

14TH MIDDLE EAST SECURITY SUMMIT
THE IISS MANAMA DIALOGUE

SECOND PLENARY SESSION
SATURDAY 27 OCTOBER 2018

SH KHALID BIN AHMED AL KHALIFA
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, BAHRAIN

Dr John Chipman, Director-General and Chief Executive, IISS

Ladies and gentlemen, we will now begin our Second Plenary Session on the theme 'Shifting Relationships and the Emerging Middle Eastern Order'.

'Emerging' is a demonstration of the fact that the IISS remains optimistic that some order will emerge out of what appears to be a persistent and ostentatious chaos with – as the Secretary of Defense said – strife emerging from various different countries at different times, and the fraying of the local and regional institutions that otherwise might have contained diplomatic disputes and advanced towards the resolution of conflict.

And we have on the stage today the Foreign Minister of our host country, the Kingdom of Bahrain, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, and the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Adel Jubeir, who each in their turn will address these challenges and then will engage in a full debate. There are other ministers and ministers of state with us in the hall from the region, and I would invite any of them who might want to add a point or clarification to do so from their seats, so we hear as many of the regional voices in this session as we can.

We will proceed in this order: I will ask Sheikh Khalid to make remarks from the podium first, then Foreign Minister Jubeir, and then we will engage in our conversation. Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed first.

Sh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bahrain

Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim; in the name of God, the most compassionate. Distinguished guests, it is a great pleasure to join my esteemed colleague, His Excellency Adel Jubeir, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, in this plenary session. I would like to thank you, my dear friend Dr John Chipman, Professor François Heisbourg, Sir Tom Beckett and the rest of the IISS team for organising the 14th Manama Dialogue on what is now the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the IISS, and for their continuous and tireless efforts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make this event a success year after year.

To get to a better understanding of the emerging regional order, we need to first understand the current situation. The challenges we face today are deep, complex and have the potential to alter the region for decades to come. If we as an international community do not take action to direct the coming changes in ways that ensure regional stability, we will find ourselves facing the possibility of a prolonged state of instability and unease.

Syria, a proud and historic Arab country with a multicultural society, has now become a battleground for territory and influence, with regional states attempting to stake their claims whilst terrorist organisations and non-state actors compete for influence and control amidst a decline in the capacity of the central government to cope with the various challenges it faces. Although the physical presence of Daesh is almost gone, we cannot discount the possibility of its re-emergence in a different form or under a different name within Syria or anywhere else, so long as the situation remains the same.

On the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen has become the latest casualty of the Islamic Republic of Iran's quest for regional dominance. The Islamic Republic's interference in the affairs of Yemen, and its support to the terrorist Houthi organisation, has prolonged the conflict and contributes to the Houthi unwillingness to return to the political process that all Yemeni parties agreed to in 2012 and to abandon their armed rebellion. This has led to a terrible situation on the ground in Yemen. The fighting continues and millions of innocent civilians suffer. I assure you, the Arab Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen is committed to alleviating the effects of this conflict

on our brothers and sisters in Yemen, restoring stability and ensuring that all Yemenis have their say in the future of interference in the country.

In Iraq and in Lebanon, the effects of regional interference are also stark. As both countries under their respective leaderships attempt to guide their nations towards the path of prosperity, they are confronted by Iranian-backed groups or individuals who place loyalty to the Islamic Republic over the national interests of their countries, resulting in bad governance, inefficiency and ultimately political paralysis. Hizbullah and associated groups continue to use bases in Lebanon and Iraq to destabilise the region. Young men and women are recruited from across the region, trained in such things as bomb-making, weapons-smuggling and military tactics, and then sent back to destabilise their countries and advance the Iranian regime's hegemonic ambitions. The region simply cannot achieve lasting stability and peace of mind so long as terrorist groups – whether state-backed or not – continue to operate in this way.

Even within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), we have witnessed attempts by Qatar to intervene in the politics of other member states in contradiction to the agreement signed between GCC members and to the norms of our region. Yet we remain committed to making the GCC a pillar of regional stability and we view its role as the most important and vital regional actor, along with Egypt and Jordan, in helping the region return to stability, considering the crisis we have faced these past years.

Looking at this broad picture, there is an underlying theme tying all the crises I have discussed so far: it is the attempt by regional states to impose hegemony on others. Whether it is by Iran's decades-long quest to spread the revolution and control more territory through proxies, or Qatar's attempt to seek its own way of influence in the region, I am certain that the emerging regional order cannot and will not be a stable one if regional states continue to compete over dominance and continue to interfere in the affairs of other countries whenever an opportunity arises.

The trouble with hegemonic ambitions in our region is twofold. On one hand, they continue to be a constant source of tension and distrust among regional states who are then forced to take the necessary defensive measures to protect themselves, such as enhancing military capabilities, forging alliances with other regional states and boycotting offending states. The other effect of regional hegemonic ambitions is that they make an existing crisis even worse. Crises that are not initially caused by regional competition are utilised by aspiring hegemons to further their aims, thereby prolonging the original crisis.

In response to the problem of regional hegemonic ambitions, I would like to highlight the critical importance of the role of the region's international partners. Countries that have a role and a stake in the region – such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the French Republic, the Russian Federation and other countries – must engage with the region and with one another to help us bring stability and to ensure that the emerging order is a stable one.

What we need in the region is a balance – a non-competitive balance between major powers in the region; a balance that does not draw a line, placing countries on opposing sides against one another; a balance of interests; a balance that places the shared interests of the international community in the region first.

We believe that our international partners should engage with our region and not abandon it. Nor should they support the hegemonic ambitions of regional countries in any way or for any short-term gain. Instead, we call on our international partners to coordinate with the responsible regional states to direct the coming changes in a positive way and to realise that the interests of all relevant international states and responsible regional states are very much aligned.

We all seek a stable, prosperous, conflict-free Middle East that contributes positively to the world economy. Here, I would like to point out the importance of the proposal from the US to establish the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) as part of the solution to the problems we face in the region.

MESA is not against anyone. It is an alliance for security and prosperity in the region and it will be open to those who accept its principles. Through MESA, we aim to boost the collective security of the region and to make sure our defence partnerships are ready to withstand the challenges of the twenty-first century, including terrorism, cyber security and the effects of rogue states.

MESA is not designed as a purely defensive partnership either; it is also an economic partnership that seeks to boost trade and foreign direct investment between its members. These are the kinds of solutions we need in the region going forward. MESA is an example of the ideal vehicles through which to manage the affairs of the region.

In Bahrain, we believe in the importance of partnership between allies and of our historic alliances in the region. We are committed to sharing the burden of protecting the region and have always done our part. We committed our forces to repel aggression almost 30 years ago. We have sent our security forces to aid the missions in Afghanistan. We have contributed to protecting the Gulf of Aden from piracy. We are an active member of the Global Coalition against Daesh and we continue our role in ensuring maritime peace in the Arabian Gulf and beyond as part of the combined task force led by the United States Navy Fifth Fleet based here in Bahrain. We will remain ready to act in coordination with our friends and allies and do what must be done to ensure the stability and prosperity of the region.

As we look towards the next few years, we must maintain hope and confidence for the future of our region. And we are confident. We must realise that, although change is inevitable, it is up to us to direct the changes in beneficial ways. I am certain that if we can stop attempts to hegemonise the region, to spread influence and power through proxies, to use free media sources to incite hatred and spread false information by some countries in the region, and if we strengthen partnership between countries that seek to build and not to destroy – countries that seek to make the citizens of the region stakeholders in their own future – we will have gone a long way to ensuring the future peace and prosperity of the Middle East.

Thank you very much.