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DR ANWAR GARGASH

DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT, UAE

Dr Anwar Gargash, Diplomatic Advisor to the President, UAE

Ladies and gentlemen, first of all I want to say that I am very grateful – for being invited and being here in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and also to be here at the IISS’s 19th Dialogue. It is really extraordinary to have your 19th and soon to celebrate our 20th Dialogue. I also want to say that I am looking forward to our discussion following these prepared remarks, but it is precursory that we give these prepared remarks.

I want to just start by saying that, through this Dialogue, this forum offers us an important platform to share our perspectives on regional and global security dynamics. I believe conversations like these are very valuable, particularly at such a critical juncture in our region in light of the current war in Gaza, with unprecedented violence and carnage.

This has caused a serious, serious humanitarian crisis, calls into question aspirations for stability in our region and brings new strategic challenges to the global stage. While perhaps it is too early to know how this crisis will impact the trajectory of regional and international relations, it is important to acknowledge that it will have strong ramifications for years to come. The unfolding situation in Gaza raises questions about the future of the international system, about the protection of international norms, about our values, and about whether our usual approaches of problem-solving are working.

Some of these approaches clearly require serious examination. For example, the policy of containment, which has characterised the Palestinian issue for so long, has clearly failed. As the events of the past month have shown, it would be a costly mistake to fail to re-engage politically on a peace-process framework to achieve a two-state solution. Borders, refugees, East Jerusalem – all have to be sorted out. Containment has failed. This outcome, we hope, will bring a promise of lasting peace to the Palestinian and Israeli people, and will require strong and sustained international engagement.

I would like to spend a few moments on the topic of our session, which is Navigating Global Competition. In my last remarks here at the Manama Dialogue in 2019, I spoke about how we were about to enter the 2020s with a global order that was very fluid, a global order that seemed to lack a clear direction, a global order where the potential for increased competition among major powers was growing, including in the Middle East.

Just a few months later, the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, adding an extra layer of uncertainty to the global strategic context and shaking the global economy. The war in Ukraine also adds to the geopolitical uncertainty, with its knock-on effects on the entire global economy, as well as food and energy security. It has led to greater divisions between the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), making consensus even more difficult to reach on key issues related to peace and security in the world.

Similarly, the initial deadlock in the UNSC over the strategic situation in Gaza, which lasted for several weeks despite an emerging consensus in the UN General Assembly about what needed to happen next, reflects this fragmented international landscape.

These shifts have significant repercussions on international relations and point to what could become a larger crisis of the international order if we do not take steps to correct this course. They are also compounded by broader systemic trends such as climate change, the nature of our very interconnected modern world, and the political, economic and security effects of competition in the world and in the technological sphere. The way we navigate these trends will shape our future.

I would like to underscore a couple of important points with respect to the shifting dynamics in global politics and the Middle East. The Middle East is very familiar with geopolitical competition

playing out in its regional order. In fact, one of the key challenges we confront is the shifting dynamics of global politics.

We understand only too well that a more turbulent international order will inevitably cascade down to affect our region. This is something we have to deal with, whether it is concerns about how the geopolitical competition between major powers unfolds in the Middle East – a competition we do not wish to be defined by – or questions about what the international system will look like the day after the wars in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, and the various yardsticks that have been used in the two conflicts happening at the same time.

Transition to an increasingly divided international system is not in anyone's interest. Nor is increased uncertainty across the Middle East, a region that has recently experienced its most difficult decade with the so-called Arab Spring and where the risk of escalation and rise in power vacuums is a consistent threat.

This leads me to another point I wanted to make, which is that at this uncertain time in global and regional affairs, and in a world marked by rapid changes and increasing competition, it is imperative that the Middle East continue to carefully chart a course to ensure stability, prosperity and peace for our nations.

We have seen some promising signs in the last few years, as Middle Eastern states have been working together to find solutions to de-escalate conflicts, rebuild relations and focus on common goals. Despite this progress being uneven, we had renewed hopes that the Middle East will be charting a new path for the years to come. The war in Gaza represents a serious setback, no doubt about it, to de-escalation efforts in the wider region. The longer it lasts, the higher the risks are that the war will spread regionally and that the current violence will only breed more violence and fuel greater radicalisation in the region. I wonder sometimes if this is another Iraq moment, to be honest.

We must prevent narratives of division from taking hold in the region and confront extremism in all its forms. While we continue to work hard towards the cessation of hostilities, the immediate priority is to achieve sustained and unrestricted humanitarian access to Gaza and substantial relief to alleviate the suffering of civilians in Gaza.

In response to this acute need, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has significantly stepped up our humanitarian efforts to support the people of Gaza, not just by increasing our financial commitments, but also by working in solidarity with medical teams in Gaza to set up an emergency field hospital there and by taking children from Gaza to the UAE for medical treatment.

Last night we saw images of the first 90 injured children being airlifted to Abu Dhabi, and this is part of our commitment to take 1,000 of the injured children in Gaza with their families in order to be treated in Abu Dhabi. This is, of course, a drop in the ocean of what Gaza needs in terms of the images that we see of the carnage and the human suffering. But we have to all work together in order to make the humanitarian effort significant and sustainable.

The last point I would like to make is that now is also the time to look to the future and ask some deep, probing questions. Can we maintain a forward-looking momentum despite regional crisis? And in light of the war in Gaza and its implications, can we work together to find lasting solutions to de-escalate the current tensions in the Middle East?

I believe the answer to these questions is, we must resolutely continue on a path to defend regional stability, and that requires that we need to go beyond containment. As we address the current crisis in Gaza, we need to continue efforts to repair the region, including by advancing our national plans to ensure progress and, through collaborative efforts with global and regional partners, to develop long-term strategies for the region. The need for reliable partners in the region is key.

This requires a process of problem-solving rather than containment, because crucially, there are issues in the region that need sustainable solutions: the lack of an enduring solution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, but also other ongoing crises, socio-economic disparities, and aspirations for peace and prosperity of young people across the region. While some of these issues still seem out of reach, they must be addressed to bring greater stability to the Middle East.

Let me conclude by reiterating the UAE's commitment to the security and stability of our region, as well as our resolve to continue working with friends and partners on an agenda of shared prosperity in the region. In doing so, we will continue to prioritise de-escalation, partnerships, diplomacy and our enhanced focus on geo-economics, because economic resilience is fundamental to the well-being of our nations and to the goals of achieving a shared stability that benefits us all.

If we can successfully pursue these goals through inclusive cooperative approaches with regional and international partners, I believe that we can improve regional security and lay the groundwork for a more prosperous and peaceful Middle East in the years to come.

Thank you very much.