

TM: Greetings ladies and gentlemen. To those joining us in the East coast of the United States, I would say good afternoon. To those joining us from the Middle East, of which I believe there are many, I say good evening. My name is Tarek Masoud. I'm the Sultan Qaboos Professor of international relations here at the Harvard Kennedy School and the faculty director of the Kennedy School's Middle East Initiative. And it's my great pleasure to welcome you to today's discussion. Before I introduce our guest, the distinguished Emirati intellectual Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, let me explain for our viewers and our listeners precisely what it is we are up to today.

The conversation we're about to have is the second installment in a series of conversations that we are having with Arab politicians, intellectuals, and thought leaders on the state of not the Arab world but of the United States of America. The idea that animates these conversations is that the United States is undergoing now a series of changes and struggles and facing a momentous election to which those of us embedded in this country may be too close to properly understand. It's our conviction that Americans can learn much about this moment in their politics by hearing from people who have some analytic and emotional distance from the events, which may enable them to perceive matters more clearly than we are able to. Now the natural question you might ask is okay that's all well and good but why are you focusing on the view from the Arab world? Why not the view from Africa or Europe or Asian or Latin America? And while I think all of those would in fact be very worthy enterprises, I also think there is something special about the Arab view because I believe that the Arab view is important because the Arab world has been affected more than other regions of the world by the outcomes of America's internal political struggles. This is why, for example, Arab affairs, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the fate of Iraq, the reverberations of the Arab Spring often appear so prominently in American political debates. This means that while Arabs have the requisite emotional distance from the American scene to be analytical about it because they reside outside of America, they're nonetheless enough affected by American political life to have the incentive to think deeply about it and have something meaningful to say about it.

Now I'd be lying if I didn't also say that an additional source of the attraction of these conversations, at least for me, is the opportunity to turn on its head the cliché of the American analyst commenting soberly on Arab politics and Arab political dysfunction. Even though I've often been one of those American analysts opining on the fate of the Arabs, it's deeply satisfying to me to provide a forum for Arab intellectuals to subject the United States to the same sort of scrutiny to which American analysts subject the Arab countries now. We began our series last week with the former Egyptian foreign minister Nabil Fahmy, and next week we'll be joined by a gifted young Arab journalist Ahmed Shihab-Eldin. Later in the series we'll speak to the Palestinian legislator and spokesperson and activist Hanan Ashrawi, and later, we'll speak to the former Iraqi prime minister Ayad Allawi, among many others. Now my esteemed co-pilot in these conversations is my brother and role model professor Karim Haggag of the American University in Cairo's School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. I don't have enough words of praise to say about this extraordinary individual, but I do want you to hear from him now, and so welcome Karim.

KH: Tarek thank you. Sincerely, it's a pleasure to collaborate with you and the Harvard Kennedy school on this conversation. And let me just add a word of thanks to our guest this afternoon, Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, and to all of you for joining us in this conversation.

TM: Thank you very much Karim. Okay so now to today's guest, Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla. Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla is one of the deepest and most insightful observers of and thinkers about global politics writing in the Arab world today. He has had a distinguished career as a professor of political science, a former Fulbright scholar, a former senior fellow at the London School of Economics, and a former chairman of the Arab Council for Social Science. He earned his Ph.D. in political science from Georgetown University, where he's also been a visiting professor in the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, and he earned a master's degree from American University. He is a scholar of political change both in the Gulf region, where he is from, and in the broader Arab world. He's written numerous books and articles. The most recent of which is *The Gulf Moment*, which made a splash in Arab intellectual circles with its bold argument that the center of gravity in the Arab world had shifted decisively to the small oil rich States of the Arabian Gulf. Those are the places he says that today are the indispensable Arab indispensable nations of the Arab world. They are quote taking the lead, influencing events, assuming greater financial responsibilities, projecting socio-economic competence, and becoming increasingly conscious of their newly acquired status as a regional power that far transcends the rest of the Arab countries. Now we'll get to that argument in a bit, but suffice it to say that if he is right that if in fact there is now a Gulf moment, I can think of no better vantage point than the Arabian Gulf from which to explore how America looks right now to the rest of the Arab world. So please join me in welcoming Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla. Welcome Dr.

AA: Thank you very much Dr. Tarek and thanks also for our dear friend Dr. Karim Haggag. Thanks for having me. I'm very happy to be part of this session.

TM: Dr. Abdulkhaleq, you're joining us from Dubai, correct?

AA: Yes, absolutely I am here in Dubai. And last time I saw you here it was I think before summer, and we were supposed to have Harvard, the students. And looking forward to your next visit to Dubai.

TM: Inshallah. Well of course the Coronavirus has derailed all of our plans, but what is the situation now in Dubai with respect to the Coronavirus? Is the worst over where you are?

AA: I think we are like everybody else and like all the countries in the world. Going probably through the second wave, but overall, the UAE has been successful in trying to contain, and they're trying to control this pandemic. I think we have done better than most in terms of the death rate, which is the lowest in the world. We are doing better than everybody else in terms of testing. We have done something like 10 million tests so far. That is even bigger than the number of the population in the country because many of us have done it once and twice. I myself have done it eight times so far, so I think we have a good record in trying to maintain it.

The country has decided to open up. Eventually, hopefully we will go back to where we were before this.

TM: Inshallah. You know one of the things that really strikes me is the contrast between the competence with which the Emirati leadership has handled the Coronavirus pandemic and the relative lack of competence with which the leadership in our country, the United States, has handled the pandemic. And when you look at the quite dismal record of the United States in handling this crisis and then you look at all of the other things that are happening in this country, from the unrest in American cities to the deep uncertainty about whether or not we will have a free and fair election, the results of which will be respected by all of the participants. When you look at the economic crisis that has resulted from, I think, both the political uncertainty and the mishandling of coronavirus. I suspect that you as a scholar of the world often find young Emiratis who come to you and say, I'm looking at the United States and how terrible things are there, and I really don't understand what is happening in America right now that got them to this state. What do you say to an Emirati who expresses this sentiment?

AA: I'll try to be as honest with him as possible, I guess. Just like I'd like to be as honest with you and with the participants in this session. 2020 has not been a good year for America, and it has not been a good year for anybody, any country in the world. But America probably was hit the most, and America has not been very convincing either. The record is really striking how this superpower America, with all the attributes that it has in terms of scientists, medical staff, medical infrastructure has turned in how to be the country that have dealt with this in this incredibly dissatisfying way to say the least. If not as Kamala today said, the greatest failure of the American system. That is not to blame the Trump administration or anybody, but America have shown that it is not at its best dealing with this COVID-19. So, the image of America at this moment is not at its best. America is really not at its best dealing with this pandemic, and it is not at its best probably because of this paralysis that we see in Washington. However, this is the glass half empty. America is not at its best. America, we thought is going to be the 21<sup>st</sup> century is going to be the American century. Apparently, it's not. That has gone away. Maybe we are moving in this post-American world that Fareed Zakaria has talked about.

However, there is also a glass that is half full, with the glass that is half empty. I think the glass half full is that America's is still a superpower, whether we like it or not. There is no other superpower that matches America and all the attributes of a superpower. America is still a financial superpower, a military, superpower, a gigantic scientific and technological superpower, a soft superpower. So, let's not also dismiss America as though it is in decline. I don't think I will tell my students, or I'll tell you here that America is in decline. I don't subscribe to that kind of a theory. So, there is two things here: a glass half full, a glass half empty. It depends where you sit, and where I sit, I have to look at both glasses. And overall America, I think, has enough power enough, enough resilience to overcome this pandemic. And we just have to wait for the election results to see which way America is going to go.

TM: Well I think many of our listeners will appreciate that note of confidence in the American future. But certainly, Dr. Abdulla, when you look at the state of political discourse in the

United States, you see a degree of polarization that I don't think ever existed before. In the circles that I tend to travel in, you have Americans who view president Trump as an aberration and an abomination. Somebody who is divisive, careless about the national interests, dedicated only to servicing his reputation. And then you have the other half of the country that views him actually, as a tribune of the common man and as a defender of the American national interest against globalized elites. And you really do have what feels almost like a sectarian divide in the United States. How do you think that this happened?

AA: Well in a way, that has always been divided. It is really not new. Maybe it is more today. We have always thought of America as a melting pot, as a country that has brought everybody in and provided prosperity for everybody. That was something of the past. Maybe America is no longer as melting pot as it used to be. There is a great deal of social division, racial division, political division. Something as you have said, we have never seen in America as divided as today, but you know, division is part and parcel of American way of life. But that division has been maintained in a very civil, in a very democratic way, and a very, you know, positive. And America was a role model in that sense. Is America a role model today in terms of, you know, division? I don't think so. That's where we are at this moment. I don't think America is looked upon as a role model in terms of, you know, in terms of social harmony, in terms of racial harmony, in terms of prosperity for its people. I think there is probably a decline of a sort. However, I think this has been cyclical. If you go through the 70 years of America since World War II, we have seen 10 good years, 10 bad years. And 70s were terrible, 80s we're good etc. So the last 10 years of America were great. America was booming economically, socially, etc. Unemployment reached nearly four percent, which was a miracle during these last four years. Are we in for another downturn in the next 10 years to come?

So, I look at America in this span of seven years, and I see it up and down. I see the up and down. I see sharp division, and I see times where the cleavages and the polarization has been sharp. And I see sometimes things that are really the best that America and any country can have. So, I am not very pessimistic as many are at this moment in history because I have seen America, and many of us who watch America from outside have seen the ups and downs of it. And maybe we are in the downside of it, but America has enough, probably, resources and resilience to pick up again, as it has done during the past seven years. These theories that America is in decline; we have heard it time and again, and we have also seen and read about America leading. Joseph Nye's theory. So, there is this, two stories and, we just have to look at the totality of it rather than at this moment, which is not the best of the moment for American people in American history and the American image and perception outside America.

TM: But looking at over the last 70 years, as you have, you're absolutely right that there is a cyclical nature to American politics and to the degree of comity in American. There's a cyclical nature to America's prestige. There's even a cyclical nature to the quality of the people who occupy the oval office. And you're right that we are not to be partisan, but we're probably experiencing a low point on all those dimensions. But don't you think that the current moment is different in just how low the low is? I mean we've never had a president before, at least in my reading, of history who openly questioned the legitimacy of the electoral process. We never

had a president who brought into the public sphere a persona who was as dismissive of the conventions of civility and the norms of at least civil discourse that operated before. I mean now you have a president who really speaks in a manner that wouldn't be admissible in your classroom or my classroom. These are our new things, and when you couple this new populist political style of president Trump with the tremendous polarization in American society, with the impotence of the American government in the face of the pandemic— If I were a young Emirati, I might not just say oh it looks like America is in decline. I might also say it looks like this democratic model is not all that it was cracked up to be. What would you say to that?

AA: I think during this last seven years, if we look at this post-war, you had a good president and you had a bad president. And Trump probably fell into this bad president's viewing. 14 presidents in this last 7 years by the way. You had Nixon, for instance, that— he was just as crooked and disastrous for American policy as you could think of okay. You had Carter. Many people were so unhappy with Carter although he was such a decent man. So, when you look at it, that historical perspective, nobody is like Trump—maybe one of the most difficult and unpredictable maybe the worst—we don't know. He's going to go into history and history would judge him. But I could come back to your question and say no you have gone through many presidents in the past who were not necessarily the best of the presidents, and they really brought so much damage to American prestige and American politics and American perception, just like Trump probably is today. Trump, his followers have still 40 plus percent, solid base. They did not waver.

I remember a story here Dr. Tarek which is very striking. I was in Washington, I think, two years ago in Washington D.C. going to this new Afro-American museum. This is fairly new so two years old, and it was something that I wanted to see, and I took a cabbie, and you know from where I stayed going to the to this museum, and he was Afro-American. And I tried to engage him, and to my surprise, he was one of the interesting discussions I had during that visit although I met so many academics etc. And the reason why: he, during 20 minutes ride with him, he was so much pro Trump, which amazed me. [He was] African American, defending Trump like you would never even believe it. He thought that he scared our enemy, and we needed him after Obama. He said that he's going to make America great again. He said that America needed him because we need you know to re-energize our people. So, when you have people like that coming from that kind of background, I think the American people are split when it comes to Trump. Trump has, as you know, a good side to him. If you look at his economic record—it's impressive by the way. But if you look at the moral part of it and if you look at the division that he's bringing, he's disaster. So overall, would you give him C, D, F or would you give him a B or an A? I would be somewhere in the middle, and I think he is probably a C plus president.

TM: Well you know that's— I want to dive into that a little bit. You know, it's not just the African American taxi driver who you met who has a high opinion of President Trump. It's also the case that many of the Arab world's leaders have a high opinion of president Trump. And one of the things that has struck us is the gap between the Arab leadership and the Arab citizens in terms of their perception of this president. He's deeply admired in the halls of power,

and I think deeply reviled on the Arab street. And the revulsion, I think, that the average Arab might feel for president Trump is understandable. This is a guy, remember who when he was running for office, would talk about how the way to deal with terrorism is to dip bullets in pig's blood to deter people from engaging in acts of terror. This is the man behind the "Muslim ban" that prevented immigration into the United States from several Muslim countries. And yet the the leaders of the Arab countries don't view him that way. And so just to give a little bit of data on this, in a May 2019 survey that was done by the Washington Institute for Near East Studies or at least commissioned by them, 9 percent of Saudis and 11 percent of Emiratis viewed president Trump favorably, in contrast of course to the very close relations those countries leaders have with Trump. So how do you explain that gap between the Arab street assessment of the American president and the assessment of the American president by Arab decision makers?

AA: I wouldn't take that poll very seriously to start with because, you know, in the Arab world it's really very difficult to conduct this kind of survey. So, let's first start with being a bit of a bit skeptical about the results of any polls in the Arab street. Having said this, I think if you look at once again four years of Trump nearly almost four years here, the Arab leaders in the Gulf at least and maybe throughout, found—maybe look at the following. The first trip that Trump has taken outside America. It was touring, not to Canada or Mexico etc. He came to Riyadh. For god's sake, that's not an easy thing. That's a mighty thing for the president of the United States to make a statement, to come to Riyadh. Of course, the Arab leaders will value and appreciate all of this okay.

Second, I think they would also look at the fact that he was delivered on the promise of his campaign. Very few presidents do deliver on their campaign, very few. And this guy said this is the nuclear deal with Iran is the worst, and I'm going to walk away from it. And he did. It was not something you would expect to do sometimes. It's very difficult to pull out of an accord, but he did. So that was a decision, a step, a move, initiative that is admired by the Arab governments, by the Arab leaders. Look at the third one here, which is just as important. They took off Qasem Suleimani. Obama had the chance to do it, and other presidents had the chance to do it. This guy is terrorist number one considered by many people, especially the states in the Gulf. So many people consider that a very courageous move to do. In the part of who—President Trump, so he does not shy away from taking this kind of tough decision.

Finally, this is the administration, this is the president that managed, successfully, to negotiate a deal between UAE and Israel, and I come from the United Arab Emirates. Whether you like the deal, or you don't like the deal, but this is a credit to him. So when you look just at these examples, let's—you know I could go down the last 10 others. They are very happy with that. We are very happy with him. Basically, I for one, let alone the governments and the leaders, I'm happy with them because he looks at Iran and see how destabilizing Iran is, unlike Obama, and he uses that strong stick called economic sanctions. And today, Iran is weaker. Weaker Iran, a destabilized Iran is good for the entire region. So many people probably look at this record rather than the other record that you see from where you sit Dr. Tarek.

TM: So, is it fair to say, doctor, that in the upcoming election were you an American voter, you would be voting for Trump?

AA: Okay I'm not going to be voting, but I think from a Gulf vantage point, yes. I think the people here are happy with the status quo, with continuity. That is okay. So, they don't like disruption. They don't like, you know, changing of administration and changing of the president. So, if I am to look at American presidential election coming in November and if I am given this choice to vote, I think my primary concern is going to be I'm going to be happy with continuity. That is despite the fact that this is a very tough president, despite the fact that he is the most unpredictable president. I think continuity is valued very much in this end rather than disruption. If Biden comes, I think they know how to deal with him. They have dealt with him eight years as a vice president, so they know him very well, just as they know all the other presidents and vice president of the past.

So, I think the criteria here to judge if I am to vote, and I have to be in favor, I think probably the people value continuity. And continuity means more of Trump, despite all the bad things that probably he will bring for the next four years. He has already done so much damage to American prestige, American reliability, American relation with the European, and with the Atlantic alliances. He has done so much damage to the international liberal system, of course, and to the international organizations: United Nations and UNESCO. Okay we know the disruption that he has brought, and I don't think anybody would tolerate another four years of him. But I think continuity is valued, and I think we will be, probably many of us, happier with him, despite all of [this baggage] that he comes with than having a new president, a new administration, a whole new policy. God knows where it's going to take us for the next four years.

KH: Great, so Dr. Abdulla if we can take you back to the central theme or the central concept that you formulated— the Gulf moment. And as Tarek mentioned in his introduction, this is the moment whereby according to you, the mantle of regional leadership has shifted to the Gulf. Now this has actually been a very interesting subject of intellectual debate in the Arab world and in Arab discourse. In general, there are, as you are well aware, many who take issue with that thesis of the Gulf moment, both intellectuals and practitioners alike. Now given that much of what we want to discuss with you today relates to that concept, I wonder if you can just take a moment or two to flesh out that thesis for our participants. What is the Gulf Moment according to your view, and why has it come about?

AA: I think I need more than one or two moments. I need probably half an hour to try to lay out the thesis in this book of mine, a 2018 work and a second edition in 2019, coming up with this concept of the Gulf moment. And I think it is important. It's an important question because many outside the Gulf probably have not come to term with this new Gulf that I talk about in in this book. There is a new Gulf. There is a 21st century Gulf that is vastly different from the 20th century Gulf, and many people have not yet come to terms with what I call the new Gulf of the 21st century Gulf, the Gulf moment. And here I think the new Gulf is different from the past economically politically, socially, militarily in every which way. And many people in the

West probably still have this hang up about the old Gulf. Politically, I don't think it is appropriate to call UAE or many Gulf states small states anymore. I have heard it Dr. Tarek.

Many of these countries—let me talk about the UAE, the case where I come from. Today, the UAE is a rising middle power, a rising regional power. It is no longer the little duckling of the 20th century that desperately needs American protection, although everybody does need American protection. So, the concept of small states no longer applies to this new Gulf, to the six Arab Gulf States. Economically, we are no longer as oil centered as we used to be 30 years ago or 20 years ago. Their interior mentality, the interior theory to describe Arab Gulf state's economy is no longer applicable. The UAE's economy is very diversified, probably just as diversified as any modern economy. Socially we are no longer the traditional society that many people still think of us. It's a very cosmopolitan, modern, global, even economy. When you come to Dubai and all of you, probably many of you, have come to Dubai and UAE and many other Gulf cities and countries and states, and society is no longer a traditional society. And the third thing here also. Militarily, we're no longer as weak or as impotent militarily as many people think. UAE, today, is considered by some second to Israel in terms of air force power and has engaged in many conflicts, and it has proof in itself being as a military might. So that's the first part of the Gulf moment. There is a new Gulf, and many people outside the Gulf have not come to terms with it.

The second part of this is that yes, the Gulf has become the new center of political, diplomatic, economic, financial, whatever power. It is the new center. Egypt is no longer. Syria is no longer. Iraq is no longer. So, we are left with UAE, Saudi Arabia, and the others. They are the new center. The basic thesis in less than one minute, Dr. Karim, is that the six Arab Gulf States today, the six of them, including our maverick Qatar, are at this moment in history, which is a unique moment, have more influence, are more visible, have more power over 16 Arab states than the 16 Arab states small and big combined have over the six Arab Gulf states. This is the new equation. That's why America, Congress, president, the Americans in general have to come to terms with the this new Gulf, and I am afraid that many in Washington, many in the administration, many in here and there, all over America probably have not come to the terms with this new Gulf, and they're still dealing with the Gulf of the 20th century. That's the Gulf moment.

KH: Very admirably done. I mean you've condensed a very rich and complex concept in just under a capsule, two minutes. Yes, so thank you. But taking the cue from your last comment, I mean this raises the question of, what are the implications of this Gulf moment for your relationship with the United States? Because it seems that this rise in Gulf regional activism, as you mentioned, I mean the involvement of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in regional conflicts, its activism in regional security politics coincided with what many observers called the U.S. withdrawal from the region. And so that raises, of course, the question whether the Gulf moment is at least partially a response to the perception of U.S. retreat from the region.



AA: Well there is a new dynamic in the relationship that's for sure Dr. Karim. There is a new dimension, and it takes two to tango. It's a two-way street. There are profound changes that are going on where you are in Washington, in America. America is going through this, you know, thinking, or there is a mood to probably retreat from the Middle East, from the region, from the Gulf for a variety of reasons: no longer as vital of interest place as it used to be, oil is no longer important. So, we're seeing messages coming from Washington, talk coming from Washington, even approaches, policy that America is in a different mood than it used to be, probably in the back there. That's one part. There is a new dynamic there, and I think we're trying to reconcile with that. But there is another dynamic, which is right here, which is very little appreciated back in Washington and in the centers of power, whether it is the think tanks or whether the administration etc. They have not yet come to terms with this new Gulf that can say for the first time, no to Washington. In many cases during the last five years, Gulf capitals have said no to Washington and done things their own way. And they don't need green light to do things anymore. But I think many people in the Washington circle and, you know, in the beltway, they have not yet come to terms with this new Gulf that is independent, that is active, that has pursued its own interest, which is sometimes not the same as America's interest in the region.

And they are— the Gulf countries like UAE that take the lead and sometimes not to the liking of many people in Washington probably. So, while we have adjusted to these new changes in America, I think many in America have not yet adjusted to this new dynamic that is taking place in the Gulf. That is, I think, where we're going to have more and more tension in this relationship, unless America comes to term with this new Gulf. I think we are heading in a period of rough time—that is another period in our relationship. I think the Gulf are going now to Asia. There is an Asian mood. There is an Asia that is rising, China, India, Korea, Japan. They are the future, and probably Europe and America are the past. And I think many of us here in the Gulf are readjusting because America is still not valuing enough this new Gulf, whereas our Asian partners have understood how important the Gulf region is, and they come for investment. They come for markets. They come for consultation. They're even ready to come for strategic and probably security purposes, the commodity that we must need because of our proximity to Iran, a difficult neighbor. So yes, there is a new dynamic on both sides, and here, I think we have understood the massive, deep changes taking place in Washington. But Washington has not yet come to understand the deep changes and the new mood in Gulf capitals.

KH: So that's very interesting Dr. Abdulla because if you say that there is this new dynamic in the relationship— I mean a rising Gulf and a United States less concerned with the region—that begs the question what is it that the Gulf wants from America? I mean, what would be your top three priorities in engaging with the next administration on the Middle East?

AA: Well America has been the number one provider of security for the last 40 years since 1971 when the British had gone. This place needed America for that one single important value commodity called security, and America has provided that neatly in return for oil and oil prices

and the market, etc., and the dollar as a currency. So, I think that is still there. No other power on earth could provide the security that the Arab Gulf states need, and no power on earth to that matter could provide the security for Japan or for Korea or for even Europe sitting next to Russia, to China in Asia. So, all countries probably still deeply need America as a security provider. That is not going to go away. However, there is something that is changing, and that changing thing is that maybe we are in for phasing America out of Gulf security. And there is only 1 percent possibility, 2 percent possibility, 3 percent possibility, over the next five years there will be a substitute for America. I think there are other powers that are ready to move in. NATO probably, Europe probably, France have already had bases, Britain have come back again after 40 years. There are Indians who are sending, you know, troops, even to the region. Koreans are interested. Asia is interested. So, I think America is still very important. However, that importance, probably, gradually is going to be phased out as we move on during the 2020 and all the way to 2030.

However, second thing. America is still important as a technological power, is important as an investment power, is important as a financial center. So, I think we will have, you know, an important relationship on this level. And it's deeper today than ever before as we move in. America is still a superpower in terms of universities: Harvard, MIT, Stanford etc. That is not going to go away, so I think there will be a great deal of interest to utilize the power of the of the universities and the think tanks and the brains that America still has there. So, America is not going to go away in terms of economics, finance. Military, security, technology is still going to be indispensable to the Gulf and to the rest of the world, despite the fact that we are moving into post-America world, and a post-American world. As Fareed Zakaria has said, America alone cannot manage the world's problem by itself, on its own. But all countries together cannot run the world and manage its problems without America. I think we are moving into that terrain. America's still needed, but the rest of the world are also becoming an important player to solve the world, to bring the stability, to provide to provide security and peace, and this stability for the world. So that we are in this somewhere in the middle as we move on for the next tour in the next decade where America is important, but probably by its own choice, doesn't want to take the responsibility to run and manage the problems and the crisis in the world.

KH: So that leads I think very nicely to the last question I will ask while we are on this theme of the Gulf moment. So, if your claim is that the Gulf is now in a position of leadership, then I think the question needs to be asked leading the region to what exactly—I mean this is the region, of course, that is racked by deep-seated long-standing conflicts. It is plagued by geopolitical competition, one of the highest levels of militarization of any region in the world. The collapse of states in the Arab world— I mean state failure— that seems to be an endemic problem in the region. This is not to say of course that the Gulf possesses a magic wand to solve these problems, but I think in terms of a vision or a pathway for the region out of this scenario of instability and extremism, what does the Gulf have to offer when it claims the mantle of leadership?

AA: As you said quite rightly, Dr. Karim, if you look at this region from Pakistan all the way to Morocco— this extended Middle East, not the smaller mediums but this very extended Middle

East Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria etc. all the way to the North Africa and going through the Gulf; if you look at this region, this is the most unstable, the most violent, the most extremist region on earth today. There's more war, more tension, more bloodshed, more terrorists, and extremists packed in this place than anywhere on earth today, whether it's in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, East Europe etc. So, it is a very dangerous neighborhood that we live in, and it's going to be even more dangerous in the years to come. In the middle of this very difficult red zone that we live in. The one place that has held its stability and prosperity for the past 50 years is the Arab Gulf states. We live next to difficult neighbors like Iran and like Turkey and like God knows what. Even though we are so close to these centers of tension and war and violence, we managed to keep our stability with the help of America— let me give credit, but also with the good management of our resources and our capabilities.

So, we live in a very difficult neighborhood, and we maintained our prosperity and stability. So, when we take the lead, there is plenty of risk involved, of course. Sometimes, you take a very calculated risk, and sometimes probably the return is not as much as guaranteed. But I think what the Gulf moment offers, or the Arab Gulf states offer the entire region is two things: our endgame, our project if there is any project for the Gulf, it is two things. It's a twofold thing. One, I think in this very difficult tense region, the Arab Gulf States want to bring stability as much as possible. So, we are here for stability, and I think we have done everything possible to counter forces of chaos. So that's one thing. And there are so many of them. And in that sense, you have to go and help governments that are breaking up. Countries that are being fragile and being dismantled like Iraq, like Syria etc. even Yemen.

So, number one, I think it is in our best interest, and if there is one value that we're bringing to the region and trying to spread around, it's the value of stability. The second thing is moderation. There is so much extremism in this land from Pakistan to Morocco. Extremists have taken over. They have hijacked the agenda for the past 10 years and even more. So, I think we are trying to bring a dose of political moderation, tolerance. That's the role model the UAE is playing at this moment. So, moderation is number one. Stability is number two. And believe it or not, Dr. Karim, in this place, there is so much disintegration of countries. There is so much conflict. The only stable regional integration until very recently has been the GCC, so we do have a model that we as the Arab Gulf States can offer to the rest of the region. There is this, you know, economic integration called the GCC— not at its best at the moment, but we have 30 years that the GCC has not breaking up. It's weak today, but it's, you know— all integration, regional integration, go through this. One step forward, and one step backward. We are, you know, one step or half a step backward, but I think we have an example to present to the region that integration is important. Moderation is the name of the game. Stability is what we see. That is what we offer for the region as we, the Gulf states, take the leadership, which is a responsibility. It is not something we, you know, have gone to assume, but it's something that has been befallen on the Arab Gulf states governments.

TM: Wonderful; thank you for that Dr. Abdulkhaleq. We're going to switch gears a little bit now to talk about the last item on our agenda before we open it up for questions, and that is the Abraham Accords, which are the set of accords that your country just signed with the state of

Israel that bring peace and full normalization between your country and the state of Israel. And I guess I have two questions to start us off here. The first is why now? And the second is what would you say to somebody who says that the answer to the why now question is that your country was nudged into this not terribly good agreement for it in order to deliver a victory for the current American president? So, if anything, this isn't an illustration of a bold Gulf experiencing a bold Gulf moment. This is just the UAE doing what the current U.S. administration wants the UAE to do.

AA: I tell you, and I tell everybody who says this, absolutely not. This is a decision completely, totally taken here in Abu Dhabi, not there where you guys are in Washington. This is done according to UAE's watch and on our own pace. We decide every single step along the way. We have decided, and we are in the control of it. We are in the driver's seat of this accord, of this process, not Israel not United States. It's the United Arab Emirates. We could pull out of it anytime we want, and we started it with our own choice. There was absolutely no American pressure, and there is no American inducement. We did the— the UAE has gone into this purely out of its own interest and out of concern for the Palestinians. Let me explain this a little bit. This is a very interesting question you're asking here. This is—I think the UAE because of this accord have in no way and in no shape is turning its back on the Palestinian issue to start with, and I think there is no turning back on the Palestinian because it's a just issue, a just cause. They deserve a land. They deserve a state of their own, and until then, I think we are with them to the last minute. They have a bad governance. They have bad leadership. They have a miserable partner called Israel, which is not interested in peace at this moment. But I don't think there is any way as we go through this normalization that there is a turning back on our Palestinian brothers and Palestinian issues.

Second, I think the UAE has taken its time. This process has started probably 10 years ago, 2019, 2009, 2010, and it's gone through many phases. And at each stage, the UAE found a benefit. First of this tacit security regime that it's formed, there's plenty of things that is going on in a tacit way, not in a public way, and the UAE have found it beneficial to capture it, whether it is in the security, whether it is strategically intelligence technology. Name it and at each stage, the UAE has found it profoundly beneficial to have an open relationship until the moment came, and I think the moment that came was probably one trigger of why there was a real concern that annexation will sit back all of this interest that was accumulating over the last 10 years. And the UAE was, you know, frank enough with the Israelis if you go that road, then this whole relationship is going to be compromised. And I think for the first time in his life, Netanyahu and his right-wing government probably found it wise enough not to tamper with this massive, mutually good relationship that is going on between the UAE and Israel. And probably, they thought that this threat is not just the paper threat. It's not just any threat. A bombastic threat is a real threat. If annexation would have gone through, I think Israel would have lost massively on this tacit relationship that was growing over the past 10 years. Annexation was the trigger, and I think the UAE have that one tangible thing for the Palestinians now. Whether they, the Palestinians, are going to take it and seize it, I'm not sure. But, you know, let's hope that we have four years of an opening where the Palestinians could come back too. So this is all done on UAE's watch, not an American watch, not an Israeli. What I

didn't think there was any pressure coming from the Trump, I don't think we were given favor to increase Trump, his popularity. Trump has to deal with the Corona. If he loses, he would lose because of the Corona. And if he wins, it's not going to be because of the Abraham Accords.

TM: You know, you spoke to us very convincingly of the importance now of the United Arab Emirates and the Arab world. This is not any ordinary country. Its importance actually far outstrips its size, so to have for Israel to have normal relations with the United Arab Emirates is not a small thing. It's a huge prize. Did the UAE get enough for giving Israel this prize?

AA: Okay I think we have a better, a bigger economy than Israel. Okay we have as open society and as relaxed and as stable and as cohesive, probably more cohesive society, than the Israeli society. We have a better relationship with the rest of the world, probably if not same as Israel, but we have more friends and more probably networks throughout the world, extending from Tokyo all the way to Washington. We are in a better position, and we don't need Israel. We could have continued this without Israel. I think the Israelis don't need us too. They are also having a, you know, an economy etc. and a big, and they are doing very well in Washington, and they're doing all well, everything.

So what advantage Israel is going to take out of this and what advantage we will take out of it? I think what we are getting out of this is massive in terms of security, in terms of technology from Israel. And Israel has a lead in in technology, especially in the military side and in the security and intelligence side. But I think, you know, the UAE is thinking now, not just regionally but globally. And I think if you go to Washington today, the UAE—probably half one Washington both sides of Washington Democrats and Republican more so than anybody—today the UAE stands ten foot taller than it was before. They are caught in where it matters the most, Washington. This accord is a leverage the UAE has now over probably Washington and over Israel. It's that leverage for us. It's going to enhance UAE's leadership in the region. It's going to enhance UAE's prestige and status throughout the world and you know maybe it's just a small— maybe it will bring us the F-35, which is part of this deal, which is going to make the UAE probably safe for the next 20 years to come. So, what benefits we getting out of this? I think we're getting more benefits than Israel.

TM: Now that your country has full normal relations with Israel, would you go and give a talk at the Hebrew university of Jerusalem?

AA: Absolutely not.

TM: Why not?

AA: I am not for normalization. I fully understand why the government has done it, why my state has done it. I fully support that, but in the personal level, I am still not somebody that is ready to go to Israel or recognize Israel or even happy about normalization. That is on the personal level.

TM: Do you think most Emiratis are where you are or where the government is? I think we don't know the feelings. We don't have the polls. But I think 1/3 of the Emiratis are happy with it. One-third of the Emiratis probably are not, and I am one of them. And 1/3 really don't care one way or the other. However, having said this, I know for sure probably, you know, as much to 90 percent of Emiratis are with any decision that the government takes. They have so much trust in the government. The government has an absolutely good record for the past 50 years of delivering. So, I think those who are with or against normalization, all of them, I think they pretty much trust what the government is doing, and I think that is very important. The UAE ranks number two in terms of citizens trust in government, by the way— number two worldwide according to Alderman Annual report on trust of government. So, there is plenty of goodwill, plenty of reservoir of trust of the government. So, I think part of it, whether you are with it or against it, I think we trust what the government is doing, and I think it's very solid. That's why I fully understand what the government of the UAE has done, fully understand why the normalization took place now, and I think I'm ready to defend it to the last minute.

KH: So Dr. Abdulla, one very intriguing reference in the Abraham Accords is to this idea of a strategic agenda for the Middle East, and I think it's worth quoting the exact text of the accords on this so that we can get your views for our participants. The accord says, and I quote, "Israel and the United Arab Emirates will join with the United States to launch a Strategic Agenda for the Middle East to expand diplomatic, trade, security cooperation." Along with the United States, Israel and the UAE share a similar outlook regarding the threats and opportunities in the region, as well as a shared commitment to promoting stability through diplomatic engagement and closer security cooperation. This is a very interesting passage, I think, because it's not just the UAE opening up relations with Israel. It's not just about normalization. Here are three countries: the United States, Israel, and the UAE coming together to talk about the future of the Middle East, a new strategic agenda for the region. What is that agenda and do you agree that this phrasing of the accords almost makes it seem that this is more of a strategic alliance, much more than a simple normalization of diplomatic relations?

AA: Yes, I think I agree. I think there is more to it than simple bilateral relationship. There is much bigger than Egypt—Israel peace deal, much more important than Jordan-Israel deal. They were bilateral. I think, here, we are reframing, reshaping alliances in here, and alliances depends on clear views of who's the enemy in here. Unless you have a clear view of an enemy, you don't form an alliance. So, this strategic agenda that is being talked about, it's a three-party agenda. America is Israel in the United Arab Emirates. So, who are we facing up to? And I think at the bottom of it all, it is Iran as a destabilizing force in the region for the past 38 years. Iran has been expanding. Iran has been funding militias and armed groups in the region and has been playing havoc in the region. And we all are concerned. America is concerned. Europeans are concerned. Asians are concerned. Even Russia, the best friends of Iran, are not on board with that. Where we differ is how to approach it, but the view—a global view—is that Iran is a destabilizing epicenter, not in the Middle East but on our world stage too. So that is a fundamental view that is shaping this strategic agenda. Then you need more than the UAE. Then you need more than Israel, and even probably more than America to come together to

face up to this Iran that is ever expanding and playing havoc in the region. And I think that is why protests are here.

However, having said this, Iran has pushed us into this. But this alliance, from the UAE point of view, is not necessarily just directed against Iran. There is also Turkey that is today playing the same role. It's a very difficult regional power. It's a very important regional power but a very difficult one that is. You see it in the Mediterranean. You see it now in Azerbaijan-Armenia. You see it interfering in Libya and Syria, all over. So, there is more than Iran at the stake, and if there is a third layer to this, there is plenty of those militias, armed ones. And there is this, you know, incredible amount of militarization of radical groups. You see them in Libya. You see them in Syria. You see them in Iraq. You see them in Yemen. You see them all over the place. So, I think this strategic relationship has all these three threats, view of threats, view of any of the stability that has, is at the core of it. And if we have this alliance, the UAE probably have found a good partner to work with. We do already have, the UAE, have a good partner with Saudi Arabia — that's a moderate state. Egypt is important. Jordan is there. Bahrain is there. The UAE has a relationship, even with as far as Greece and Cyprus and Germany. So, UAE is doing partnership with so many friends and so many allies now. We are firmly embedded in this trilateral accord with this strategic thinking at the center of it all, Dr. Karim.

KH: Thank you Dr. Abdulla. So, one final question I think before we turn to our participants and that relates to the issue of peace and specifically to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Now the UAE has been very adamant in emphasizing that it still upholds Palestinian rights. It is still in favor of an independent Palestinian state and for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the middle of all of these shifts and the new dynamics in the region and your newfound relationship with Israel, can you tell us how does the UAE intend to manage this new relationship for the pursuit of these goals, for the pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

KH: Dr. Karim, I think we have to realize that dealing with Israel is not an easy thing. Israeli politics is just as difficult to understand sometimes as American politics, if not more. So we are into this relationship, with this partner, and I think we have to realize that Israeli politics is not as neat and as clean, as easy as we think, and we just have to learn from engaging them and trying to be a good partner. If they make any stupid mistakes, if they're our new partner Israel is— do something really stupid again, I think the UAE could be in a position to say thank you very much we tried, and you didn't deliver. And I think that is very possible, and I say this because Israelis, at the moment, are not partner for peace. This right-wing government, I am giving up on it. Maybe the UAE government is not giving up on Netanyahu and his right-wing government, but they are not interested in peace. They are interested in more settlement. They are interested in in grabbing more land. They are not in one bet for an independent Palestinian state. So if that is the case, then I think we don't have an Israeli partner for peace. Nevertheless, the UAE is trying to engage them as this engagement is going to be used to soften the Israelis and bring the Israelis first to the peace negotiation. It is exactly unlike what many people think. It's the Israelis that are not ready for peace. It is this government in Israel that is not a peace

partner. Palestinians will like to join at any moment, if they give you— annexation stops or settlement stops or the Israelis bring some, you know, modest improvement to their life and stop this heavy-handedness that the occupation is bringing.

So, I am somebody who's not very optimistic that, despite this accord, we're going to have peace in a year's time or two years' time. However it's also a challenge to the Palestinian leadership, and we are in for an election, and let's hope that the Palestinian people would realize that this corrupt old very, you know, lethargic Palestinian leadership has not been also delivering what the Palestinian people do. And hopefully the election will be a game changer, and the new leadership comes in. And if that is the case, then I think Israel will be in a much more difficult. Israel is very happy with this division on the Palestinian side, with this status quo leadership that we have in the West Bank. And for them, they don't want to change all of that. So let's hope that the election will be also a more added positive move in the direction to have some kind of a negotiation between these two partners, Palestinians and the Israelis.

TM: Dr. Abdulkhaleq, we're going to open it up in a second for questions, but I'd be remiss if I didn't just bring this back to the Gulf moment for a second, and I'm just wondering what the implications of the Abraham Accords are for the Gulf moment? After all, there was in the Middle East, a prior moment, an Egyptian moment, and some might tell you that the Egyptian moment ended in fact when Egypt made its separate peace with Israel. At the very least, that certainly cost Egypt a great deal of prestige and influence in the Arab world, and I'm wondering if the same thing might happen to the Gulf.

You're right. We don't have polling data on this decision, but we do have previous polling data on how the average Arab views Israel. So, there was a poll conducted in 2017-2018 of 19000 Arabs in 11 countries. Now admittedly, it was done by a group out of Doha. But they found 82 percent of Arab respondents believe that Israel is the country that poses the largest threat to their national security, and 84 oppose recognition of Israel by their country. A less biased source of public opinion data is the Arabbarometer run by Amaney Jamal of Princeton and Mark Tessler of Michigan. In 2018-2019. They interviewed 25000 Arabs in 12 countries, and they asked them would it be good for the region to coordinate its foreign policy with Israel. 79 percent of Arabs said no, the majority. Of those, half of the Arabs said strongly disagree with that prospect. So, given how unpopular normalization is with the average Arab, if the Gulf is now seen to be leading the charge towards normalization, doesn't that risk denting the Gulf's prestige among citizens in the region and potentially putting an end to the Gulf moment?

AA: No, I still think the Gulf movement is here to stay, and it is going to be here until 2050 at least. So, the first half of the 21st century is going to be Arab Gulf states' century. So no, I think despite all these statistics and the polls, with regard to the Palestinian issue, I don't think that is going to weaken, dent the Gulf moment. That's one answer. The second answer: at the heart of the Gulf moment is the UAE momentum. If there is a Gulf moment, there is something also called the UAE's momentum, and the UAE is taking the lead. 10 years ago, Qatar was taking the lead. Maybe 10 years later, Saudi Arabia will come back with its reform and will take the lead. But at this moment of the Gulf moment, there is something called the UAE's momentum, and I



think this accord is going to solidify the UAE's leadership of the Gulf moment and of the Arab region. And it is done, not because of this accord, because what the UAE has achieved so far.

It is the one country that is going to Mars, and it is one country that is planning to land on the moon. This is the first country in the Arab world that is having, you know, nuclear power to diversify its power portfolio; it's energy portfolio. It's the country that has probably the biggest airport, the biggest airline company; not just in the Arab world but on the globe. It is a global hub for logistics, a global hub for tourism. It has—every single day there is good news coming out of the UAE, which turns it into a role model. And that role model — if you want statistics, we just saw one just two days ago with the Arab youth, which is in its nine years, and Arab youth view the UAE as the favorite country, much more so than America. 46 percent of Arab youth view UAE as a place that they want to work. Their place that they want to emulate, a successful place. They don't want to go to Canada. They don't want to go to Britain. They don't want to go to Germany. Arab youth—200 million Arab youth, 46 percent of them— there is nearly 100 million that view the UAE as the country of their choice. So, the UAE as a role model, as a trendsetter is here to stay. And every single day, there is something new coming out of the UAE to solidify what I call the Arab moment, the Arab Gulf but the UAE momentum. So, I don't think this accord is going to damage UAE's perception indeed. If anything, it's going to give us even more chances to play that leadership role.

TM: Wonderful thank you Dr. Abdulkhaleq. Now let's open it up for questions. If you have a question of Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, you can get my attention by raising your hand using zoom's raised hand function. If you're not able to raise your hand for whatever reason, just send me a private message in the chat, and I can ask the question on your behalf. And the first question I have here is from our colleague Sultan Sooud al-Qassemi. So, let me unmute him so that he can ask his question

SA: Thank you Dr. Abdulkhaleq. Good evening. My question to you is the U.S. has indicated, a number of times, it's unease with the ongoing Gulf crisis, which has dragged on, I think, now we're going into the fourth year, adding that it benefits Iran. So, what should the U.S. do to help resolve the Gulf crisis if at all it is possible?

AA: Thank you Sultan. The UAE has been trying to resolve the Qatar crisis, the Gulf crisis for the past, whatever, five years, and it didn't go anywhere. They sent time and again, envoys, foreign ministers, Tillerson. They came in and out, and they tried to mediate, and it turned out that they are not in the position to do anything about it. So, number one, there is not much that the American can do about it. They tried it, and they failed, And maybe if they try for another five years, I don't think it is Washington that could crack this problem. Kuwait tried also. They are the only mediator that everybody recognized, and for the past five years again, they didn't make any headway in this third, fourth year, finally going into the fourth way. So I think this crisis is here to stay for the time being. There was some opening, and we moved forward half a step. But then again, there was a lapse of— back to square zero. It's, you know, bad for the GCC for sure. But the Gulf moment is much bigger than the GCC. The GCC is only the institutional part of the Gulf moment. What I see here is this UAE–Saudi Arabia axis, UAE–Saudi Arabia

coordination and cooperation which is at its best, which is substituting for the rest of the group. And as long as we have this UAE-Saudi Arabia coordination, which is at its best, and it's going to continue and this is a game changer and a very important development in Gulf politics, I think this will substitute for any confusion that we have at this moment. But I think we are far from resolving this Qatar or Gulf crisis so far. Thanks for the question.

TM: Thank you, Sultan, for that excellent question. The next question I have is from professor Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, professor of economics at Virginia Tech University and an affiliated scholar of the Middle East Initiative. Please go-ahead sir. Djavad you're unmuted, but we cannot hear you. You knew it yourself. Okay, I think while we are sorting out Dr. Salehi-Isfahani's technical difficulties, we'll go to our next questioner, Dr. Jonathan Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

JA: Thank you Tarek and thank you Dr. Abdulkhleg. It's good to see you again, and it's good to see Karim. I have a question about the Gulf moment. At a moment when the world seems to be pivoting in a direction of reducing the centrality of hydrocarbons—the global economy— is the Gulf moment in fact, right now, and declining as the world looks not only to renewable energy but other kinds of substitutes for hydrocarbons? As the scarcity of hydrocarbons seems not to be the determining factor in the supply because through fracking, other unconventional oil and gas, it's just a question of what the price is. What is the future of the Gulf moment in a decade or two decades and the world's willingness to rush to the Gulf at a time when oil is a less central commodity than it's been?

AA: Thank you John for this question and happy to have you here. You know, this is—I think— a great misperception of the Gulf moment. The Gulf moment has absolutely nothing to do with oil okay, and I think I think it's a post-oil thing. Oil has been around since 1973 onward, and there was nothing called the Gulf moment. The Gulf moment is a 21st century thing, which means it's a post-oil thing. Oil is still a king or, it is still important, but the Gulf importance is not linked to oil anymore. Gulf sovereign wealth fund is more important today, as important— let me see. As oil, UAE is the second in terms of sovereign wealth fund. UAE and the others have developed the aviation industry, and it's massive by the way. Emirates airline today and Dubai airport and Doha airport and the aviation sector is a huge important— what Emirates airline brought to the UAE in terms of tourism, in terms of imaging, in terms of publicity is more far more important with what oil has brought in the past. 50 years. The Gulf today, UAE Dubai port today is the third biggest logistic hub in the world. The UAE is the logistics center, and the Gulf is becoming a logistics center. Dubai caters to a region that encompasses two billion people today. Dubai is a center for banks and companies and global multinationals. So the Gulf formed. And let me add to all of this is the private sector of the Gulf, whether it's in Kuwait or Qatar etc. They have penetrated Arab economies from Morocco to Tunisia to Egypt to Jordan to all over the place. Today, Gulf capital and Gulf multinational corporations operate in Europe in Australia in Asia in America— all over the place. And that's a private sector Gulf, by the way.

So I think the Gulf moment is has gone way beyond oil, and the Gulf are going way beyond oil. Although, once again I emphasize oil is king as oil is to be reckoned with. But it's not any more

an important feature of the Gulf moment. The Gulf moment has to do with the diplomacy power, soft power, financial power, logistic hubs, military power. The Gulf of 21st century has gone way beyond what many people there in where you said, probably in Washington. And I think the thinking that the Gulf is nothing but oil is obsolete. It's no longer true. We could— the UAE's GDP is a 400 billion dollar GDP. Only 27 percent of it—it is all your revenue. The government, of course, revenue is still attached to oil revenue. But even there, we have the value added taxes. Saudi Arabia has gone for 15 percent taxes to diversify their revenues, and I think, you know, oil is probably not important to you guys in the west to America to Europe even. But it is still massively important to Asian countries. 80 plus percent of Gulf oil today goes to India, China, Korea, Japan, and at least for the next, you know, 40 years to come, Asia is the future. And therefore, oil is still important for the global market.

TM: Thank you Dr. Alterman for that question and thank you Dr. Abdulla for that answer. I have a question here from Nimrod Novik who asks is there any appetite in the UAE to join hands with Egypt and Saudi Arabia in replacing Qatar's role in Gaza and thus steering Hamas away from the Muslim Brotherhood axis? That's his first question. And his second question is there any appetite in the UAE to play a role in improving governance in the Palestinian Authority?

AA: There is no way the UAE or Saudi Arabia replaces Qatar in the regional role. I think Qatar has been always a maverick, a loner, and wherever it goes, it becomes a spoiler. So, I don't think UAE wants to repeat any of that. It's not the type of policy approach that the UAE or Saudi Arabia wants to do. In fact, it is exactly the opposite. Qatar has been consistently over the past 25 years a spoiler, which is even more so today with Erdogan and with Turkey. So, we're not going to go help Hamas or jihad or provide things to make the life of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank difficult. Okay that's not the kind of role that the UAE and Saudi Arabia will be playing. They are playing much more a different role altogether, and I think you know, this accord probably will be used by the UAE. And I hope they do facilitate Palestinian-Israeli negotiation. They are in a power, in a position to have that leverage probably over Israel. And if the election in Palestine brings in a younger, a different leader to Palestinian politics, which has been exhausted by this corrupt old age Palestinian, and when that happens, I think you will find Saudi Arabia and the UAE being a partner with the Palestinians much more so than today. Today we're having a problem with the leadership, which is happy with what they have at the moment, but maybe things will change as a result of the election. And I think it's in everybody's interest, especially the American, the UAE, the Israelis to make sure that the forthcoming election in Palestine is a successful to bring a new generation of Palestinians to lead this cause and get us out of this mess.

TM: Wonderful. So, we are coming up on the end of our time, but professor Djavad Salehi was able to get back online, and so I'll invite him to ask his question. Go ahead sir.

DSI: Thank you. I hope you're hearing me now.

TM: We are.

DSI: Right good. Thank you, Tarek, and thank you, Dr. Abdulkhaleq, for a very fascinating talk. My question is about Iran and specifically about U.S. sanctions against Iran. You correctly observed that Iran, as a result of the sanctions, has become much weaker. But as you probably know, the impact of sanctions has been quite asymmetric on the government, which is the source of the tensions with UAE and on its ordinary people. And I'm wondering if there is this understanding or this distinction made in UAE between the leadership in Iran and ordinary Iranians who are your neighbors— are going to be there for thousands of years—whether having this kind of collective punishment, with almost no end in sight, because it's not clear that Iran's leadership is changing his minds about his behavior in the region; whether this is going to be a good thing for the region moving forward because, as you know, these regimes come and go, but the people of the region are going to be living there forever.

AA: Thank you Dr. Djavad for this important question. At least in this session, let me, you know, just answer it this way. Iran is a neighbor to us. It's only 200 kilometers away. It's probably 20000 kilometers from America, but we are here next to Iran. The six Arab Gulf States are the closest to Iran next to Iraq, and we have been dealing with Iran for the past 3000. Through after all of this period, we lived next to Iran as a neighbor. Okay we lived with Iran during the shah Period. Now we live with Iran after, you know, after the revolution for the 37. And it goes back, and it would go forth. Iran has always, during all these 3000 years has been a difficult neighbor for us, whether it's the shah Iran or revolution Iran or before Iran. It's always been difficult, but the last 38 years has been more difficult than before, and Iran is getting more difficult by the day. The radicals are taking over. It's the Suleimani. It's not Rouhani. It's not Mohammad Javad Zarif that we all see. It is Khomeini and his closest friends that are in the driver's seat, and these guys, nobody reached them and to talk to them or to deal with them. And as long as these people are in the driver's seat, in the seat of power in Tehran, Iran is going to get even more difficult by the day. That's answer number one. Answer number two: nobody probably has reached out to Iran more than the UAE and more than Oman and more than Bahrain and more than all us. We really have tried time and again to reach out to Iran, but Iran is, as you know more than I do, it's a very difficult— politics of Iran is very difficult. Iranian mentality is very difficult. It's like the Iranian carpets. It is difficult even for the Iranian to understand Iranian politics before and now even more. So, it's a very difficult neighbor to deal with.

Nevertheless, the UAE in particular, in the past one year at least, have reached out to Iran in multiple ways: have gone to Tehran, have sent an envoy to Tehran, have sent letters to Tehran, have sent Coronavirus medical aid to combat Coronavirus at least once during 2020. So, we are reaching out, and I think we are interested in lessening tension. Sanctions are not something that we like, but it is not our doing. It is the American doing, and if you have the power please change it. Maybe if Biden comes, we will be more than happy to have Biden because of one primary interest of ours. That is the lessening of tension in the Gulf. We don't want to see another war. If there is a chance for a war, we have gone already three big wars in the last 30 years, so we're not interested in the fourth. The Arab gulf states in total, the UAE in particular, are not interested in the fourth also destructive and disastrous war. So, you're absolutely right. Our sympathy is with the Iranians, and the one to blame is not us. The one to blame is not even

America for the sanctions. If there is any blame, it is the government of Iran. It's the clerics in Iran. It is Ali Khamenei and company in Iran. They are the one to be blamed for these sanctions.

TM: Ladies and gentlemen, we have now come to the end of our time. In fact, I believe it is midnight where Dr. Abdulkhaleq is. I think all of you will agree with me when I say that we've just experienced the very special treat of being in contact and communion with one of the most gifted and fertile minds out there. And I believe my friends, if our speaker today is correct that we are living in the Gulf moment, I can think of no greater testament to the existence of that moment, to the existence of a dynamic, creative, and influential Gulf than the Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla himself. Sir, thank you very much for joining us.

AA: Thank you for having me and thanks to Karim and the participants.

TM: Karim, any last words before we sign off?

KH: Just to add my word of thanks and sincere appreciation for Dr. Abdulla. I think your insight, and I think more importantly your candor has left us with a very rich discussion. So, allow me to really thank you. And of course, thank you Tarek and to all the participants who joined us for this session, thank you very much.

TM: All right everybody, good day. Thank you. We'll see you again soon. Bye.