

Programme

The Middle East: When Will Tomorrow Come?

February 27-28, 2017
Lotte Hotel Moscow

February 27, Monday

09.30-10.00

Opening of the conference

Valentina MATVIENKO, Chairperson of the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation

Andrey BYSTRITSKIY, Chairman of the Board, Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club

Vitaly NAUMKIN, President of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences

10.00-11.30

Session 1. The changing world order and the Middle East: a stormy passage

As 2017 begins, the growing need to guarantee national security has become the determining factor in world politics.

Severe international conflicts, international terrorism, and migration flows pose a challenge to the political and economic systems as well as the social structures and values of many countries, including those in the West.

The resultant feeling of helplessness and insecurity exacerbates the built-up frustration with the “old” elite that many people view as ineffective and out of touch with reality. Meanwhile, the “new” elite attempting to replace them stand accused of populism and radicalism.

These feelings once again give states – the only players that can take responsibility for the future of mankind – the central role in world politics.

At the same, rivalries between world powers are extending into new areas, making information wars and cyber security dominating concerns in international relations.

All of these factors create both serious challenges as well as “windows of opportunity” for global and regional powers. The latter, although stronger now, are at risk of buckling under mounting pressures, especially as global economic structures shift and change.

- *How will these global development trends affect the Middle East?*
- *Will they extend directly into the region, or have only an indirect effect by altering the behavior of key global players?*
- *How does migration influence the political situation in the region?*
- *Is it possible to scale back the information war that attends the larger hybrid wars raging in the Middle East?*
- *Will the current global economic trends relegate the Middle East to the economic sidelines or present it with opportunities for new breakthroughs?*

Moderator: Fyodor LUKYANOV, Research Director, Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club

Speakers:

- **Mikhail BOGDANOV**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
- **Raghida DERGHAM**, Founder and Executive Chairman, Beirut Institute; Columnist and New York Bureau Chief, Al Hayat
- **Steven HEYDEMANN**, Chair in Middle East Studies, Smith College; Nonresident Senior Fellow, Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution
- **Jamal KHASHOGGI**, Writer (Saudi Arabia)

12.00-13.30

Session 2. Terrorism: regional aspects of a global threat

In 2016, terrorists carried out attacks across a wider geographic area than before and suicide bombers took the lives of more than 5000 people in 28 countries. Coordinating the struggle against this scourge has become an overriding priority. Academic disputes as to whether this or that group is insurgent or terrorist reflect an alarming trend: the attempt to define groups by their slogans rather than their actions when, in fact, certain deeds discredit any ideology. Given this situation, it is necessary to find the most effective means for combating all organizations that challenge states' monopoly on violence and its use for political purposes.

- *Is it possible for global and regional players in the Middle East to coordinate their efforts more closely?*
- *Can regional forces overcome their current geopolitical differences?*
- *Which counter-terrorism methods remain untried?*
- *What contribution can the Muslim world make to the ideological struggle against the Islamic slogans that terrorists use?*

Moderator: Alastair CROOKE, Director, Conflicts Forum

Speakers:

- **Shaukat AZIZ**, Prime Minister of Pakistan (2004-2007)
- **Vyacheslav TRUBNIKOV**, Director of Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation (1996-2000), First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2000-2004)
- **Moshe YA'ALON**, Minister of Defense of the State of Israel (2013-2016)

15.00-16.30

Session 3. Syria and Iraq: untying the Gordian knot

These two countries, linked by a broad array of interrelated conflicts in which outside powers are involved, remain the most problematic hotbeds and sources of uncontrollable processes in the Middle East. That has put their statehoods and even national identities at risk. Their institutional crises have spawned alternative movements, most notably the Islamic State, and caused the formation of new loyalties and ties based on shared militant aims and the need to survive in the midst of civil war.

The success of government forces in the past year has shifted the balance of power and made it possible for regional powers to play a more active role in stabilizing the situation – while, of course, pursuing their own interests and approaches in the process. On one hand, such global players as the U.S., Russia, and the EU increasingly seek to use the potential of regional powers to influence the situation. On the other hand, states in the region do not want to be excluded from cooperative frameworks devised by outside players – hoping to participate in them as a means of furthering their own interests.

- *Will the changing balance of power in Syria lead to progress on the political front, and what obstacles can be anticipated along the way?*
- *What agreement must the leading powers reach in order to join forces and find a suitable compromise between opposing forces in Syria and Iraq?*
- *What contribution are regional participants willing to make toward the settlement of the Syrian and Iraqi crises?*

Moderator: Vitaly NAUMKIN, President of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Speakers:

- **Bakhtiar AMIN**, Minister for Human Rights of Iraq (2004-2005)
- **Mohammed MARANDI**, Associate Professor, University of Tehran
- **Hasan Selim ÖZERTEM**, Political Analyst, Ankara

17.00-18.30

Session 4. Yemen and Libya: save society, restore the state

Media and public opinion around the world, as well as the international community, have shown much less concern about the conflicts in Yemen and Libya than in the eastern Mediterranean, although they are no less dire and have led to terrible humanitarian consequences and the destruction of a vast cultural heritage. Regional powers have exacerbated those conflicts, turning them into proxy wars and transforming Libya and Yemen into breeding grounds for what could become highly destructive conflicts in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Is it possible to overcome the inertia of the protracted crises in these countries? To answer that question, we must first determine the following:

- *Is it imperative to preserve the territorial integrity of Libya and Yemen?*
- *Why have previous attempts at reaching a settlement been ineffective?*
- *Which domestic political forces in Libya and Yemen could become drivers for restoring statehood?*
- *Which new mechanisms could be employed to reach a settlement?*
- *Which actions could regional and global players take to improve the situation?*

Moderator: Vasily KUZNETSOV, Director, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences

Speakers:

- **Ali NASSER MOHAMED**, President of South Yemen (1980-1986)
- **Said FERJANI**, Member of the political bureau, Ennahdha Party (Tunisia)

- **Na'eem JEENAH**, Executive director, Afro-Middle East Centre, South Africa
- **Ismail OULD CHEIKH AHMED**, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General for Yemen

February 28, Tuesday

10.00-11.30 **Session 5. Global players: to leave or not to leave, that is the question**

The formation of a new world order encountered serious systemic problems, and disputes between the global players – primarily the U.S., EU, and Russia – have contributed to increased tensions in the international arena. Changes underway in the U.S. and EU, and Russia's active role in Syria, could have a significant impact on the future of the Middle East. Attempts by global players to reduce their military and political commitments suggest the need for an exit strategy, but that will remain unattainable as long as the situation of "war by all and against all" persists in the region. The search for a political solution presupposes the need for cooperation – itself dependent upon the willingness of the parties involved to adjust their interests in light of the changing balance of power in the region.

- *Which changes in U.S. policy for the region do Middle Eastern players anticipate under President Donald Trump?*
- *Can the Middle East become a central area of interaction between the global powers?*
- *Is it possible to establish a joint coalition, or would it be more realistic and effective for existing forces to step up mutual coordination and operate in parallel?*
- *Aside from the fight against terrorism, which projects do regional powers consider most important?*

Moderator: Andrey KORTUNOV, Director General, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)

Speakers:

- **Nabil FAHMY**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt (2013-2014); Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, American University in Cairo
- **P. R. KUMARASWAMY**, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- **Paul VALLELY**, Major General, US Army (Ret); Chairman, Stand Up America and the Legacy National Security Advisory Group

12.00-13.30 **Session 6. Regional actors: the responsibility of the strong**

The growing influence of the regional powers has a twofold effect on the situation in the Middle East.

On one hand, intense animosities between regional powers create an atmosphere of alarmism with regard to other states. Rival states view each other as existential threats, destroying mutual trust and all but eliminating opportunities for compromise. At the same time, a sense of their own weakness forces those states to seek outside support. On the other hand, an excessive degree of foreign policy activity in 2016 had a negative impact on the domestic political situation in some countries, threatening to destabilize them. They were on the verge of war on several occasions. This indicated the existence of a "red line", but did not yet lead to an understanding of the need to search for common ground.

At the same time, it is necessary to begin the long-term process of strengthening regional players. Peace initiatives can only succeed if they participate, and regional alliances – for all their fluidity and mutability – remain the only possible means for rebuilding the region.

- *How must the major regional players improve their relations for détente to become possible?*
- *Is it possible to pursue a “package deal” compromise in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen that takes all of the warring sides’ interests and security concerns into account?*
- *Can Turkey’s new role become a unifying starting point?*
- *Which conditions should be established in the region – and with regard to the West – to make the creation of a regional security system more interesting to Iran?*
- *What would help Saudi Arabia and Iran reach mutually acceptable compromises?*

Moderator: Irina ZVYAGELSKAYA, Chief Research Fellow, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences

Speakers:

- **Ebtesam AL-KETBI**, Founder and President, Emirates Policy Center
- **Sadiq AL-RIKABI**, Member of the Iraqi Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee
- **Kayhan BARZEGAR**, Director, Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies (IMESS) in Tehran
- **Nourhan ELSHEIKH**, Professor of Political Science, Cairo University; Member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs

15.00-16.30 **Session 7. The Middle Eastern economy: kick-starting growth**

Sustainable growth for the Middle Eastern economy appears practically impossible under current conditions and simply normalizing the regional economy has become a global challenge. Countries seized by conflict live according to the “laws of a war economy,” with non-state military bureaucratic structures the key participants.

Other Arab countries have begun economic reforms, but a lack of external financing and continuing social and political instability at home have made it difficult to fully implement them.

GCC states are also now experiencing serious financial difficulties. However, the agreement to reduce oil production – reached in 2016 with the participation of Saudi Arabia and Russia – offers some hope for overcoming those challenges.

Although the global demand for oil is rising and the Middle East will continue to supply a major portion of that oil despite the “shale revolution,” the economic future of the region and its place in the world economy remain unclear.

- *Can the international agenda for conflict resolution in the Middle East expand to include economic issues?*
- *Can the Arab states implement structural economic reforms and how can the international community support them?*
- *How stable are the new “oil relations” between Russia and Saudi Arabia?*
- *Which additional measures must the U.N. take to address structural economic problems in the region?*
- *How can international nongovernmental organizations play a greater role in promoting the economic development of the region?*

Moderator: Leonid GRIGORYEV, Chief Adviser to the Head of the Analytical Centre under the Government of the Russian Federation

Speakers:

- **Taisuke ABIRU**, Senior Representative, Representative Office in Moscow, Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC)
- **Abdallah AL DARDARI**, Senior Advisor for reconstruction and rehabilitation in MENA, World Bank Group; Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs of Syria (2005-2011)
- **Gürkan KUMBAROĞLU**, Director of the Energy Policy Research Center, Boğaziçi University; President, Turkish Association for Energy Economics

17.00-18.30

Session 8. The future of the Middle East: in search of a common dream

The crisis of political ideologies affecting world politics finds particularly acute expression in the Middle East. Two major ideologies of the 20th century – liberalism and socialism – can no longer offer an attractive image of the future to the people of the region. The elite in some countries have attempted to breathe new life into Arab nationalism for the sake of pragmatic and tactical objectives, but such methods are exclusivist and, at times, backward looking. Long an alternative to official ideology, political Islam has been largely discredited by the actions of radicals, and the pan-Islamic idea has proven incapable of overcoming disputes between states, ethnic groups, and communities.

- *Which ideological project could serve as a basis for rebuilding a unified and peaceful Middle East?*
- *What place is political Islam destined to take as moderate Islamist forces dissociate themselves from extremists?*
- *Could Arab nationalism ever amount to anything more than a memory of the “Golden Age”? Is it possible to strengthen the Left?*

Moderator: Fyodor LUKYANOV, Research Director, Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club

Speakers:

- **Ilyas UMAKHANOV**, Deputy Chairperson of the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- **Amal ABOU ZEID**, Member of the Lebanese Parliament, Free Patriotic Movement
- **John BELL**, Director of the Middle East and Mediterranean Programme, Toledo International Centre for Peace in Madrid
- **Amre MOUSSA**, Secretary General of the League of Arab States (2001-2011); Foreign Minister of Egypt (1991-2001)