

Experts analyze 'Deal of the Century' at Abu Dhabi strategic forum

Author:

Mon, 2019-11-11 22:54

ABU DHABI: On the second day of the Abu Dhabi Strategic Debate, experts on foreign-policy and security issues took part in an exhaustive discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As panelists in a session entitled "The Deal of the Century: Rewriting the Rules of the Regional Game," they discussed the US role in the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the context of President Donald Trump's promise during his 2016 election campaign to broker a deal that caters to the demands of both sides.

David Makovsky, Ziegler distinguished fellow and director of the project on Arab-Israel relations at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, said that for a solution to work, it "needs to give dignity to both parties."

Referring to the phrase "The deal of the Century," Makovsky said that it was not coined by the US or the Trump administration, and was in effect first used at a press conference in the Middle East.

While the deal's political components remain a mystery, Makovsky said the economic elements consisted of "raising around \$50 billion from affluent countries in the region, in the form of loans, grants and investments."

According to him, "most of it will be spent in Palestine, some in Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon, to support infrastructure and business projects."

However, the economic elements remain "a part of a package of five core issues" known as the "final status," said Makovsky.

They include "borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and mutual recognition of the other state," he added, pointing out that the issues had not yet been fleshed out.

"They are waiting for a new government in Israel but this late in the cycle of the first administration, with US elections coming up in 2020, they will put out a vision and not a plan."

He said a vision would lay out US ideas in 60 to 70 pages, with the presumption that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas would reject it.

"At the minimum, it is a historic reference point," said Makovsky, who went on to express his disagreement with the "all or nothing" approach taken by the Trump administration with regard to Middle Eastern issues.

"If you say yes on the five issues, you get 178 economic projects. My fear is in the Middle East, when it is all or nothing, it is nothing."

As part of the same panel discussion, Dr. Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland said previous US administrations, including that of President Barack Obama, had failed to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simply because “the issue has become less strategically important” to the US.

“Never has a US president since the end of the Cold War made the (Israeli-Palestinian issue) a top priority,” he said.





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Protesters storm Bahraini embassy in Baghdad in protest against US 'deal of the century' Media blitz as Palestinians oppose 'Deal of the Century'

[‘Sister protests’: Lebanon, Iraq look to each other](#)

Author:

Hashem Osseiran in Beirut and Maya Gebeily in Baghdad | AFP

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Mon, 2019-11-11 16:15

BEIRUT: A Lebanese flag flutters in the protest-hit Iraqi capital. More than 900 kilometers (500 miles) away, a revolutionary Iraqi chant rings out from a bustling protest square in Beirut.

"Don't trust the rumors, they're a group of thieves," sings a group of Lebanese musicians in Iraqi dialect, referring to political leaders they deem incompetent and corrupt.

"The identity is Lebanese," they continue, reworking the chant by Iraqi

preacher Ali Yusef Al-Karbalai, made popular during the street movement there.

Such recent shows of solidarity have become a common feature of protest squares in the two countries, where corruption, unemployment and appalling public services have fueled unprecedented street movements demanding the ouster of an entire political class.

They serve to "shed light on similarities between the two movements and boost morale," said Farah Qadour, a Lebanese oud musician.

"The two streets are observing and learning from each other," said the 26-year-old who is part of the group that adopted Al-Karbalai's chant.

In Lebanon's southern city of Nabatiyeh, hundreds brandishing Lebanese flags chanted: "From Iraq to Beirut, one revolution that never dies."

And in the northern city of Tripoli, dubbed the "bride" of Lebanon's protest movement, a man standing on a podium waved a wooden pole bearing the flags of the two countries.

"From Lebanon to Iraq, our pain is one, our right is one, and victory is near," read a sign raised during another protest, outside Beirut's state-run electricity company.

In Tahrir Square, the beating heart of Baghdad's month-old protest movement, demonstrators are selling Lebanese flags alongside Iraqi ones.

They have hung some on the abandoned Turkish restaurant, turned by Iraqi demonstrators into a protest control tower.

Banners reading "from Beirut to Baghdad, one revolution against the corrupt" could be seen throughout.

Lebanon and Iraq are ranked among the most corrupt countries in the region by anti-graft watchdog Transparency International, with Iraq listed as the 12th most corrupt in the world.

Public debt levels in both countries are relatively high, with the rate in Lebanon exceeding 150 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

"What's happening on the streets in Iraq and Lebanon, they're sister protests," said Samah, a 28-year-old Lebanese demonstrator.

"They're the result of an accumulation" of years of problems.

One video that went viral on social media networks showed a masked Iraqi protester dressed in military fatigues demanding the resignation of Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, one of the main targets of protesters in the small Mediterranean country.

In a video released online, a group of young Iraqi men had filmed themselves singing, "Lebanon, we're with you!"

The two movements also seem to be adopting similar protest strategies.

In both countries, rows of parked vehicles have blocked traffic along main thoroughfares in recent weeks.

University-aged demonstrators wearing medical masks or eye goggles have occupied bridges and flyovers, refusing to believe pledges of reform from both governments.

The big difference is that in Iraq, the demonstrations have turned deadly, with more than 300 people, mostly protesters but also including security forces, killed since the movement started October 1.

Lebanon's street movement, which started on October 17, has been largely incident-free despite scuffles with security forces and counter-demonstrators rallying in support of established parties.

The two movements, however, are united in their anger about the kind of

political system that prioritizes power-sharing between sects over good governance.

The consecutive governments born out of this system have been prone to deadlock and have failed to meet popular demands for better living conditions.

"We are united by a sense of patriotic duty in confronting this sectarian political system," said Obeida, a 29-year-old protester from Tripoli.

He said he had high hopes for Iraqi protesters because the sectarian power-sharing system there is relatively new, having emerged after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

"In Lebanon, it's more entrenched," he said of the arrangement that ended the country's 1975-1990 civil war.

On a Beirut waterfront, dotted with luxury restaurants and cafes, a 70-year-old Iraqi man who has been living in Lebanon for five years looked on as demonstrators laid out picnic blankets on the grass.

With a Lebanese flag wrapped around his neck, Fawzi said the protests looked different but reminded him of those back home.

"The goal is one," he said.



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Lebanon's central bank chief says deposits secure, will preserve stable

poundIraq denies using poisonous gas on protesters, expresses regret over deaths

Turkey should scrap Russian missile system or face US sanctions -White House official

Author:

Sun, 2019-11-10 23:17

WASHINGTON: The United States is very upset about Turkey's purchase of Russian missile defense systems and could impose sanctions on Ankara if it does not "get rid" of them, White House National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien said on Sunday.

"Turkey will feel the impact of those sanctions," O'Brien told CBS's "Face the Nation" in an interview, referring to penalties under the US law known as the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which he said would pass Congress with "overwhelming" bipartisan support.

His comments came ahead of a visit by Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan to Washington on Nov. 13 to meet US President Donald Trump for likely crucial talks as the two NATO allies have been at loggerheads over a range of issues. One key disagreement is Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missile system, which Washington says is incompatible with NATO defenses and threatens its Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets.

Despite threats of US sanctions, Turkey started receiving its first S-400 deliveries in July.

In response, Washington removed Turkey from the F-35 program, in which Ankara was a manufacturer and buyer. But so far, it has not slapped any sanctions on Ankara.

Turkey has not yet activated the S-400 batteries it received, and Washington still hopes to persuade its ally to "walk away" from the Russian systems.

"There's no place in NATO for the S-400. There's no place in NATO for significant Russian military purchases. That's a message that the president will deliver to him (Erdogan) very clearly when he's here," O'Brien said.

Earlier this month, the head of Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate said a second S-400 delivery to Turkey may be delayed beyond a planned 2020 timeline by talks on technology sharing and joint production.

The S-400 issue is part of a wider range of disagreements between Turkey and the United States.

Washington was incensed by Turkey's offensive into northern Syria against US-allied Kurdish YPG fighters last month. Turkey halted the incursion after the Kurds withdrew from a border region under a US- brokered truce



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Will Turkey abandon S-400? Trump meeting will give answerIs it the end of US nukes in Turkey?

[Tunisia's Islamist-inspired party wants leader to be house speaker](#)

Author:

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Sun, 2019-11-10 16:57

TUNIS: Tunisia's Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party which last month came top in legislative polls put forward its leader Rached Ghannouchi on Sunday to head the next parliament.

Ennahdha, which won 52 out of 217 seats in October's parliamentary election –

well short of the 109 needed to govern – also insisted that the new prime minister of Tunisia should be selected from the party.

Ghannouchi, a divisive figure and veteran leader of Ennahdha, was proposed as candidate for speaker of parliament by the party's Shoura Council, according to council chief Abdelkarim Harouni.

Ghannouchi has led Ennahdha since it was founded almost 40 years ago, carrying the movement to victory in a 2011 election, just months after the party reemerged from underground following the revolution that ousted autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

He has never run for office but won a parliamentary seat in Tunis in the October 6 legislative polls.

Harouni on Sunday reiterated that Ennahdha wants one of its own figures to head the new government in the North African country.

The Islamist-inspired party has until Friday to announce its candidate for the premiership.

Ennahdha has been holding negotiations with other political groups to form a new government.

But Harouni said "certain parties want to deprive the winner of the legislative election" from heading the cabinet.

Tunisia's new parliament is expected to hold its first full session on Wednesday.

The legislative polls were held between the first and second round of Tunisia's presidential election which was won by political outsider Kais Saied, a conservative academic.



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Top US military official says 500 troops to remain in Syria

Sun, 2019-11-10 20:19

WASHINGTON: US troop levels in northern Syria will probably stabilize around 500, a top American military leader said Sunday, weeks after President Donald Trump had announced a complete withdrawal.

"There will be less than 1,000, for sure," General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said on ABC's "This Week." "Probably in the 500ish frame, maybe six."

Trump's abrupt announcement last month that he had ordered a full troop withdrawal drew angry rebukes at home and abroad, with critics saying it could allow a resurgence of Daesh, while leaving US-allied Kurdish fighters in Syria vulnerable to a Turkish invasion.

The US president later relented in part, saying he would leave some troops in the region to protect valuable oil fields.

Milley, who has commanded troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, told ABC that it was important for US troops to remain in Syria so long as Daesh has a presence there.

"There are still Daesh fighters in the region," he said, using an alternate term for Daesh. "Unless pressure is maintained, unless attention is maintained on that group, there's a very real possibility there could be a re-emergence of Daesh."

Asked about the killing Oct. 26 of Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi by a US special forces unit, Milley said it would have a "significant disruptive effect on the organization." He said the US had "a considerable amount of information on his successor," Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Quraishi.

"Where opportunities arise," Milley said, "we'll go after him."

Trump has said he wants to wind down US military entanglements abroad where possible, but Milley predicted that American troops, already in Afghanistan for 18 years, would remain there "for several more years."

He was also asked whether he knew Alexander Vindman, the army lieutenant colonel and White House Ukraine expert who has testified about his concerns over a controversial phone call between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Milley declined to comment "on a witness to an active investigation" – the House of Representatives' impeachment inquiry into Trump.



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Syrian, Turkish forces reignite clashes near border town
Turkish-Russian patrols pelted by residents in north Syria