
Panel: Keynote Address

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 29, 2015 / 9:30-10:45

Talking Points for: HRH Prince Turki AlFaisal, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies

"Reordering the World Order: A Saudi Perspective"

Speech by:

HRH Prince Turki AlFaisal

In the Name of God the most Merciful and compassionate. May God's Peace and Blessing be upon you.

It is a pleasure to join you in this important conference. I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to H.E. Hahm Chaibong president of the ASAN Institute for Public Policy for his kind invitation to speak to such a distinguished audience. It is always a pleasure to be among friends in Seoul. Mr. M.J. Chung's support in establishing the ASAN Institute is a credit not only to him but to the Korean people and I applaud you, sir, for it and your other philanthropic endeavors, especially the medical one.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is not only, is the U.S. back? The question should be: is the world back? The questions of restructuring or reordering the world order and the place or position of certain states and regions in such an order are legitimate and pressing ones. Calls to reform the UN system, which is a metaphor for the waning international order, have been on the agenda of the international community since the early nineties of the last century. Alas, all calls fell on deaf ears despite the continuing talk of the need for such restructuring to reflect the new realities of the world. Failing to do so led the world to the state of uncertainty that we are witnessing nowadays. Therefore, I find myself in agreement with Henry Kissinger's statement in his latest book "World Order" that "A reconstruction of the international system is the ultimate challenge to statesmanship in our time".

Needless to say that the world of today is not the world of 1945 when victors of World War II envisaged an international order that guarantees their prominence and dominance while working to preserve "peace and security of the world". In realpolitik terms this was understandable and acceptable as a matter of fact and as a reflection of the balance of power and the reality of the world at the time. It is fair to state that this order, unlike the ones that preceded it has sustained itself and has succeeded in becoming a system for world governance and global politics for the last 70 years. This order was able, despite its shortcomings, to rid the world of wars between great powers which was the norm of international affairs in previous centuries; it has successfully integrated almost all states of

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the world into an international order; it has contributed to freeing many countries and societies from the plight of colonialism and subjugation, it has helped in organizing global life into many successful international bodies that deal with all kinds of international issues that touch upon humanity: peace keeping, health, education, environment, refugees, development, etc. Above all, it consolidated the principles of equality between states, the right of self-determination, and the primacy of International Law. This, however, does not mean that the world has rid itself of all diseases and overcome all threats facing humanity. Alas, the cold war lasted almost four decades and made the World order into a bipolar system, where the United States of America and the Soviet Union enjoyed almost all political, economic, military, and cultural influence internationally and regionally. That order divided the World and brought it in many occasions to the brink of total war. It was unfortunate that millions of people’s lives in many countries were lost as under that bipolar system. Countries like Vietnam and Afghanistan are still suffering from that time. Certain regional problems were left without real resolution; pending international justice and international conciliation. The issue of Palestine is a standing manifestation of such failure.

The cold war ended with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and bipolarity transformed into “unipolarity” where the United States solely enjoyed almost all political, economic, military, and cultural influence on the world stage. The world was hopeful that such a grand transformation in the international order would lead to a more equitable international order that reflects the principles that the USA was preaching during the cold war: Rule of Law, Self-determination, Human Rights, Freedom and Equality. This hope was consolidated by freeing Kuwait from occupation and afterwards by the announcement of President George Bush in 1991 that and I quote: “Until now, the world we’ve known has been a world divided – a world of barbed wire and concrete blocks, conflict and cold war. Now, we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. In the words of Winston Churchill, a "world order" in which "the principles of justice and fair play....protect the weak against the strong....A world where the United Nations, freed from cold war stalemate, is poised to fulfill the historic vision of its founders, a world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations”, end of quote. This could have been the ideal for the international community that was becoming more global, more interdependent, more interlinked. In another word the oneness of the world was closer than ever before. This hope was dashed by the reality on the ground. The forces of nationalism in the Balkans and the Caucasus regions, and the scourge of global terrorism were unleashed. The failure of the international community to act jointly in facing such threats and the outstanding issues of peace in the Middle East constituted a crisis for the United Nations system. And with the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001 unipolarity became unilaterality that disregards the dictates of being part of an international order. It goes without saying that the dust of unrestricted wars on Iraq and Afghanistan and their ramifications have buried unipolarity and, I hope, unilaterality, in issues of war and peace. In short, unipolarity is not better than bipolarity in increasing people’s suffering in many parts

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of the world. The question arises as to whether multipolarity is the suitable formula for managing world affairs? It is a fad now talking about this issue but if we look into the history of world order since the Westphalia arrangements of 1648, multipolarity was behind colonization, division of the world into spheres of influence, great powers competition, and great power wars. This was in the past. However, there is no guarantee that greed and self-interest in international politics is obsolete. In fact, signs of such retreat from the ideals of world order to the principles of power politics in international relations are crystal clear. The strains in American and European-Russian relations over Ukraine, the inability of the Security Council of the UN to act in solving the tragic Syrian crisis, and other regional crises are good examples of such a slide toward power politics on the world scene. As Dr. Kissinger said yesterday, there are more areas of conflict, today, than ever before.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No doubt, to be fair, the international order needs restructuring to be inclusive, and reflective of international reality, where power, in all its aspects, is shared by many power centers. The world is conscious of unfairness of the present order and sees it as an outdated structure and not being able to tackle the issues of the day. This consciousness was correctly captured by Zbigniew Brzezinski when he wrote: "For the first time in history almost all of humanity is politically activated, politically conscious and politically interactive. Global activism is generating a surge in the quest for cultural respect and economic opportunity in a world scarred by memories of colonial or imperial domination". In this kind of situation, how can we understand that one billion and a quarter Indians; one billion and a half Muslims: Arabs, Turks, Iranian, and others; close to a billion Africans and more than half a billion Latin Americans are without effective representation at the helm of such a structure?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world does not need a world war to have a new world order to prove that world orders in history are byproducts of major wars. The advancement of humanity in all aspects of life, the realization that we share a common destiny, the belief that peace and security is a common goal for all on earth, and the achievements of the last 7 decades of dealing with all issues affecting human lives, dictate that all of us must work seriously to reform the UN system for it to be fair, inclusive, reflective and up to the aspirations of the people of the world. It is unfortunate that all recommendations that deal with restructuring the UN organs were and are ignored by the permanent veto members of the UN Security Council. This must not be the end to calling for democratizing the UN system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No region in the world has ever suffered from the unfairness of the international order, when bipolar and when unipolar, more than the Middle East region, particularly the Arab World. Our region has been the hell where the principle of the right of self-determination, has been burned. By the same principles that were behind the creation of the State of Israel the Palestinians were deprived of their homeland and denied their basic rights of self-determination and statehood. The United States' use of the veto power to protect Israel from

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sanction is a case in point. For almost seven decades our region has been going from one war to another, from one catastrophe to another, and from one UN Resolution to another; and justice is still elusive. Hypocrisy on the part of great powers that are at the helm of the world order and the guardians of its basic principles becomes crystal clear when it comes to Arab, Muslim, or Middle Eastern issues.

The inaction of the UN Security Council to stop the killing and mass massacres in Syria and the irresponsible use of the veto by Russia and China is another case to prove that calling for restructuring the world order is a legitimate cause.

Saudi Arabia calls for and supports all efforts to reform the UN system, including reforming the Security Council to be more representative and truer to the basic principles of the UN, and for the General Assembly to have an international legislative power that cannot be vetoed if the veto is to be preserved under any restructuring of the Security Council. Had Korea not avoided the Russian veto, 65 years ago, there would not have been the thriving and dynamic Republic of South Korea.

Reforming the UN requires new thinking by all member states including the five permanent veto members. The sustainable international order that can preserve peace and security in the world and that can meet the pressing challenges and threats facing humanity must be an equitable one. The whole world has a special responsibility in realizing this noble goal.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Now, I refer to the conference’s theme: “Is the U.S. Back”. I am not fond of the rise and decline theories when it comes to the United States of America. Relative material power of states may rise and fall in comparison to others; however, the U.S is still one of the greatest powers on earth in all means. In this respect the U.S is and will continue to be there and does not need to come back. The issue then “Is the U.S. back to its ideals and its world responsibilities that guided its foreign policy since World War II” I hope so. The U.S. never said that it is abandoning such principles and responsibilities. However, the current administration’s policies toward many issues facing the world and especially with its strategy of “Pivot to Asia” have ignited discussions at all strategic circles all over world about the American intentions. What this pivot (or rebalancing) means to the world balance of power, to the future of Asia, to the future of American engagements and commitments in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa are the debated questions. While all these questions are legitimate ones, it is hard to envision, in an interconnected, interdependent, globalized world, a great power pivoting away from its global responsibilities or its global role. If this is the case the U.S stops being a leader even if it is a superpower. The U.S. withdrawal from its global responsibilities in preserving world peace and security is a prescription for anarchy that threatens regional and world peace and order. Let us look into what is happening in the Middle East and see how the American withdrawal from its responsibilities impacted the balance of power in the region and opened Pandora’s Box to disastrous ramifications. Mr. Obama has a strategy for the Middle East. From his first campaign rhetoric, it should have been obvious that he was pivoting towards Iran. In March of 2009, the newly elected

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President Obama sent his first Nowruz New Year greeting to the Iranian leadership. In June of that year, when the Iranian people rose up in revolt against the fraudulent election results that brought back Ahmedinejad to power, the President of the United States did not issue a single word of condemnation about the brutal repression by the Baseej militias and revolutionary guards against innocent Iranian demonstrations. There was no call for Ahmedinejad to leave office, as there was, six months later, when the Tunisian and Egyptian people rose against their presidents. It went on, like that, even at the height of the Syrian uprising against the brutish Assad regime and the President’s red lines, which were not acted upon. The President obviously wanted to show the Iranian leadership that reaching a nuclear deal was more important to him than Iran’s persecution of the Syrian people. His praise for the Iranian people through many television and printed interviews clearly signaled his hopes to engage Iran after the nuclear deal. To be fair, President Obama also ratcheted up the sanctions regime against Iran, but he did so in order to convince the Iranian leadership that he can do things to harm them. But he did go behind the backs of the traditional allies of the U.S. to strike the deal with Iran. The small print of the deal is still unknown, but from the parameters of the deal there are two glaring risks. One, the deal opens the door to nuclear proliferation, not close it, as was the original intention of the negotiations. Two, ten to fifteen years hiatus from developing nuclear weapons is hardly reassuring for the world; not to mention Iran’s continued holding of enriched uranium stockpiles and the unexplained and plainly flimsy snapback approach to sanctions. Who is going to snapback, the Russians, who are already agreeing to supply Iran with missiles that can defend their nuclear installations; or the Chinese, who are already contracting to buy oil and gas from Iran, or the European banks and manufacturers who are swarming into Tehran to sell their financial and industrial products; or even the American merchants, from oil companies eager to contract for renovation of Iran’s oil industry and auto manufacturers, eager to set up auto manufacturing in Iran? In parallel to the President’s pivot to Iran, look what happened. A vacuum created by leaving Iraq in 2010 without making sure of leaving behind a sustainable national political structure, and by delivering it to thuggish sectarian political forces under the influence of Iran contributed to the collapse of the regional system of the Middle East, and the unleashing of radical terrorist forces that are destroying the concept of nation-states in the region. The failure to act on the Syrian crisis is another example of the worsening situation and encouraging regional forces, like Iran and its proxies, to advance their sectarian agenda that threatens regional security. One of Iran’s proxies, the Houthis’ blatant overthrow of the legitimate government in Yemen has led to operation Decisive Storm by ten regional allies to restore the legitimate government to power. Therefore the U.S. is leading, but in the wrong direction, at least in the Middle East. The U.S. must rethink its policies in the Middle East to be a trusted leader again and it must look into the region holistically free of its obsession with a nuclear deal with Iran and Israel’s security.

Thank you

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