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IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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## **Camille Grand**

Sameh, thank you so much for providing us with this comprehensive look at the issue of the zone and the path towards progress on it. Let me now turn to Ariel Levite, non-resident scholar and senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, one of the best minds on the topic and a great friend.

## **Ariel Levite**

Thank you, Camille. Let me give you a very informal view from Tel Aviv, not from Jerusalem, tainted in part by spending some time in Washington, I must add, but nevertheless fundamentally a view from Tel Aviv, and a very personal view at that. If I sound incoherent at times, it is because of the blinding effect of these projectors. I apologise – I can barely see you let alone others on the panel.

I think the Middle East is presently simultaneously beset by a very acute struggle of a political, cultural, social, economic and strategic nature. On the one hand, what we are seeing inspires a lot of people with hope that we may be able to realise some very legitimate and heretofore suppressed ambitions for new, improved regional as well as domestic order that would bring with it prosperity, social justice, democratic participation, freedom, dignity, sovereignty, for those who currently lack it, disarmament and, of course, stability. At the same time, you have those who, both within their countries and more broadly, are resisting it fiercely or are trying to seize on the new opportunities that have been created by the unsettled regional scene in order to attain, maintain or institutionalise some form of leverage, asymmetric advantage, totalitarian control or some other type of unique privileges. This is the stark reality that we are currently facing in the region.

The collapse of the old order is, on the one hand, leading some to expect what was previously unattainable. What we tried to do in the 1990s and could not succeed might be possible, but, at the same time, we have to say that it has made parts of it more difficult to attain. If we could not attain it in that previous period, it may well be even more difficult to attain in the current reality, so we need to try to see what we can realistically achieve now and how we position ourselves to aim even higher in the future.

I am, then, trying to suggest that we need to prioritise. We need to figure out where we need to put our emphasis, given the current political realities, within as well as across countries. We have to figure out what the practical, pragmatic steps are that we can take to try to create a new, fairer and more sustainable order in the short-to-medium term, while contemplating steps that would lay the ground for realising more ambitious goals down the road but specifically avoiding those that could try to undermine the long-term prospects by some steps that are currently taken.

With that in mind, let me try to say a few words about what I think needs to be the new list of priorities: unquestionably and realistically speaking – again I emphasise the fact that I look at things from Tel Aviv – reconstituting domestic order in the countries around us on a more legitimate functional and sustainable nature is the key aspect. Given that we are talking here, essentially, about the security setting, the concentration of arms exclusively in the hands of governments, the control of governments over their own territory, and the accountable use of arms, both internally and externally, is by far the biggest challenge we face, as we see some countries around us either losing control over significant parts of their territory, unorganised or non-state actors acquiring ever more sophisticated arms, such as rockets with longer ranges, and using them both internally and externally. With the prospect of non-conventional weapons being part of that arsenal, I think that that is the first order of business that we have to confront.

The challenge that we face there is that the current processes continue to unravel. We see it this morning in a shocking way in Syria, but we also see it, lamentably, across the Egyptian border, where the Egyptian government's control over the Sinai is exceptionally porous. We have a very effective

political dialogue with the Egyptian government, but the Egyptian government's control over its own territory seems something to be desired. It does not matter if it does not manifest tragically, as it does in the football stadia, in the Sinai. That is the first order of business and the most urgent call to deal with those that are causing mass destruction and casualties on a daily basis. I am talking here not just about the security aspect but, of course, about creating a more stable domestic order.

Arresting and urgently rolling back the most acute non-proliferation challenge is the second issue. The current trends, as they are progressing, are taking us further away than ever from being able to realise the goals of a WMD-free zone or whatever other name we use for that organ. Some urgent steps need to be taken in the Arab-Israeli peace process, which I will talk about in a moment. Most importantly, on the political level, through 'channel one' and other channels such as NGO activity, there has been some symbolic progress on issues of coexistence. Because we have so many new players within governments, parliaments and the public that have become active, trying to inspire confidence in continued coexistence and even more ambitious forms of coexistence is absolutely essential if we want to seriously contemplate laying the ground.

I am specifically trying to think of how we deal with the religious issues. It is an incredible opportunity, on the one hand, and a great risk on the other, if it is mishandled. If we can show that, notwithstanding the ascendancy to power of religious forces of a significant nature in those countries, and try to turn the religious issue from being a bone of constitution into something that blesses coexistence, some of the arguments that have been used to explain why we cannot aim even higher in terms of building security and achieving disarmament would perish.

I have been in this business for 25 years. I am, on the one hand, very pessimistic, because I see some very alarming trends in terms of security. I also see some hopeful signs. I do see some efforts, including by some of the new forces that are coming to power, to assume state-like behaviour and to exercise some form of coexistence, which inspires me to continue to live in the Middle East and to hope for a much better future. I do not see how that could play out in a WMD-free zone anytime soon, but I think, in laying the building blocks for it, I am not without hope.

Let me conclude by saying a word or two about Israel specifically. I think that what you are presently seeing against this background is a really unique situation, because we are seeing events unfold in virtually every one of the countries around us, in which we have remarkably little influence, let alone control. First of all, then, there is incredible fluctuation and a high degree of anxiety, and even more so, when you think that you do not understand or cannot predict what is going to happen.

Against that background, you nevertheless see that the response of the government – even the government currently in place, notwithstanding some criticisms that I have about their behaviour – is to invest in domestic defensive arms – in missile defence – in order not to be in a situation where you respond to every missile or rocket provocation. This is unprecedented in terms of scope, intensity and resources that go into it. Secondly, we are seeing an unexpected degree of moderation in response to provocation coming from across the borders with Lebanon and Gaza. On a daily basis, eight rockets fall on Israeli population centres, and you are seeing a very moderate response to armament trends against us in those places. Thirdly, notwithstanding the trends that you are currently seeing with Iran in particular, Israel is sustaining a policy of nuclear restraint.

Do not take any of those things for granted. I do fault the government for having an erratic behaviour in the peace process. I think it could have tried much harder. It is essential that they do. It takes two to tango and I thought no less of the other partner. My bottom line is that we are at a critical juncture well before the conference is convened in 2012 – assuming it is convened in 2012. We will be tested if the current cycles of violence in the Middle East do not spin out of control and whether diplomatic

solutions can be found to the more pressing issues of the moment. We are in a critical period where the reconstitution of political order in some of the countries around us transpires in a way that inspires coexistence. If this were the case, we would position ourselves into the future with the ability to think seriously about more ambitious undertakings and loftier goals of the nature that some of my colleagues around the table have articulated. Thank you.