

TM: Welcome everybody to this sixth installment in the Harvard Kennedy School American University in Cairo series of conversations with Arab thought leaders on the 2020 U.S. election and America's changing role in the Middle East. I'm going to turn this over to my co-pilot Karim Haggag to introduce our distinguished guest for today but let me just remind everybody what it is we are doing here. Each week we've been meeting with leading Arabs from the worlds of policy practice and ideas to explore their perceptions of the current season of politics in the United States and to get their sense of where they think the United States, the world's sole superpower, is heading, and particularly, what all of this means for the Middle East. So far in this series, we've interviewed some really interesting and extraordinary people, including prime minister Ayad Allawi, the Emirati intellectual Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, the Iraqi-Emirati journalist Mina al-Oraibi, and these conversations will soon be available on our website and on podcast streaming services. We also have one more conversation. This is the penultimate conversation before we break for the winter, one more conversation next week with the Saudi editor of the al-Arabiya English, Mohammed Alyahya, and we hope that you'll join us for that. Let me now turn it over to my co-pilot in this endeavor, Karim Haggag of the American University in Cairo School of Global affairs and Public Policy. Karim.

KH: Thank you, Tarek, and thank you everyone for joining us for this afternoon's discussion. So it's truly my distinct pleasure to introduce our guest this afternoon. Raghida Dergham is one of the most renowned and respected names in Arab journalism. Mrs. Dergham is currently a columnist for *The National* and *An-Nahar al-Arabiya* newspapers. Throughout her long and distinguished career, she served as the senior diplomatic correspondent and New York bureau chief for the London-based *Al-Hayat* for 28 years. For those of you familiar with Arab journalism, *Al-Hayat* has been a one of the leading journalistic platforms for regional and international news in the Arab world. And in that capacity, Raghida has conducted numerous high-profile interviews with some of the leading international political figures in the United States in the Arab world and on the international stage. Raghida Dergham has been a frequent contributor to *the New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *Al Joumhouria*, *the Huffington Post*, *Arab News*, *al-Arabiya English*, and *Newsweek*, among many other global and regional news outlets.

A prolific commentator on global politics, she is a member of several of the leading foreign policy think tanks and associations, including the Council on Foreign Relations, the Foreign Policy Association, the International Media Council of the World Economic Forum, and the advisory committee of the International Women's Media Foundation. Raghida Dergham is currently the executive chairman of the Beirut Institute, which she founded in 2010 as an independent non-partisan think tank and which has since then become a leading Arab and global for addressing issues of governance, innovation, women, youth empowerment, and education in the Arab world. Mrs. Dergham was named one of the hundred most powerful Arab women in 2011 and in 2016. And in 2017, she was named Arab woman of the year for her achievements in journalism. In 2018 she was named one of the 50 most influential women in the Arab world, and if I could just add a personal note to this introduction, as a young Egyptian diplomat, I remember—myself and for many of my colleagues— we looked to Raghida's column

in *Al-Hayat* as a source of deep insight and perspective on regional politics and global affairs. So it's really a pleasure to have you with us today.

RD: Thank you very much, Karim. Very generous introduction. You're very kind. Thank you very much.

KH: Thank you Raghida.

TM: Great. So let's get started with questions. So the first question I guess I'll ask is, you know, it seems like we have a clear winner in this election. It's not 100% certain, but it looks like it's going to be a President Joe Biden, inshallah to use his favorite word. How are people in the Arab world processing this development and the broader prospect of Biden administration?

RD: Thank you very much Tarek and Karim for hosting me. I look forward to this conversation, and I will start by absolutely objecting to a one view from the Arab world. I think in the Arab region, we have multiple points of views, normally on many issues, in particular about this issue of the elections of the United States president. Yes there are people who are feeling that Mr. Donald Trump was exhausting, and we need to get something else going for some sort of a normality, if you will. But no. The majority of the Arab policy makers have found in President Trump a relief because President Barack Obama had switched in favor of Iran for many years during his presidency, and he switched away from the traditional alliances with Arab countries, such as Egypt. I must say not only with Arab Gulf states. So there is a little bit of fear and that Biden presidency might bring back an Obama era. And by that, I mean the Obama era embraced Iran in the name of accomplishing the JCPOA, which of course you know this is the nuclear deal that was made with Iran. And in fact, there are people who feel that President Obama turned a blind eye on Syria in a very unfortunate way in order to preserve the Iranian interest in the JCPOA.

So some in this region are afraid that the Biden administration will bring back the Obama and, if you will, the reset. Because when Donald Trump came to power, he did the reset away from what President Obama did. Now there is fear that maybe now a Biden presidency would go back to what Obama had already put in place. Having said all that—and there are others who are being dealing with this in a very sober way— and they're saying well take a look at the facts because the preoccupation of most of the Arab region is about what policy will the United States pursue towards Iran.

So there is now an assessment by some that there isn't going to be an automatic return to the JCPOA only because the team of Joe Biden had already spoken of the necessity of Iran to comply and the necessity to take a look at its regional behavior, and above all, the issue of the missiles, which is quite controversial—the Iranian missiles, which have been pointed out by the Trump administration. So there may be some people who think that it's going to be a quick embrace of the JCPOA, come back with the Europeans. They are going to be very happy about that, join forces, go back. And you know, this is a quick success of foreign policy for the Biden administration. That's one view.

But the other view says wait hold on because this is not as easy as it looks. It's going to be much more complicated. They have to square that. The Biden team would have to square between what they have said is required of Iran and how much can they walk the walk and do the talking as far as going back to the JCPOA with the Europeans. And I'll tell you something. What I want to discuss later because I don't want to go too long. Some Russians are rather weary about what the Biden administration would do with Iran, and I say that and please bring this back when we discuss this further.

Secondly, I would point to you that the Trump administration—again I'd like to discuss this a little bit later— may be creating some facts on the ground. From now to January 20<sup>th</sup>, that might make it very difficult for the Biden presidency to go ahead and jump to rescue Iran back from the sanctions. I'll explain all of that later, but I think I should stop now to allow you to tell me what you want me—

TM: Well, no. This is great, and you shouldn't feel the need to render your comments sound bites. But I do have a follow up on this because you started off by chiding us for asking you for a single Arab view. You said there's a variety of views, and then, the best you could come up with is that the Arab view ranges from extreme horror to mild horror. So can you tell me if there is a segment of the Arab elite or mass opinion that is actually happy about this change in American politics?

RD: Let's talk about governments first. I think governments like the Syrian government allied with Iran would be rather happy to get rid of the Trump pressures, whether it is through the Caesar act, Magnitsky act, or etc. because what's going on here is the issue of sanctions. So you would have Syrians, particularly in the government, say, you know, good riddance that the Trump administration would go. You would have in Lebanon, the allies of Iran, Hezbollah and the supporters of Hezbollah, who would also say good riddance. Let's just get rid of the Trump administration because that would mean, from their point of view of sanctions on not only Hezbollah but also their allies in Lebanon. So therefore, the allies of Hezbollah and Lebanon might even entertain the idea that Biden presidency would somehow drop these sanctions, which for me it's foolish. But again, I'll let you ask me about that later.

In terms of the Arab public, look. I mean the Arab public in general—again, this is not fair for me to just to tell you what the Arab public feels. I did not do any survey. But in general, they have welcomed the policies of Donald Trump. Again, in Egypt, because if you remember during the Obama presidency with the Biden vice presidency with Hillary Clinton, if you remember, there was at least a silent blessing of the attempt of the Muslim Brotherhood to take over in Egypt, in Tunisia. And you are an Egyptian. You know better than me, but you would have many Egyptians saying well we don't want that. You have other Egyptians who do want the Muslim Brotherhood to take over in Egypt. But they have at least half of you in Egypt; you don't want that. So that half is not going to be very happy with a fear of the Biden presidency resetting what was reset in terms of the U.S. relations with Egypt. So in Tunisia, I would argue the same

that they at least half the population does not want the Muslim Brotherhood to rule. And you could feel that on not only on the streets and the parliament. If you follow what's happening in Tunisia, you will feel it. You will hear it.

And so then, you have the big question of Turkey. Again, we will get back to that, but Turkey being sort of the supporter of the rise of Muslim brotherhood in the Arab region, expansionist Turkey and other areas, not only in the Arab region but as you know, in other places from Nagorno-Karabakh to the Cyprus issue to their contention with Greece. I did chide you, and I will chide you again. There is no one Arab point of view we have, and that's very healthy that we have completely different points of views across the board. But in general, I would argue that there is fear of a return or at least the impression would be that Iran would feel strengthened again and powerful again to the extent that it will implement its project in Syria, in Lebanon, in Iraq, in Yemen. And so for many Arabs, this is an encroachment on Arab geography that they do not welcome. Many most Arabs absolutely admit, as they should, that Iran is a great country, that it is entitled to its greatness within its own borders. But this notion that it is entitled to have paramilitary forces in other countries that report to Tehran, and this notion is really about an absolute erosion of the very principle of sovereignty. So you know, it is not just an emotional thing. It's not about oh we don't want Iran, or we're afraid of the Ottoman return, of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It is real politick. We're not talking only about the encroachment of ideology. We're talking about felt matters, policies being implemented at the expense at the expense of sovereignty in several Arab countries, including Lebanon, including Iraq, including Syria, and including Yemen.

TM: So just to wrap a ribbon around this. So would you object to me framing your comment as such the only Arabs who are happy about a Biden victory are those who are either in cahoots with Iran or in cahoots with the Muslim Brotherhood?

RD: Yeah but they're both— you know, I mean they both feel those are not—

TM: Not, for example, Arabs who care about, you know, Democratizing their countries or Arabs who might have taken issue with President Trump's statement about Islam, you don't think none of that figures?

RD: Well, I think you summarize what I wanted to say perfectly.

KH: Yeah so Raghida, if it is the reality that the prevailing perception in the region is driven by this anxiety that a Biden administration would mark a return to the very problematic policies undertaken by Obama, you would think that the Arab world—and here I'll be more specific the like-minded countries of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, the UAE— that this nucleus of like-minded Arab states would reflect on that period of the Obama administration, draw some lessons, and develop an approach towards the future Biden administration that would align with their interests and the type of regional politics that they would like to see. Do you think that that is happening? Is that taking place?

RD: Yeah, again I want to remind you of what I also said earlier. I said there are those who are not as anxious towards the Biden presidency because they feel that that sort of falling into the arms of Iran is not going to be as easy as perceived by some. So as I said earlier, there is a portion of the policy makers who feel that the Biden presidency will have to take a look at what the Trump presidency has done and build on it rather than throw it in the seat. Now there will be others who say oh we did the JCPOA. People in the Biden team, if they take office, just say this is our baby. We're going to resurrect it. And yeah, I mean there may be that euphoria, if you will. But when it comes right down to it, there will be more obstacles than right now obvious to anyone because of again I repeat, because of the missiles and because of the behavior on the level of the regional interventions. But above all the missiles, I must say. I don't think the United States is going to break up with Iran because the Iranians are encroaching on Arab sovereignty. I'm sorry to say, that but I'm being very realistic here.

So I lost part of your question. The Obama lessons. Even people in the Obama administration felt horrible about what the Obama lessons were in Syria. I mean after all there was a genocide in Syria, and you know, this was a situation where people turned their sight away in order to accomplish the JCPOA. And you know, hundreds of thousands of people pay the price. I should hope that this is not going to be that legacy remembered of President Obama, and I'm not suggesting that a President Biden would do that. But I think it's going to be challenging. There are some set ideas amongst the Biden team in terms of how they view certain Arab countries, that no matter what reform is taking place, it doesn't matter. There has been an established past that is condemnable, and they're right in certain cases. But they shouldn't really forget about what's going on in terms of processes of democratization. Democracy is not an easy word, not in this part of the world or anywhere else, but when you talk to somebody like me, a woman from this region, I do pay attention to measures, if they put women in the middle of policy making, when they liberate women from where they had been.

And also, I don't think there is a confidence in unfortunately —look I'm an American, and I'm a Lebanese. And I have a very hard time interpreting both worlds, you know, as an Arab, as an American to each other. But there is not that much trust in the drive of the United States for democracy. I mean the invasion of Iraq during the George W. Bush era, they told us it was for democracy, and no it wasn't. It was really for many other things. We'll talk about that. But so there is no automatic sort of wing that says oh we love America for its democracy. It's bringing democracy to all part of the world. But there are others who appreciate the use of sanctions that was established by President Trump in order to pressure individuals, pressure parties, pressure countries, pressure militias in order to correct some wrongs. This has been a sort of like okay somebody is looking at us. Somebody is doing something rather than the sort of well, you know, the good old sweet talk of the Europeans.

KH: Yeah so just to press you on this point because—

RD: I think this is not the original point. Go ahead Karim because I forgot the question.

KH: Okay, I will press you on the same point because I think this discussion about the Obama's administration's policies is useful to dissect given the parallels that are being drawn between Biden and Obama. So I think you're absolutely right that the criticism from the region towards U.S. policies under Obama led to this estrangement between the administration and its partners in the region, but the counter criticism from the U.S. side then was that okay, well the Arab world has no solutions to these problems. You know, what is the Arab solution to the Iran's nuclear program? What is the Arab solution to the Syrian civil war? What is the Arab solution to the proliferation of pro-Iranian militias? Do you feel that criticism is legitimate? For then, what would be the Arab approach to addressing these problems under a future Biden administration?

RD: Okay so again, that big broad word Arab— again, I'm going to just object because there is no Arab approach as such. There are different countries and different approaches. Now and first of all, the Arabs were excluded in a very predetermined way from the discussions on the nuclear deal with Iran. They were actually excluded in a very malign intent, quite honestly. Who did the JCPOA? The five permanent members of the security council plus Germany. There was no Arab participation in it. They probably are guilty of not pushing enough, but I don't know if they had pushed enough where would they have been. The Arab participation in any sort of input in their future is supposed to happen through the League of Arab States, which has really had not been functional. It's been rather dysfunctional when it came to issues of such importance. There has been the GCC, of course, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and they too have suffered the break in the ranks, you know, between Qatar on one hand and the UAE on the other, then Oman in between. So there is no coherence in the GCC either. So you do not have sort of a Arab structure because you keep saying Arab as if we have one structure, and we don't. Karim and Tarek, both of you know better than me, but you know we do not have a structure.

However, right now, there is a revived talk about the potential of a new security structure. Of course, the Iranians offered their version of it where Iran would have the upper hand in a security structure that will have the GCC countries, Saudi Arabia the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain, plus Iraq and Iran. And that was rejected because it was about basically enhancing the superiority of Iran and its projects. Then they have the Russians who went to the security council with their own proposal of security structure. I wrote a couple of weeks ago about this revival of the talk about a new regional security structure that has been spoken about in several different quarters. I don't know how serious it is, but it has notably come out after there has been officially the Abrahams Accords and the signature of normalization basically between the UAE, Bahrain, Israel. And Sudan, I think, and others are on the way. Probably, some say—and you could argue that they're right—that some of the Arab Gulf states went in the direction of having what is the proper word? It's not a deal, and it's not a treaty—have an accord with Israel in order to be able to stand up to Iran and Turkey. Don't forget Turkey in the equation because Turkey is also a menace, not only in the Arab geography, not only Iran. So Israel is absolutely a menace as well. So don't get me wrong. I don't think this is the time to just say Israel is not guilty of occupation or what it has done to the Palestinians and the two-state solution.

Having said all that, again, I think the Arab countries individually and collectively are acting in a different way than we know it. They don't go to the League of Arab states. They don't go to the GCC. They don't go to the traditional forums that we have known. The United Nations has also proven itself pretty useless. Listen, I covered the UN for about 40 years, and when they stopped counting the dead in Syria—and they did literally stop counting the dead in Syria— I just gave up, backed up, and left because, again, the security council was another body that is not reliable to go to. So something is happening. Something is going on, Karim. I don't know what it is. Yes, Arabs are guilty of not doing enough, no doubt. And yes, they are all over the place. They are not united, and no, they will never be united in the sense that you would think. At best, hopefully, they will be like Europe, you know, dependent and coordinated. But not united, and that's why I keep saying there is no such thing as an Arab position as such. I don't know if I answered your question this time. I hope I did.

TM: SO Raghida, just to kind of follow up on this, so you know, the Biden administration— you mentioned the JCPOA. The Biden administration probably wants to get us back into the JCPOA. Your criticism was that it was engineered without any Arab involvement. But then of course, the litany of Arab ills that you just recited would cause one to expect that there would be no Arab involvement. So what's your prescription for how the Biden administration might address this issue in a way that would be viewed more favorably in terms of the interests of America's Arab partners?

RD: Okay if I were to do wishful thinking, I would want the Biden administration to start reaching out to the Arab Gulf states because it is in the region. Iran is their neighbor and to make sure they are involved in any discussion. Two, I would make sure that I do not agree with what President Obama agreed to. That is excluding on purpose the issue of Iranian interventions outside of their own borders because that was agreed to by the five permanent members plus Germany. It was a condition of Iran that if you want the nuclear deal, you do not speak about the regional, and they agreed. That was a very costly agreement. That was a costly policy that we paid the price of. That's why when I argue with some of my colleagues, and they said what we care about. We are afraid that Iran would have a nuclear weapon, and I say I'm afraid that I will not have sovereignty in my country. I'm afraid of what's going to happen to the people of this region. And I am like you. I am preoccupied with what would happen if your Iran has or develops a nuclear weapon. But here I am paying the daily price for Iran's encroachment on the other the other Arab countries, including my own.

So I mean, I would beg the Biden team to remember what the Obama administration bet on, which was oh they said we are sure that the JCPOA will impact the behavior of Iran regionally, and it will change such behavior. Well take a look. Show me how. Where is that? Prove it to me. To the contrary, it has been costly with a lot of lives lost. Of course, nuclear is important but forgive me if I insist that you really need to address the region. This is not to be excluded again because that is really a crime. And so the Biden administration is well advised, and I beg the Biden team to think again and do not repeat the mistake of the Obama administration by agreeing to exclude the regional behavior from any negotiations about the JCPOA or otherwise.

One more thing just because we are talking about exclusion. The funny part, I was yesterday, from this very place here, I was doing an e-policy circle for Beirut Institute Summit that I do every Wednesday. And my Russian guest, Fyodor Lukyanov, who's close to the administration in Moscow, he said something that got my attention. He said he was expecting that, or he was worried —maybe he didn't say the word worried. But he expects that the Biden team and the Iranians will go at it together to try to figure out how best to get back on that bilateral relationship in a way that also excludes even Russia. So I would say to the Biden team please don't, at least if you want to include Russia or China or the members of the security council—

TM: Why do you care if they include Russia or China?

RD: I just said that if you don't want to include Russia or China or Germany or France or Britain, because those were the countries who signed the JCPOA, At least think of the region because we are in the region on the receiving end of excluding us and allowing Iran to go unobserved in its regional project.

TM: Raghida, when I asked you this question, you said if I had a magic wand, I would ask for this or I would beg for this. So you don't have a magic wand and as persuasive as I think you are, American policy is not going to be made on the basis of it. So what can the Arab countries do to convince the Biden administration that when it comes to try to resurrect a deal with Iran, they need to be at the table? Is it simply just making this kind of moral claim? We're the ones who are affected, please. Or is there something they can bring to the table?

RD: I think they have been active. I mean ambassadors in Washington have not only putting all their eggs in the basket of the Trump team. They've also been, you know, professional and building bridges with the potential Biden team. And so I think this is very important, and what can we do? What do you expect that we can do, Tarek? I mean other than somebody like me express and beg and bring to the attention of all the policy makers who are my guests every week. And I have Democrats, not only Republicans to say please do not dismiss this very important point. If you don't want to speak, if you don't want to bring the Arabs to the negotiating table with you, at least do not allow the repeat of taking off the table the issue of regional behavior by Iran. This was a fundamental huge policy that cost us lives. That is my message. It's not about a wand or not. It's a policy message. It's a policy recommendation. It is really essential that we must make sure that—I mean don't just lift sanctions. The revolutionary guards will go on implementing their policies because the revolutionary guards in Iran are the ones who are executing foreign policy of Iran. It's not President Hassan Rouhani. It's not Mohammad Javad Zarif, the foreign minister of Iran. Take a look. There is struggle there, and there's elections coming up in June 2021.

And so do not rush and lose sight of what could happen if you do not pay attention. Not only do you hurt people in the Arab geography, you're hurting people inside Iran. And the Democrats always, you know, take pride in looking after human rights inside Iran, and I don't think they're going to dismiss that. I don't think they're going to turn around and say well, we're going to just forget about what the sanctions of the Trump administration are all about because those



sanctions accuse Iran of sponsoring terrorism. So it's not going to be an easy— I have to repeat it again, lest you misunderstand me. I don't think it's going to be easy for the Biden administration to jump back into the JCPOA, no matter how much euphoria is there. And so I am saying please take a look at what was done wrong and what it what did it cost and amend it.

TM: Yeah so one quick question, and then we'll want to move to different topic. But another country obviously that Biden's presidency might result in a in a change toward is Saudi Arabia, and you might remember the Democratic presidential debate in November of last year. Now president-elect Biden said that he would make it very clear that we're not going to sell more weapons to Saudi Arabia, that we're going to make them pay the price for the murder of *the Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi. And he said, we're going to make them the Pariah they are. He said, in fact, there's very little social redeeming value in the present government of Saudi Arabia. So do you think we're about to witness a major restructuring of the U.S.-Saudi relationship, and if so, what should the Saudi response be?

RD: All right, so I think that there will be a push back against Saudi Arabia and particularly because President Trump, you know, reset that and he built very good relations with Saudi Arabia. Look, let me start by saying something extremely important. Jamal Khashoggi was a colleague of mine. He worked with us at Al-Hayat. I knew him for 30, 40 years. And his killing is an atrocity, and there has to be accountability one day. It should not be shut under any rug. So let me make that very clear, no matter what I say about Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis right now have been pitched by the Trump administration to go ahead and take the same steps as the UAE, as Bahrain, as the others in terms of turning the page with Israel. And it may happen. It may not. And they say the Arab peace plan is our reference. And if there is, you know, seriousness about the two-state solution that they might—at any rate, I don't think the Biden administration is going to lose sight of Israel when it comes to this equation. So they're going to take a look at what the Abraham Accords have done in terms of Arab states in the Gulf relations with Israel. Israel is a domestic issue, as you know. So Democrats, Republicans are not going to be just all of a sudden revenge of Saudi Arabia or revenge of the UAE or what have you, embrace of Iran and Israel. And it's not going to happen because it's a domestic issue.

Then, I wanted to say that in terms of what's happening inside Saudi Arabia— this is what I was referring to earlier. There has been a lot of reform. I know many people in the states fancy the issue of just framing all of Saudi Arabia in the horrifying killing of Jamal Khashoggi.

TM: I mean, is it just that? There's the arrest of activists. I mean there's several female rights activists who are in prison right now. It's not just about that one dramatic event.

RD: It is largely about that and also more than that, I will even tell you it is about 9/11 as well. I'll go back to even 9/11 when Saudi Arabia has become the country that has been associated directly with the twin towers. So it's an old story. I mean the relationship with Saudi Arabia has always been problematic, and I think it's —you know, I don't know which administration did what, but I think mostly the Republicans have been on better page with Saudi Arabia than the

Democrats. I don't know, but what I'm trying to say is that think regionally, think strategically, geopolitically what do we want? Do we want to do Saudi Arabia to China or Russia? We don't want that. I mean we Americans. I think we should think all the way across the board as to what is our interest in the long run. It is not in our interest to dump Saudi Arabia. It's not in our interest to lean on Egypt so that Turkey can create havoc either in Egypt or in Libya next door or in Tunisia and North Africa. I think we should really think about what is it? Let's think of where we are, despite you know, all the anger with Donald Trump and everything that he's done, you know, to anger Americans. But look what he is leaving behind in these relationships. Take a look at it. If it's good for the U.S. Go on with it. If it's not revisited, correct it. But don't be driven by just okay Trump did this, and we're going to do the opposite.

By the way, speaking of Trump, can I just switch a little bit to tell you something that has been worrying a lot of policymakers, and it can be happening, and it's more sort of losing. I mean there's a lot of worry that the Trump administration will go ahead with a huge amount of sanctions to what Biden can do in terms of the relationship with Iran. That is to say that the Trump administration, which has envoys in the region including, I believe tomorrow, the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo coming to the region with the idea of imposing multiple sanctions outside the realm of the nuclear, based mostly on the issue of the missiles and, as I said, accusation of supporting terror and other matters in order to tie the hands of the Biden administration when it comes February 1<sup>st</sup>. Let's just say not January 20<sup>th</sup>. So this is a policy that might really leave a different landscape than the one we are looking at now, thinking okay. And the Biden administration would just go back to the JCPOA, or, you know, it will not— yes, it's crippled. No it's not. This is going to be a very interesting thing to watch, and I think that sanctions will even go as far as getting to China and to Russia, if they resume or if they take on sending arms to Iran. So you know, it's not over. The Trump administration may concede, but it's going to stay in power till January 20<sup>th</sup>, and there's a lot of time for them to do a lot of things.

TM: That's very interesting, and there are certainly some changes in the Defense Department that would suggest that Trump's got some plans for the Middle East, and we'll come to those in a second. One quick thing on Saudi Arabia because it was in your comments, but I think I stepped on it, or we didn't bring it out. So would I be correct in saying that you think one of the prices that the United States is going to levy on Saudi Arabia in order to get Saudi Arabia back into our good graces is the price of normalizing with Israel? That's what I heard you say.

RD: In a way. Listen it's not a secret that the Trump administration has been very keen on making that, on hoping that that would happen anyway.

TM: But, you know, in other words, that would be a condition—Biden might let Saudi Arabia back into the U.S.'s good graces in a Biden administration if Saudi Arabia comes through and signs its version of the Abraham Accords.

RD: Okay I'm not quoting this. You know, you do this. I do that. I don't think he's going to say I'll send Iran down the drain, and you sign up with Israel. I'm not saying that at all, Tarek, because

that would be very irresponsible of me to make that equation, but I'm saying that while you're doing what are you doing policy, you think of these things. You do look at what's in front of you. You look at that. You calculate it. And what's geopolitics? It's about that. You know, take a look. You know, and Israel is important in this transition and always in American public politics. But what happened with the Abraham Accord is unprecedented. No? Don't you want to agree this is totally new? Now who's opposed to those is Iran. What's the Biden team going to do with that if Iran—and there has been threats by the revolutionary guards against the countries who signed up with Israel by the Abraham Accords. How is he going to explain himself, or how is his team going to explain itself if he looks that he has, you know, enabled the revolutionary guards or the hardliners in Iran to go ahead and teach a lesson to those countries who signed up with Israel? You figure this out with me.

TM: Yeah I can't figure it out. Karim has the next question. The only thing I will say is that I just love how you've chided Karim and I several times for identifying a single Arab view, and yet, on this issue of the Abraham accords, you're making it sound like there's a single Arab view, and anybody who's not with it is Iran.

RD: Absolutely not true. That's not true. If you understood me this way, I then—

TM: Go ahead. Correct me.

RD: I did not. I would give you the benefit of the doubt, and I would say I misspoke, but I didn't—you hear me out exactly as I'm trying.

TM: Go ahead, please.

RD: I am telling you that on the domestic American level. I did not tell you all Arabs are all for—I never even hinted to that. I was saying on the domestic American level Israel is important, and you were asking me about Saudi Arabia and would a Trump administration have wanted Saudi Arabia to sign up with Israel. Certainly, is there an objection to Arab countries signing up with Israel? Certainly. The Palestinians are above all. They are the ones who are angry, more than anyone else, and they say where are we? And then, this is a completely different conversation. What happened? Why are the Palestinians where they are, or have they been betrayed? Did they betray themselves?

This accord, from my point of view, at least it did one thing, and it may be too much of a price for this one thing. The Israelis, Mr. Netanyahu, attempting to annex whatever was left of the Palestinian land in the West Bank and in the Jordan Valley to the extent that the potential of a Palestinian state would have been erased. If he had gone ahead and annexed what he had planned to and enabled by the Trump plan, enabled by Jared Kushner for sure, we would have lost any possibility to see a Palestinian state. Period. This accord put a stick in the wheel of that drive. Now I pray that the Israelis are not lying about that. That they do not mean to just, you know, pocket it and then take back the notion of finishing up the notion of a Palestinian state. I pray, and I hope that a Biden administration will make sure to pressure the Israelis not to back

down from this arrangement that there will be no annexation, and that there will be a Palestinian state.

So do not, please, Tarek, suggest to me at all that I am telling you that all Arabs have supported these accords. In fact, I am telling you that there's a lot of objection and a lot of suspicion. But there is a welcome by a big number. Again, don't tell me what are the Arabs thinking. Look what the UAE is doing and look at the Gulf and the in the UAE. They are happy with what they're doing. They feel comfortable. They believe that they put that stick in the wheel of annexation, and they feel that this is going to produce, from their point of view, better rights for the Palestinians than the last 30 years of what—I mean where did we get—the poor Palestinians have been under occupation, which for me, is a violation of human rights.

TM: You don't think it's a real testament though to the insignificance of the Arabs in the Washington calculus? That the only way that they could put a stick in the wheel of the Trump administration's, you know, aiding and abetting of annexation was to capitulate on a long-standing insistence on not recognizing Israel until the occupation had been resolved?

RD: Listen, I don't need to listen to your interventions. I'm all ears. But you know, it is your view, and then I accept that it's your view. But I discovered.

TM: I'm just asking questions.

RD: This was not a question. This was your statement, and I accept that this is your point of view. And so you go ahead and tell them that and call it capitulation, can put it what you want.

TM: I think it's just a testament to weakness. Don't you?

RD: Well no. I just tell you one thing. You want to put adverbs and adjectives, and you know what? You're entitled to do that. I am an analyst. I am telling you my point of view. You can throw it in the garbage. You can agree or disagree, but I will not. I do not agree with your assessment in the way you frame things, and I really think, unfortunately, the Palestinians have contributed in a very horrible way to their demise. It's really unfortunate, and yes to use your word, the Arabs betrayed them. The Europeans betrayed them. The Americans betrayed them. The Russians betrayed them. Okay, but they also betrayed themselves unfortunately. And I even went as far as— I'm to tell you from my point of view. Okay, by the way, that division between the Palestinian leadership and Hamas. But guess whom Hamas is being supported by? You know, no less than Turkey and the project of the Muslim Brotherhood. If you are a supporter of that project, be my guest, and then support it and just say it's a good thing that Hamas challenged the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. That is you in that case. It is not my view.

My view is that Hamas contributed in a very bad way to the Palestinian cause, as we called it and of course, it is not a country, but you know. And the division amongst and the leadership of Fatah have gotten so involved with themselves that they put their own leadership above the

aspiration of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian state. We are where we are. There is still a little bit of rescuable situation, possibly, hopefully with the Palestinian state—not the one envisioned in 67 borders give and take, but you know. Or maybe things would just go bad, and the Israelis would implode. The Palestinians will implode. Who knows what happens in this part of the world? This is a rough neighborhood, as you well know. But anyway, I don't see how Hamas or Iran or Turkey have contributed positively to the Palestinians. I really don't see how.

TM: I don't think we disagree on that. Go ahead Karim.

KH: So Raghida, to take you up on that last point about how the two-state solution can potentially be salvaged. Right, so the policy platform of the Democratic party mentions the two-state solution as an objective for U.S. foreign policy. President-elect Biden is known for his views obviously valuing the strategic relationship between the United States and Israel but also very critical of the issue of settlements and a believer in a negotiated solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And now, of course, we have the Abraham accords. So we have not only Egypt and Jordan but also now two other countries with direct diplomatic relations with Israel, the UAE and Bahrain. Is there a moment or is there an opportunity for a renewed push to revive a diplomatic process towards a two-state solution? And also get getting back to this problematic issue of the of the Arab position. Right so again, let's be specific. Those countries who have now invested in a relationship with Israel right. How can that relationship be leveraged for that objective of reviving a serious viable negotiated solution towards a two-state solution?

RD: Look I pray that the Biden administration will put the words of President elect Biden to implementation. Because we have covered so many elections, and I read so many manifestations, and when it came to power, it was back to square one. Do you remember Secretary Kerry going back and forth like a hundred times? I don't know, but they did nothing. Obama came in, and the first thing he's told us. He's going to resolve the Palestinian issue, and we got very excited when he went to al-Azhar, even to speak about that. Of course, he stopped in Turkey first because he decided that Islam in Turkey was the moderate Islam. Well again, I'm very critical of that, and I don't know how to feel about it, particularly because of those Egyptians. I would love that.

TM: We don't feel good about it either. Don't worry.

RD: That's just to say. You know, that I want to tell you that I think President Biden is not going to step away from a new fact that has been established, which is the Abraham Accords. I don't think any president of the United States does erase something that was done vis-à-vis Israel, particularly when Israel has been a beneficiary of it as well. So I wish them luck in making sure that the Israelis stop their settlements, that they stop their annexation, that they lean on the Israelis to absolutely commit to this, not only the spirit but the letter of not annexing the Palestinian lands in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley. And you know, to see how on earth can we be as fair as reasonably possible because we can't be fair enough to the Palestinians, really. They have paid a huge price.

But you know, if they want to correct the wrongs made, they know the road map. Look that roadmap has been there. Remember it was George W. Bush who put that resolution in the security council. I don't remember the number, but it was about the Palestinian state with the roadmap. I think, if my memory is not failing me, I think it was the Republicans who have delivered more to on the issue of Palestine than the Democrats. And I wish somebody will correct me if I'm wrong because my memory could be failing me.

But including what President Clinton did, including the parameters because I once saw President Clinton and he was speaking about what Taba accomplished and how Yasser Arafat was so wrong to refuse what was offered to him in the negotiations in Taba. So we were at this conference, so I went to him. I said President Clinton, why would you not say Arafat should have accepted what was offered to him in Camp David which preceded Taba, if you remember? And he sort of laughed it off, and he said, well it's another story. I'll explain it to you later. That's because it wasn't offered anything in Camp David. Robert Malley, probably, who is a very prominent Democrat, could tell you that story and a very distinguished one and an old friend of mine. He could tell you that story of what happened in Camp David and then afterwards in Taba. Yes Arafat did not accept that. Yes that is true. There was something offered to Saab Erekat who just passed. I remember him coming to Davos, the World Economic Forum from Taba, and I remember him sitting on stage with his coat. Somebody should look at that with his sort of brown coat coming from Taba to tell us what was going on. And he thought he was coming with something, and Arafat just, you know, knocked it out, whatever they were coming back with you know why? Because he was betting on Sharon coming to power, and he didn't want to give it to what was that at that time Barak right?

TM: Was it Peres?

RD: No Barak was it. I think so. And yet, he didn't want to, you know, give it to someone who was losing the election. So there's a lot of politicking that has taken place. I pray President Biden takes it very seriously and builds on these accords, including cementing no further annexation by Israel of Palestinian lands and giving the Palestinians their independent state and really, you know, getting them out of their misery. They have suffered enough.

KH: We want to get to questions from our participants but maybe a final question on Syria, which you mentioned. So looking at Syria, it seems we are now entering the post-conflict phase or close to that, and now, there is increasing talk about how the political settlement for the Syrian Civil War should be structured. What, in your view, should the U.S. involvement be in that conflict resolution process in Syria moving forward? I know you've been very critical of U.S. policy towards Syria in the past. If you could give us your perspective on what you would like to see in terms of Washington's approach to this coming phase of Syria.

RD: Well, let me say, first of all, I look at Syria not as a clear win for Russia. I think it's still a project of a quagmire for Russia. I think the Russians are suffering that, and I think it's not done until it's done. Idlib is still an issue. I know, right now, some people like to say that President

Putin struck a deal with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, and therefore, that's going to be reflective on Idlib or the potential conflict of Syria. And I don't buy it yet. Let's hope. I don't think the Astana process, which is Iran, Turkey, and Russia, for Syria is happening or as it used to be. Anyway, it's still there and then formed. I'm not so sure it's actively executed but because that's— I mean the reason for that is because the Russians really failed in convincing President Bashar al-Assad of the constitutional process and the elections and etc. So it has been failure after failure.

Now, of course, the only thing they have stuck themselves into doing—that is to say not, you know, let him lose because Putin gave his word to Assad that he's not going leave him to hang and dry in Idlib. Therefore, that conflict with Turkey went to Libya. If you want to talk about Libya later now, you know, they're talking about a potential example of a conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is not resolved yet because we don't know what the prime minister of Armenia is doing. Anyway, it's too complicated.

Look, the U.S. is probably doing exactly, at least for the Trump administration, what they do, which is use sanctions as a tool. So they have the Caesar Act, as you know, and they are imposing sanctions, not only on the president, on his wife probably on his son. I don't know. They are pressing, so that he would cry uncle, and he would accept what he needs to accept, which is to deliver on the constitutional process, to find a political settlement.

I think okay, you don't get upset, you know. Biden's people might go into the Syria file with a bit of guilt because of what happened in the Obama era. Some of them, not all of them, not every one of them, is going to say mea culpa. But some of them felt very guilty. Some of them wrote about it. Some of them just defied and insist they've done the right thing. But if a combination of the above thinks about it and decides that they want to do something for Syria, we'll stick to the to the Caesar act, which is— by the way, I think it's an act. That means it's the Congress. It's not only a decision by the administration. This is where the Biden people will get stuck a lot because there's been congressional acts that are not easy to undo. And put pressure. I mean, you know talk to the Russians. Maybe the Russians these days are not in the mood to entertain Iran like they wanted to, or maybe they are—talk to the Russians. I don't know. Don't give it to Turkey. I mean, after all, Syria is de facto divided. This one is taken apart, and the American bases are there and in a very lucrative area, where the oil and gas is.

Yeah, so I think that we may witness a new approach, but I think it's very important to keep the pressure on. Otherwise, you lose. Keep your eye on the ball. I mean just make sure that— I'm sure I've said this wrong. It doesn't matter, but don't lose sight of what's happening in Syria. But how weak is Turkey or how strong is Turkey. How weak is Iran or how strong is Iran. How weak is Russia or how strong is Russia, and don't forget the Golan Heights and Israel. And again, you know, the ongoing— and do not overstate the strength of Bashar al-Assad. Be very be real about it because if the Russians pull that cover off him or if the Iranians and Hezbollah leave alone, he's not going to be sitting pretty.

TM: Raghida so thank you. This has really been tremendous. We do want to open it up to the audience for questions. So you can raise your hand using the participants function. You just click the participants icon at the bottom of the screen, and then a pane will open up on the right-hand side, and you can raise your hand. While people are finding the raise hand button, I think I'd be remiss if I didn't just ask you a very quick question. You are, of course, in one of the jewels of the Arab world, Beirut, which experienced a great tragedy in August. And I'd just love to ask you to just give us a sense of how the city is recovering from that. And if we could tie it to the theme of our conversation today, one of the things I was, you know, pleasantly surprised by was to see the French leader Emmanuel Macron taking such an active role in trying to at least talk about some of Lebanon's internal issues. The United States has been completely absent from that conversation. Do you think there's a role for the Biden administration in that?

RD: I think you're wrong about the U.S. being absent from that conversation. Absolutely wrong because there's been several envoys including, David Schenker, who has come more than once, a couple of times recently. The U.S. has been very involved in the negotiations over between Lebanon and Israel over the—.

TM: No, but that's what I mean. I mean that's different from the internal situation.

RD: Oh well, let me explain. Yeah, it's not at all. First of all, the sanctions that the American Trump administration imposed on important figures in Lebanon, they have been very impactful. And one of the impacts is that the speaker of the parliament Nabih Berri, let us negotiate our demarcation with the sea, maritime borders with Israel. So, the Americans have been very involved, again, through the Trump administration's approach, which is, you know, sanctions if they don't comply. So the issue here, and as you probably know, the last set of sanctions went against the former foreign minister of Lebanon, Gebran Bassil, and that shocked a lot here in Lebanon, but it's been expected by others. And what they're trying to say, the U.S. administration, is that there are two issues here.

One is corruption which is absolutely unbearable in this country, and secondly, they want to weaken Hezbollah's grip on this country because Hezbollah has a major grip on this country. So they are not stepping out. And you say you mentioned the French. So they're not leaving it to the French, oh go have a picnic. Do it, and we'll see what happens. No the French also committed, and Macron himself, when he was here, he committed that should his initiative fail, he too will go for the sanctions against those who are failing all these efforts. And probably, he will try to bring the Europeans with them as well. So there is coordination. It is not an issue of an absence.

So let me just take this opportunity because I'm glad that you asked me about Lebanon. I was hoping you would. This country is really pretty much doomed if it stays on the course it is. The corruption of the whole political ruling class, all of them, is beyond imagination. It is utter, and it is shameful, and the greed has taken a new dimension that is unlike others. I fancied myself saying that on television the other day, and I liked it. And to all of them is that, you know, you remember that the cartel of Escobar thought they were beyond accountability and look what



happened, what end they met, what end he met. So I'm praying that they will meet such an end because they have killed the very spirit of this country, and they've killed this country. And I mean all of them. And if you see the extent of this as—thank you for saying it's the jewel. It has been right now so roughed up. They don't even know the value of the lira. They don't know if they are coming or going. They have no jobs. We have migration flow out of the country. All our smart people are fleeing. Why? Because of this cartel running this country, and that's number one.

And also because Hezbollah is not allowing this country to be normal. So we need to have a normal country with sovereignty where we have the army's authority all over this country, not paramilitary forces, no matter what the cause is. I'm sorry if the idea is to have resistance for all the Arabs, as you like to say, to resist the Israelis from our borders. Well then come, and do it, and get it over with, or go to the Golan Heights. We have paid a huge price for where we are, and it's not about that. It's about the Iranian project in the region. Iran wants Hezbollah to take this position, and that's why Hezbollah does. And yes, the Americans and the French are coordinating, and yes, they are trying to see if there is a—you know, look. I mean we wanted the IMF to come and bail us out. Guess what happened? They didn't let it. They objected to the IMF conditions to come and bail us out, so we are going further and further into the hole. Our people are going to reach starvation, and those bunch of—you know don't get it and won't get it until they are driven out, and they must be.

TM: Thank you for that, Raghida. So let's open it up for questions because I think you've said you've put so much on the table that I think our audience will really want to engage with. So the first question I have is from Dr. Gary Samour, the director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University. Go ahead Gary.

GS: Thanks, Tarek. It's great to see you again, Raghida. Hello and thank you for such a high-spirited presentation.

TD: Did you expect anything else, Gary?

GS: No. So I want to go back to the question of the regional project that Iran is pursuing because I agree with you. The Biden team understands that if they want to revive some type of nuclear deal, it would go a lot easier with U.S. allies and partners of the region if they can show that they're having some success against Iran's efforts to establish a presence in Arab countries. So if you look at the landscape or the battlefield, there are four countries where Iran has a strong political presence and even military presence: Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. How would you rank, in each of those four, where is Iran most vulnerable? Where is there most likely to be a successful effort by the U.S. and its Arab partners in terms of containing and even rolling back Iran's influence? You talked about Syria and Lebanon, didn't talk about Iraq yet.

RD: You know, Iran is most vulnerable in the relationship with the United States of America. This is the card. It isn't that you can weaken them in Syria or you can weaken them in Iraq or Lebanon, although you can, and I'll explain. But the most important element right now is what

the Biden administration will tell Iran, whether it is in Iraq—let's take Iraq as an example. Iraq has not been able to be normal country. It really hasn't. I mean look. I mean there are American forces in Iraq. And Hash al-Shaabi of the Popular Mobilization Force in Iraq reports back to Tehran, and they are very powerful, and they are overthrowing many of the decisions of the government of Iraq. It's a great, grand country that is under, you know, the influence of Iran big time still. So now, the Saudis, I think, they were trying to see if they could come in and sort of offset the total impact of Iran inside of Iraq. I think Iraq is totally essential for the Biden administration to revisit, to take a look at it to see how can we help Iraq? This is really the bonanza for Iran. It has been.

Lebanon is important to Iran in as far as Hezbollah is concerned. Hezbollah is the most valuable card in the hands of Tehran for disruption, for activities inside Lebanon, inside Syria, inside Iraq, inside the Gulf states, and inside, of course, Yemen. It's the most valuable card. In Syria, again truthfully, if it had not been for Iran and Hezbollah, I don't think Bashar al-Assad would have been sitting there. I remember who saved him from foreign adversaries? It was Hezbollah.

So I think the most important thing Biden administration could do is to really look at Iran left, side, and center, not only through the nuclear vision. You got to look at Iran through the regional activities in order to even win a better deal on the nuclear. Look, I don't think we're going to go back to the JCPOA, Gary, and just say hey it is as it's not going to happen. There's too much that has taken place. So come back strong, and you've been already strengthened by a lot of sanctions that have weakened Iran. Now Iran, of course, is threatening I'm going to go to China. I'm going to have a pact with China. But guess what? If Biden and China have a different conversation, I don't think China is going to come to say excuse me, I want to favor Iran over a better relationship with the United States. So let's be clear on that. I think it would be magnificent, and I think I'm repeating myself. And I think it is, you know, my wishful thinking, and hopefully it's a policy that I will push. And I hope you'll push it with me that Biden team will put on the table the issue of where Iran is in terms of its interventions, how well is it doing for itself, and for the places where it's intervening, and what's this cost to the Iranian people inside of Iran?

TM: Great Raghida. Thank you for that answer. I want to just remind our audience if you do ask a question, it will be recorded because we are recording this event, so just please be aware of that. I think we have time for a couple of more questions. So the next question I have is from John Lamb. Go ahead sir.

JL: Good afternoon and thank you again for a really terrific presentation. I just wanted to follow up on your comments about Lebanon, and as you know, the president Macron has a special envoy there today and tomorrow, I think. I guess to sort of try to stir the fire a little bit, two questions number. One, do you think there was any formal coordination with the sanctions imposed most recently on Gebran Bassil and do you think there's any real possibility of a government d'admission? as it were to actually be formed and for any real reforms to be made considering that the people that appear to be, you know, Saad Hariri and the rest, the usual retreats.

RD: John, thanks for asking about Lebanon. Thank you very much. I appreciate it. I think, and as far as your first question about whether there was a formal, I'm pretty sure that the administration told somebody in Paris that a couple of days before at least that this is happening in a couple of days. And as far as the sanctions against Gebran Bassil, I'm pretty certain of that. I don't have it as information, but I am, you know, pretty confident in what I'm saying because they are coordinating. It's not that the French are operating in a vacuum. The Americans are saying go for it. Do your best. Convince them to do the right thing. Then have them deliver. But if not, you promise that you will also come along with the sanctions. So that is number one

Number two, the Gebran Bassil thing is not small. No, it's major. Guess who else afraid of sanctions coming, and they are coming. I'm told more sanctions are going to come. I don't have names, and I will not volunteer any names, but I think anyone who thought of himself, because I should say himself because we normally don't have women doing policy in this country because they think they're better than us. So I think those who have thought they would get away with what they called tesfia? which means—help me out John here. What's the right word for it? You know, when they made an arrangement with Hezbollah. Any government that has been making the arrangement with Hezbollah or is planning to make an arrangement with Hezbollah is not going to be unnoticed by the Trump administration from now till January. And so, you know, fascinating receivment?. It may be people that you would think it's so unlikely, and they're very nervous. They are. I assure you.

Saad Hariri—my column is, you could find it on my social media but in the international and in Arabic. You could find it on LinkedIn, on all the social media. And I really was very critical of him to say, well who gave you the right to assign this ministry to the Sunni, the Shiite or that one for the Christians? Who are you? Like why do you think you are entitled to do that because you want to become, again, a prime minister? I don't think he's going to succeed, but I'm taking a big gamble by saying this outright. I don't think he's going to be able to form a government because Hezbollah would not allow him to form the government without them, being the upper hand. Although, they really want it. I mean, okay, Hezbollah and the Iranians are very nervous about what the Trump administration will do from now to January, so they might ease up a little bit. And I'm now rethinking what I just said. They might ease up, and they might just like buy time. And in order not to go under the sword right away— let's see if I'm right on this. I'm just thinking out loud now. But I think it's a bit too late. In certain cases, I think the sanctions are in the Treasury Department against many Lebanese, and let me tell you, there are a lot of nervous men around.

TM: That's great. I mean you're breaking news right and left in this interview. Okay we have time for one more question, and that will be from Dr. Lana Salman, a fellow Lebanese and a postdoctoral fellow here at Harvard this year. Go ahead Dr. Salman.

LS: Thank you Raghida for a wonderful conversation. So my question is also about Lebanon, and I wanted to ask you, do you think the Biden administration would support in any way the

reconstruction of the port? Today marks the hundredth day since the explosion, and it's as if nothing happened with this sort of government that we have. Do you think with these politicians in place, there will be any support for the reconstruction of the port? And my other question is do you believe that the revolutionary movement that was underway in Lebanon, no matter how fragmented, still has a chance at survival? Especially that the last week or so, our universities our private universities, USJ and AUB; they're organizing elections and independent students are running for these elections, and we know politics starts from these places.

RD: Thank you Lana. Listen, I'm going to start with your second question because I want to end up speaking about what Biden could do for Lebanon. The revolutionary movement was breathtaking in the beginning, and then it was infiltrated, not only by the organized parties who took the decision that they're going to oppress it. And you know, just that. It was not supposed to succeed from that point of view. It's unfortunate that it was infiltrated by individuals whose tendencies are either leftist or communist or what have you. So they, all of a sudden, change the whole focus from the revolution for, you know, bringing down the government's grip on the country to saying what, you know, to attacking private property, burning private property. They made it a revolution against the banks. Of course, the banks and the central bank are part of the problem, but it was not supposed to be against them in absorbing the others, serving the agenda of these parties that that have ruled this country despite its people for so long. So I think it fumbled, and it faltered this revolution. Does it have a chance? It should. It must at one point, but they need to grow up. Everybody involved in it, grow up. You know, it's not a picnic. Revolutions are not a picnic. They cost lives. They need resilience. They need persistence, and they need a strategy. They don't even have a strategy. It's good that the Trump administration supported the revolution and declared support for what the Lebanese people want, and I pray that the Biden administration does the same and even if there is any guidance, fine. I mean what is this accusation? That you support the aspirations of people to say we want to get rid of the ruling elite that has deprived us of negotiating with the IMF, deprived us of having a decent living, deprived us of understanding where we are? And then, you know, robbing us, taking our money, no less than that. So I hope that this happens.

Now to the explosion of the port. Look, I am a direct victim of that explosion. I lived across the street from the Beirut port. I had my dream home that I sort of—you know, I knitted my dream you know. The Lebanese diaspora, I spent 40 years in the United States. I worked very hard. I came back to Cologne. I took an apartment that I loved, and I started a life. And one day, those people who have not let us know why they had nitrate stored in the midst of a civilian area, one day that explosion came, and an equivalent to an atomic bomb came into my home and devastated it. I do not have a home. So, well I am strong, and I'm grateful that I was not at home because had I been there or any the people who worked with me, my team, with the Beirut Institute, we wouldn't be talking right now. I'm just telling you if you walked in there you would just say gracious god what happened? And it is that sort of suffering that the people in Mar Mikhael?, Geitawi?, in Achrafieh, in all these areas. You have no idea how painful it is to walk through every time I go to bed because now I'm outside of Beirut. Every time I walk through, I swear to you my heart bleeds. I feel pain in my stomach. I come back to where I am—

I don't want to say where I am but outside of Beirut—with pain in my stomach, and I get sick for a day or two because it is so painful.

I put a note for myself to remember in answering you. The FBI, I think, was one of the agencies that conducted an investigation. We have no idea what happened to this investigation by anyone. I don't know. We don't know. How is that? A misery, and worse than that, the insurance for the building for my apartment, they say oh we have to await the result of the investigation before we start to give you money to rebuild. So look at the vicious circle and how painful it is on every single level. So what do I wish president Biden would do? Keep the pressure. Do not let them get away with it. Hold their feet to the fire. Demand that there will be an end to impunity. Demand that there is no dealing because this whole country is now stopped at the notion of what deal will happen between President Biden and Iran. So that we know. How does it impact Hezbollah in Lebanon? Then, we might know what our future is. Then, we might understand. We are bleeding badly. So my appeal to president Biden is to take a look at us and to see if the policy by President Trump was useful. Build on it, and I think it was because it awakened some of those monsters here to the fact that they need to stop, and we need more of that.

TM: Raghida, thank you very much. I think this is a sobering note on which to end a conversation that was, to put it mildly, lively, informative, and extremely fun, I think for all of us. But you brought it home on a note that I think is appropriate for us to end on, which is to remember the human suffering that results from some of the dynamics that we've been discussing. Karim any last words before we release Ms. Dergham?

KH: Raghida, my sincere appreciation for taking the time to be with us. I think you've given us a presentation that's not only full of your usual insight, but I think it was a presentation that was passionate as well as compelling. So thank you.

RD: I thank you both, and I thank your team with you and everyone who participated and listened to me, I know I'm a bit feisty, but I guess you expected that. And I want to invite you to join my e-policy circle for the Beirut Institute Summit which is meant to be held in Abu Dhabi, but of course, because of COVID-19, we are postponing until 2021. And we are every Wednesday at 3PM GMT, so please join us through YouTube, through, I think, Facebook. And the conversation is global. It's geopolitical. It's interesting, and it's also fun. And I thank you so much for hosting me. I hope I, you know, did the right thing but despite the small little fight I had with Tarek.

TM: Oh no that's fine. Although, you misstated my position. But that's why I'm now obligating you to come back to Harvard when COVID is over. So let me continue.

RD: I will come back to Harvard any time. Take care, Tarek. You honor me. Thank you.

TM: Okay take care. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and we'll see you all next week.