business. If he's not, forget about it.

**Raghida Dergham:** All right. Thank you very much Irina. Like I need 45 minutes from you Claudia. Yeah, please. Just forward looking. What would you do right now, if you-

**Claudia Gazzini:** I wish it were 45 minutes, but I think it's 45 seconds. But listen, I think there's one big word looking ahead. That's ‘elections’. We're not there. We're not there yet. We need a consensus on: what type of elections? Is this going to be presidential? Is this going to be parliamentary? There are a lot of fears in Libya that the presidential election will lead to further competition, further fighting, winner take all mentality. So, you know, my recommendation going forward is, first of all, let's try to get an agreement at consensus. It won't be easy. But let's also not forget that that is enough. We need to mitigate the risk of election violence, we need to mitigate the risk of contestation, and we need to mitigate this tendency that countries have to bet on Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, Haftar, Fulan-

**Raghida Dergham:** I'm racing against the electricity cutting us off. By the way, if it does get cut off, stay, I come back. Stay, just keep on talking if it gets cut. Again, whatever. 30 seconds to you Stephanie Williams.

**Stephanie Williams:** So, I will use the oil theme to say that everyone needs to keep their foot on the gas here. So, do not lose the momentum and particularly at the national level. Yes, elections are the overwhelming demand of the Libyan people. 80% of Libyans want national elections at the end of this year. The authorities, the institutions, charged with producing these elections need to get off the dime now. They need to work they need to live up to the expectations of the Libyan people. And I see you waving, so I'm going to stop.

**Raghida Dergham:** I know, but I’m so scared the electricity shuts off. Thank you so very much. A fabulous e-Policy Circle. I'm so proud that we managed to have an all women e-Policy Circle, and you're all absolutely fabulous. And May 5, first anniversary, first one year anniversary for e-Policy Circles of Beirut Institute Summit in Abu Dhabi, with His Excellency President Barham Salih of Iraq. Thank you for joining me. It was dynamic, feisty, and fun. Thank you.

**Elham Saudi:** Thank you.

**Claudia Gazzini:** Thank you Raghida.

**Irina Zvyagelskaya:** Thank you.