

Global Agenda Outlook

Regional Hotspots

The following materials are excerpts from the conversations that took place in Dubai that were not included in the final publication, Global Agenda Outlook. They summarize content raised by participants, which offers additional context and insights into the issues discussed. The following materials are not direct quotations from the speakers and should not be quoted as verbatim text.

Moderator

Is our approach to conflict resolution, to identifying hotspots and dealing with them, actually something that we should be critical of?

Ian Bremmer

Do we have the right way to approach a conflict, and are we focusing on the right things? Part of my response would be to look at where conflict is coming from. It's increasingly very different; it's increasingly not security conflict, but rather it's economic conflict. The focus and the tools are very different than they probably should be. The capacity and willingness of countries to engage in conflict resolution is much lower structurally than it was five to 10 years ago. This is also a challenge.

Moderator

If you were a Chinese thinking to the future, you would say all the problems of the Middle East are going to be my problems. Eventually, the United States may be less interested in the Middle East. The Suez Canal is still going to have to be defended, but you may think that China will have more control about what is going on in the Middle East than before. Do you agree?

Javier Solana

I think we have to distinguish two things in the Middle East. One is the [Arab] Spring and [Arab] Winter and the other thing is something that goes beyond. It is history again. Why is Syria so different; why is Syria so important? We have a very important division in the [UN] Security Council. We have decided that this is the wrong time not to act. The Western world, without a sort of legitimacy, we are trapped now in the situation that this division between China and Russia and the other Western members of the Security Council, looks like it may paralyze the Security Council.

This is a very important phase that may have consequences in other issues. The third thing is China. There is no doubt that the rise of China is a fundamental issue. It may have security consequences, but the important thing is to establish strategic trust. Instead, we may still have a strategic mistrust. We have to convert that into strategic trust. It's not simple. If we only go through mechanisms of tactical trust, I don't think we are going to get all the way to strategic trust.

Ian Bremmer

Things are changing for many reasons. One of them is the economic crisis in Europe. This crisis is not enabling Europe to supplant the withdrawal of American power from the regions, especially from Iraq and Afghanistan. And the economic crisis in the States is not giving America the same leverage. Ten years of war against terrorism has created a lot of troubles for the United States.

This is why we are living on a threshold of a new era. This new era has not yet been determined; the rules of the game are not yet determined. This is why we see all kinds of manoeuvres from China and Russia; each is trying to enhance its own influence. Take China. The Americans are busy in Afghanistan and Iraq gave China for eight years a space to develop economically, politically and strategically. But China today looks around, doesn't see the power that used to fill the region, and now they are practising their normal, natural interest of filling the gap.

If you ask me to rank these, it's not that Asia is a little bit bigger than the Middle East from a global perspective. The Middle East people don't understand; the Israelis don't understand; the Saudis don't understand, just how limited the comparative impact of the risk environment in the Middle East would be globally in five years' time compared to Asia. That's an enormous problem for the Middle East.

Moderator

Why is that an enormous problem for the Middle East?

Ian Bremmer

It's going to cause much more conflict.

Javier Solana

If you want to solve the situation in the Middle East, you need to have other players in the Middle East. By themselves, they probably will not be able to resolve the conflict.

Moderator

The Arab world has been looking at Western intervention in the region as negative in a way. It is not conflict resolution.

Javier Solana

It is the reason for a conflict.

All my frustration, 100% of my work... 75% of my frustration has been the Middle East

Moderator

Has Syria become a conflict zone?

Ian Bremmer

I don't accept that characterization.

I do not believe that when you talk about Syria, you talk about Iraq. I see actually a bigger structural issue in the Middle East. It started off as the Arab Spring. It's now become the Arab Winter. My definition of the world order today is very much along the lines of what you called the G0. Not a G7, not a G20, but a G0 [zero], an absence of leadership.

Moderator

What other conflicts can we expect in 2013?

Ian Bremmer

The Horn of Africa – Somalia.

Javier Solana

Somalia, maybe. But I think Somalia is a conflict that will not have the consequences of the others we have spoken of.

Moderator

Mali, West Africa?

Ian Bremmer

Mali, yes or maybe. I would put Mali in relation with Algeria. Without the consent of Algeria, no force will be deployed in Mali by the United States, France or the European Union. This is an issue that we don't touch, the role of Algeria. Algeria is going to be an important player.

Moderator

Are regional organizations best placed to have a positive impact on the conflicts in 2015?

Ian Bremmer

This is related to what leaders can do. Part of the problem is that, of the three areas of the world that are going to experience significant geopolitical conflict, only one of them has institutions up to the task, though those institutions need to change: Europe. The Germans are working very hard with lots of governments to ensure that the institutions are up to the task.

Are the institutions up to the task in the Middle East? No. Now, you do have the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council]. The GCC is interesting. You hear rumours that in Egypt the new constitution is going to refer specifically to being a Sunni Muslim State. I don't know if you think that's going to happen, but it's interesting that as the Saudis are providing money to the Egyptians, will the Egyptians want to consolidate into the one institution that actually seems to have some mass. Will the Saudis and Qataris and others effectively look to Europe and say they have a model that works pretty well? We want that model, except our model will not be inclusive. Our model will be a Sunni Arab monarchy model. That's interesting. It's probably better than nothing.