

A Conversation on the Middle East

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2g1tIKJAIdA&list=PL7fuyfNu8jfP8TWSJzPCsyScNGwbW6xbQ&index=29>

Speakers

- David Petraeus, Partner, Chairman of the Global Institute and Chairman of KKR Middle East; Former Director, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
 - Kim Ghattas, Financial Times Contributing Editor; Author of *Black Wave*
 - Moderator: David Ignatius, The Washington Post
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Ignatius

So we always like to begin with plugs for books. I think that's great. These are 12 of them, and they make great Christmas gifts. Just want to note that. So as Nick said, this is a panel of three people whose lives, in many ways, have intersected with the story of the modern Middle East, this amazing arc that we now think is heading toward an inflection point, a new stage in the story. And we're going to try to explore that and ask the question that I don't find being asked often enough, which is, okay, where are we going? You know, we've reached this decisive moment after wars in different countries. Where do we go now? And what are the fundamental drivers of that change? So we'll end up asking the question that David Petraeus famously asked my colleague Rick Atkinson on the way to Baghdad in 2003 when they were commanding the 101st Airborne, which is they said, "Tell me how this ends." And that was haunting in 2003 on the way to Baghdad. In some ways it's even more haunting. Now we'll get to that question at the end of our conversation. I want to begin by talking about where this started, and I want to turn first to Kim, who's written a book that I commend to everyone in this audience, called *Black Wave* that takes as ground zero for the story we're living through the year 1979 and I'll just briefly note the points and then ask Kim to talk about them. In 1979 you had the Iranian Revolution, the earthquake, you had the seizure of the Mecca mosque, in some ways, a kind of second earthquake in the Sunni world, and you had the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Think of those three drivers. So Kim, let's begin by talking about what happened that year, and whether you think that earthquake is finally beginning to settle down.

Ghattas

It's great to be here with both of you, thanks to the Aspen Security Forum for bringing me over from Beirut. It was a long journey. I come from Beirut with a lot of worries about where we are going and how things are shaping up, and we'll get to that at the end of this conversation. But if we want to go back to 1979 and how we got here, 1979 is indeed a watershed year in which the Saudi Iran rivalry was born out of the ashes of the Iranian Revolution superimposed with the Saudi need to show their credentials as leaders of the Arab Muslim world, because the new Islamic leadership of Iran was trying to take that leadership away from them and Khomeini trying to assert himself as leader, not just of Iran or the Shias, but of all Muslims, using the Palestinian cause, among others, as a way to burnish his credentials as a leader with resonance beyond

the borders of Iran. And that's why we are partly here today. And of course, then the invasion of Afghanistan gave Sunni militancy power to think that they could emulate what the Iranians had done, bringing theocracy to power through violence. What happened that year is both the birth of the Saudi-Iran rivalry, which unleashed and, you know, washed over the region for four decades. There was a geopolitical event, but it was also a cultural, social earthquake, which changed the region culturally. If you look at pictures of the Arab world in the 60s, it's very different from what you see today. It unleashed conservatism Sunni and Shia, and that rivalry stayed with us and shaped the region. And it had its own dynamics for 40 years, and it is now reached a detente out of convenience, but not out of any meeting of the minds. What happened then in 1982 and that's the subject of my next book, is that dynamic of Iran's desire to lead in the Arab world and use the Palestinian cause for its advancement and its expansionist project in the region, was superimposed with another watershed event, which was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and what that did is create the birth, the real birth, of the Iranian axis. It was in the aftermath, or right as the Israelis were invading Lebanon in June 1982, that the Iranians sent their first Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon to create Hezbollah. And that watershed moment, superimposed with 1979, is, I strongly believe, what brought us to where we are today. It solidified the enmity between the US and Iran, which became violent in Lebanon with the attacks against the Marines, the hostage crisis, all of which you covered. 1982 was a moment when Israel thought it could change the region. Ariel Sharon wanted to reshape the region. Make peace with Lebanon, make peace with Syria, eliminate the Palestinian cause. So again, you know, echoes with today and Benjamin Netanyahu views of the region, and it gave Iran a foothold in Lebanon, the birth of the Iranian axis, which has been decapitated today. But I think is down, but not out.

Ignatius

So that's a wonderful starting point. I remember 1982 just like a dreadful newsreel in my mind. I was in the American Embassy about a half hour before it was blown up in 1983 and as Kim says, I remember the euphoria that the Israelis had as they arrived in Beirut, much like the euphoria of the last month. Now, we've done it. Now. We've solved our problem, and it didn't turn out that way.

Patraeus

And you wrote, wasn't your first novel about Beirut?

Ghattas

Agents of Innocence, my favorite.

Patraeus

And then *Bank of Fear* came.

Ignatius

So Dave, I want to ask you about what I think of as your starting point in this story, and that is the road to Baghdad. You were a young Commander. You ended up in Mosul and did amazing things in Mosul, but you and I talked about that invasion so often over subsequent years, but

I've never asked you directly. I don't think what one thing you think could have been done differently, then that would have led to a different outcome than the one we ended up living.

Petraeus

First of all, just to put it in context, you know, the reason I started asking tell me how this ends was because even halfway to Baghdad, Najaf and so forth, you could see the assumptions we've been provided being invalidated one by one, the idea that we're going to lop the top off everybody else who's going to stay in place, we're going to orchestrate a new government and go home to a victory parade, such as after the liberation of Kuwait. So what is the one thing? Well, this reminds me of a question I asked right before the invasion. We were actually all out in the desert floor, the 101st Airborne Division, for example, 20,000 troops, 254 helicopters were spread all over Kuwait, and we get called back to the base there for one final pep talk. We sort of resented it, because we all had to fly for an hour back in and there was no real new information. It was just, I think, the overall commander wanted to look us in the eyes and something. And at the end of that, they asked anybody got any questions. And there were a couple of questions here and there. I raised my hand and I said, "Could you just give us a little bit more detail about what happens after we get to Baghdad and topple the regime?" And at that time, it was going to be the organization for reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, ORHA, headed by two retired three stars that knew both of them well. And one of them turned to me and he said, "Dave, you just get us to Baghdad. We'll take it from there," and that did not exactly work out real well. So the real issue, I think, revolves around, again, not just the assumptions, although those were pretty important, because that's what you found your phase four plan on to build on. But it was really about having an organization really ready to do this that actually had a deep understanding of the country. And the truth is that the understanding that most people had of Iraq, if they had any at all, was not from boots on the ground in Iraq proper. It was spending time up in the Kurdish region, say, back in subsequent times. And so you recycle through ORHA. They got fired. Secretary Rumsfeld got frustrated with them. We bring in the Coalition Provisional Authority and the very first decisions without consulting those of us on the ground who, by now I we actually had a provincial council, a governor, we had district councils. This thing is going well. We're doing investment banking deals for the two derelict hotels. We're reopened. The border commerce is moving all the rest of this. And these two decisions just cut us off at the knees, firing the Iraqi military and that again, if you want to have an organized der process, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration into society, that's one thing. But firing all of them without telling them how we're going to enable them to provide for themselves and their families, was a grievous error, and it really plagued us, I'd argue, all the way maybe forever, but certainly until the surge, when we actually had real reconciliation process. Because that was the second one. You know, it wasn't just firing the Ba'ath Party. I'm all for that. We killed Saddam's sons. In fact, that was the right thing to do when they resisted detention. It was firing the bureaucrats, 10s and 10s of 1000s of them, whom we needed to run a country that we didn't sufficiently understand and without an agreed reconciliation process. That was the deficiency. Again, if you want to filter your way through certain fire, level two, level three, but level four, and many of them were Western educated. In fact, I think a majority of them that actually invested in them, and they were much more secular than those who tended to replace them. Over time, we were able in the north to get an exception from Ambassador Bremer to conduct our own

reconciliation process, which is why Mosul continued to go so much better for so much longer. But even there, eventually that couldn't be sustained without support from Baghdad. So it really comes down to what do you do the day after? And we did not have a sufficient plan for that, and the ad hococracy and all the rest, I have actually wondered. A lesson that I've taken from that is that you should use existing institutions. Establish them right away, get an embassy and get the American corps of the Army, Corps of Engineers, get the defense contracting, use existing organizations, rather than a complete pickup team, which then, as you'll recall, was also rotating every three months, so you never had any continuity with those who were trying to help rebuild the ministries in Baghdad.

Ignatius

I commend to the audience Dave's recent book, *Conflict*, which is a history of most of the conflicts the United States has been involved in since the end of the Second World War and the last war, and the lessons from them. And to just summarize your book in a sentence, Dave says again and again, you've got to get the big ideas right. And you just heard a big idea. Never heard you phrase it just that way that use the existing institutions to the extent you can.

Patraeus

There are actually three lessons that I took from the invasion. Should understand the country much better than we did, certainly than I did, and my counterparts and others understand all the elements of it, how it's supposed to run, how it really runs, all the ethnic, sectarian we had a surface understanding, but not the kind of detailed understanding that we needed. And then we launched north of Mosul, which we weren't supposed to do. We didn't have maps for Mosul. We printed maps all night long before we put the soldiers on the helicopter. So that's number one. Number two, was use existing organizations institutions rather than pick up teams. And then number three is that you should not conduct a policy, implement a policy or an operation if it doesn't take more bad guys off the street than it created by its conduct. And these two actions firing the Iraqi military hundreds of 1000s of individuals. whose incentive was to oppose the new Iraq rather than to support it and then the same with the many 10s of 1000s of level four Ba'ath party numbers in particular, who we needed to run a country again that we didn't sufficiently understand.

Ghattas

I want to pick up on something that David just said, the general, which is that don't do anything that you think isn't going to take off more bad guys from street than is going to create. That was a big mistake in 1982 and there was very little planning, or, you know, war gaming of what happens after Israel invades Lebanon, and that led us to the creation of Hezbollah. They hadn't assessed how Lebanon had changed, how the region had changed, because of the Israeli, because of the Iranian revolution. They hadn't assessed that they could be creating enemies on the ground. They had very little planning for the day after. And fast forward to today. Again, a lot of great military successes by Israel. Gaza is devastated, 50,000 or more dead. Hamas is decimated. But no real plan for the day after in Gaza. In Lebanon, great military success. Hezbollah decapitated. What's the strategy? Are we creating more bad guys? Are we creating Hezbollah 2.0 3.0? And you know, same question can be asked in Syria.

Patraeus

Just really quickly, David. From that experience in my five combat commands as a general officer, we've always had a sign that was staring me in the eyes, right up next to all the maps in the command center. And it asked a question, "Will this operation take more bad guys off the street and created by his conduct?" And the answer to that is no, you're supposed to go sit under a tree until the thought passes.

Ignatius

It's a good suggestion from all of us. So this is a story, as our initial discussion made clear of unanticipated consequences and the need to think as clearly as you can about what's coming. One, I would say, unanticipated consequence was the rise of Mohammed bin Salman as the Crown Prince and effective leader of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was the problematic missing piece in the puzzle. It was supposed to be this strong center of Sunni resistance to revolutionary Iran, but under a previous span, our Saudi Arabia was so careful, so frightened of itself, so frightened of internal Islamist threats, that it didn't really move. And then along came this brash young man, Mohammed bin Salman, a big part of your book, Kim is about his rise. Dave, you've known him, talked to him, thought deeply about him, just each of you reflect a little bit on where he is. You know, we passed through, I have to say this, Jamal Khashoggi was my colleague and my friend, and I've done everything I can to hold his memory sacred. But we're in a different period now, and I'd like each of you to talk about it and the risks of failure for MBS and the possibility of great success.

Ghattas

What the Saudis did over 40 years after the Islamic Revolution wasn't just, you know, shrink back into their within their borders and become more conservative, but also feed Islamist currents, Sunni Islamist currents across the region, which led to sectarian warfare, including in Iraq in the aftermath of 2003 the rise of al Qaeda, the Taliban, etc, that is a product of the Saudi-Iran rivalry, which was fought at various levels, including cultural and social and religious. Fast forward to Mohammed bin Salman. He first started out as a brash young defense minister who wanted to teach Iran a lesson. And you get the war in Yemen. You get things like slapping around the Lebanese prime minister trying to fund and arm militants in Syria. They were trying to, in essence, emulate Qasem Soleimani. And he learned very quickly that that was not the way to work. And I give him credit for maturing. I think Saudi foreign policy today, and me too, a close friend of Jamal Khashoggi, you know, distraught by what happened, but Jamal Khashoggi himself would like us to acknowledge how MBS has matured and how he has transformed for the better the lives of millions of young Saudis who deserve a better chance at a more enlightened, more carefree life. And I think we should acknowledge that today, I think the opportunities are great, but I think Saudi Arabia, which wanted to establish relations with Israel before October 7, is finding itself with a conundrum that it cannot solve on its own without pressure from the United States on Israel, which is it is not going to reach out to Israel anymore unless they get a Palestinian, a promise of a Palestinian state. The bar for that has risen tremendously. And I think the Saudis and various countries in the Arab world, the UAE, even the Jordanians, the Egyptians, are frustrated by Benjamin Netanyahu's belligerence, because they

want to create a new Middle East, the Middle East we've all been hoping for that is more modern, that is more reform, that is more progressive, however you define that that term, but that is about a forward looking vision, right? Which is something that President Trump is also in support of. And so the Saudis are very frustrated, not just by Benjamin Netanyahu belligerence, but by the apparent inability of the Trump administration to rein in Benjamin Netanyahu and get us all back on the same page towards that forward vision for the Middle East, which, you know, we saw briefly appear in front of us when President Trump went to Saudi Arabia, and then you know, we got sidetracked again.

Ignatius

Dave, what would be your MBS assessment?

Petraeus

Visionary, aggressive, impatient at times, you know, hurry, but a young man who actually has seriously big, big ideas, and we should keep in mind what has enabled him to push these forward. Was some very adroit maneuvering at the outset. Remember, he was not even the Crown Prince. That was Mohammed bin Nayef. You used to have three different factions controlling the Ministry of Defense. That was what his father had. So he was the deputy minister. You had bin Nayef as the Minister of Interior, and then you had Prince Miteb was the National Guard. These are all three different elements from the original king. And what he did is consolidate power. He took over his crown prince. He then got Mohammed bin Nayef was shouldered aside, got a confederate in there, if you will, his. And then Prince Miteb was the last. And so now there's a consolidation of power. And to be fair, in doing that, he has accelerated decision making there in a way that's never been seen before. It used to be somewhat sclerotic, because you had these different factions that would all wrangle and decision making, as you recall, was just endless. It took a very, very long time to get something out of that at times. And so that is not the same. And there's never been a consolidation of power like we see there, and there's never been someone with the kind of vision that he has put forward as well. You can ask if some of that is beyond realistic. Maybe, you know, Neom and so forth, but he knows that. I remember one time in Washington when he was here, I said, you know, this is pretty far reaching stuff. He said, "General, if I don't, if we only achieve 65% of Vision 2030, think how extraordinary that will be." And that is the case. And he's, he's taken actions that no one dared to take. Much overlooked is how they shouldered aside a lot of the clerical establishment, sort of early on. They put women in particular councils that overshadowed that they were doing that. Then, of course, women to drive and on and on. So this is a really significant development in a region in which Saudi Arabia, arguably is now the big Arab country. It's not Egypt, it's not some of the old traditional centers of influence. It's really the Saudis and then the other Gulf states in particular, of course, UAE, and each of these, and I'd submit that Qatar does as well, this kind of very aggressive vision with leadership by a young individual compared with the tradition.

Ignatius

I can remember asking MBS and one of those early conversations, "Your highness, you know, one lesson surely, of military history is you have to concentrate your fire. You have to choose

what it is you want,” and he said, “No! David, I need to go after everything at once,” and gets a gleam in his eyes. and he did.

Patraeus

I mean, that's pretty much what it was. So there have been some tough lessons. I mean the Yemen campaign, which I totally arguably we should have supported when they had the chance to take the port of ODA, but that did not turn out well, and they eventually had to withdraw and scale back their objectives there. So I want to just briefly ask the two of you, because the number of questions still to give me a quick shorthand assessment of where you think Iran is going hearing from some of our Iranian friends, well known, I know, to not Iranian, but narrow neighbors, that Iran seems now to move toward a triumvirate of pragmatic leaders trying to steer things forward. Larajani, Rouhani, Khatami, are the names that are mentioned just briefly. I'd be curious where each of you think governance in Iran will be a year from now.

Ignatius

Just briefly, I'd be curious where each of you think governance in Iran will be a year from now. We have a common friend who says, who tells us all the time that the road in Iran is a one way street, right? This 40 year arc of the Islamic Revolution is coming to an end. This is a prominent Western diplomat who was based in Iran, that road is coming to an end, but exactly how it ends, we just don't know yet.

Ghattas

I think that the Israeli Iran 12 day war has actually complicated matters internally and in the region. Far be it from me to advocate for more war. That's not what I'm trying to say, but I think it was inconclusive in the way that the Iranian regime feels that it can now recalibrate, find a way to consolidate, put forward pragmatists, maybe become a military dictatorship, push the theocrats, the clerics, to the side, which is going to mean more oppression internally, which is not a good thing, but that's just how it's going to be. I do think that they're going to push forward with the nuclear program the same way that Israel did after the 1967 war. They feel that this is their only deterrent. It has complicated efforts to continue to put Hezbollah in a corner in Lebanon, because they're looking at their bosses in Iran, and they're like, “Wow, they sustained that shock. They didn't tell us we need to disarm. We can hang on.” And if they sustain that shock, we can't sustain further pressure so it's actually complicated things, but I think that in the sort of medium term, we're looking at a more oppressive more militaristic Iranian regime.

Ignatius

Dave, what do you think?

Petraeus

Well, first of all, I think we have to step back a little bit and recognize that Israel's strategic calculation is very, very different from before seven October, and that's a big deal for the region. Israel will never again allow a threat to materialize, not just in neighboring countries and territory, but they won't allow it to emerge in the greater Middle East. And in that regard, Iran, I think, has to realize that they are defenseless right now. They took down this sophisticated Russian S-300

air and ballistic missile defense system. None of us knew how the F-35 which, of course, the Israelis used to do this, was going to perform against it. It performed magnificently. The Russians clearly don't have S-300s or S-400s to spare. They don't have enough for themselves, given all the Ukrainian action in the Federation. And so they have to recognize that if they make another move, they're going to get hammered once again. And I don't think that an Israeli prime minister, even if it's not Bibi Netanyahu, will allow the Iranians to proceed down the path to a nuclear device. So that, I think you have to understand, and they have to come to understand that, I think, as they evolve. But then the question really is, it depends. It depends on what is the succession? Is there still a very strong, hard line cleric at the pinnacle of power in Iran, of the regime, or could there actually be some new kind of organ, again, triumvirate, whatever you might want to term it, that takes over. You could actually entertain at least the notion that, since they control 30 to 40% of the economy, lose Hezbollah, and all these others who cares and this nuclear stuff. What has this brought us now? Now I know that's fantastical.

Ignatius

Great place for them in Los Angeles, just waiting for them.

Ghattas

I think the mindset of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the current Iranian leadership was really shaped by the Iran-Iraq War, and we have to remember that, where they felt abandoned by everybody, and they doubled down on everything.

Patraeus

And then drank from the poison chalice.

Ignatius

Absolutely we have just, gosh, four minutes left. But I want to touch on Lebanon, Syria, and just briefly Gaza. So first Kim, take on Lebanon.

Ghattas

In four minutes? Okay.

Ignatius

You know, you can give us the one and a half minute version. So has Lebanon finally reached the promised land of regaining its sovereignty as a country?

Ghattas

Not yet. We're on the way, but not yet. Hezbollah decapitated, but not down and out. This is not the IRA that can take decisions on its own internally. They answer to Iran, and Iran has not said disarm. They will want a political price, a political, you know, reward for disarming. We don't know what that looks like. More power in the parliament, more power from the President, et cetera. Their resupply routes have been very much affected, obviously, by the fall of the Assad regime. But Iran is busy again, and that's why I say, you know, we had a really golden opportunity at the beginning of the year when everything was in flux, Hezbollah was very much

on the back foot. Assad was gone, Gaza maybe had a cease fire in January. This was the moment to strike with a grand political vision, diplomatic vision, for the region. Now, everybody's recalibrating. Iran is trying to see how it can hit a foothold stronger again, into Lebanon, even into Syria. When it comes to Syria, I'm a great supporter of what the Trump administration has done. I was a big proponent of backing Ahmed al Sharada. There was no other alternative. He was the man who was there. Syria was exhausted by 13 years of war. Good riddance Assad. He was so evil that anything would be better. That doesn't mean that we should give Ahmed al Shara a blank check. We need to continue to breathe down his neck every day. I think we've gone a little bit too far in embracing him. Great about lifting the sanctions, but you still need to breathe down his neck, because international support does not translate into national legitimacy yet, and he's not done enough in terms of national legitimacy. And the problem of again, Israel using force to shape the region to its liking, is causing trouble with the Druze in Syria. This is having repercussions in Lebanon. It's very tense at the moment in Lebanon. We don't have time to go into the details, but what's happening in the Suwayda Province, where Israel is, you know, helping the Druze, yes, but not out of any humanitarian concern. Taking further, more territory in Syria is affecting the Druze community in Lebanon. The Sunnis are getting riled up, and so we really need to watch that we're potentially looking at real trouble again.

Ignatius

Dave, what's your assessment of Syria in particular? Just say a word about the ISIS detainees in the Northeast that here we have been helping the SDF guard.

Petraeus

So first and foremost, again, recognize that Syria, like Mosul in a way, when we arrived up there, when I was a two star **[general]**, it has almost all of the ethnic, sectarian, tribal, political fault lines of the Middle East running through it. So His job is a very challenged one, but I should note that he is a proud alumnus of Camp Bucha, the detention facility in southern Iraq during this urge, and we believe that he understands the need for a government that has representation from all of these different elements, and not only assures majority rule, but also ensures minority rights. That's the big idea for Syria. There's going to be a dozen suedes, if not, and one of those is obviously going to be with the Syrian Democratic Forces that we still support, that we enable to defeat the Islamic State caliphate in northeastern Syria, and now we're controlling 10s of 1000s of individuals, some of whom are hardcore terrorists. Others are the family members and children of hardcore terrorists at that detention facility in northeastern Syria that you have visited and are concerned about. And then very quickly, maybe on Gaza, I have strongly supported the Israelis achieving the three objectives they've set out destroy Hamas, keep Hamas from governing again, and get the hostages back, but I've said publicly from the very beginning and written about it as well that I just don't think they're going about it the right way. Again, the big idea here should be to conduct a comprehensive civil military counter insurgency campaign. Clear, hold, build and transition, and you establish security as you go along with this, you use population control measures, biometric ID cards, get people back in their homes, where they were, in better shelter. And that requires a fourth objective, which has never been stated and that is to provide a better future for the Palestinian people in Gaza without Hamas in their lives.

Ghattas

And in the West Bank.

Patraeus

Absolutely. So that's the challenge that they have. Hamas has not been destroyed. It's been degraded, but it's still probably the most guys with the most guns. It probably still would emerge, if you have a free for all in there, even with some of these tribal elements that Israel is arming and helping and the hostages back, negotiations. Can that be done? I want to see that happen, but I'm really worried about what is the future of Gaza, for which there's been no real vision provided for, what life of the Palestinian people will look like.

Ignatius

Kim, last word?

Ghattas

The way forward requires less bombing and more visionary strategy. That includes a diplomatic path which can translate what President Trump is talking about, you know, what MBS is talking about, and what we all want in the region. You know, for the longest time, many of us, and me included, thought that, you know, the Palestinian issue, okay. I mean, it's one of our problems in the region. We can't stay hostage to it. We need to reform, do our thing, clean up our houses, internally. And, you know, eventually we'll figure out the Palestinian cause or not. While researching my next book, I've come to the conclusion, I've changed my mind. We still need to do all of that. And I think we are when you look at Qatar, when you look at Saudi Arabia, when you look at Lebanon, when you look at Syria, we are all actively trying to build the future, and now we seem to all be hostage to Benjamin Netanyahu's political career, which is a real shame. This is the moment to translate some of these military successes in Lebanon, in Iran, in Gaza, in Syria, into a vision for the region going forward, and that includes addressing the issue of the Palestinian cause, Palestinian state, whatever you want to call it. And if I may just pay tribute to one man who features prominently in my next book, which is Malcolm Kerr president of the American University of Beirut, who was assassinated in Lebanon in 1984 the first political assassination by Hezbollah. He wrote in 1967 that any side deal between Israel and Arabs that doesn't address the central cause of the Palestinian issue is constantly going to be doomed to failure. We succeeded with Jordan and Egypt but we have the Abraham accords with the UAE but we won't be able to go much further if we don't address that.

Ignatius

So, that's a good point to end on, and I just want to note the obvious symmetry of the comments from our panelists. What's required, even as we have this amazing military transformation, military driven and inflection point, is clear strategic planning and guidance. I should say. In closing, Malcolm Kerr was a friend of mine. I can remember walking with him on the lawn of the American University of Beirut, looking out over the Mediterranean not long before he was killed. And I do often think of him as somebody who embodied our hopes for the Middle East and the way that those were crushed. And I hope we come back next year, we'll actually answer the

question, tell me. Tell me how this ends, but we'll have a little more progress in this arc that we've been trying to describe for you. So thank you very much panelists.