

Transcript

00:00:00

Good morning, everyone. And what a pleasure it is to welcome you all to the Middle East Centre. First thing on a crisp, bright winter morning, 9:00 AM of 7th week with the end of turbine sight. I'm glad to see that everyone has.

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So much energy as to still be giving it their full, but of course you have, because we have. Since the appointment of Professor Rehab, Ismail been able to relaunch our programme and contemporary.

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Studies. And with that we have seen a whole new level of engagement and activity and our centre hosting more and more speakers who are at the cutting edge and shedding new light on a crucial area of research as well as a public interest for us all.

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And so, having watched all of this begin to unfold us with great excitement that I'm here to welcome you to today's one day workshop on transnational Islamic movements, global and local realities.

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We will have a series of panels through the course of the day. The programme is quite charged and so we will be keeping to a pretty strict 20 minutes per speaker.

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But you looked at me.

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No, he's dropped Hisham, but and then we will take questions for all of our speakers group together at the.

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Where we should?

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A good half hour for the Q&A we we may have some slight adjustments to be made in the course of the panel, but.

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If we can roll with punches, we're very confident that you can too. It just remains for me to thank everyone who made today possible, I really.

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We had for the intellectual leadership she's brought to getting this programme off to such a brilliant restart. I want to thank our amazing admin team, both Jenny Williams, who has been as always extremely helpful on logistics. But Caroline Davis.

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Who is just, you know, a dream to work with and and for all of her hard work in making this go so smoothly, I think we all have to express a bit of thanks. So as not to eat into the time of our speakers, I will stop by introductions there.

00:02:06

Welcome. It's great to have you all here. And we will now start with the first panel.

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Intramuslim relations and geopolitical transformation.

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Am your chair and our first speaker is the excellent Ishan Hilliard, Ishan over to.

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You that's very kind of you, Jane.

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Good.

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Good morning, everybody. It's been a long time since I've been back at Saint Anthony's and we sent 2. I blame it on COVID.

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Been everything.

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COVID I used to live only about 5 minutes away that way.

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And I remember coming to Saint Anthony's.

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Beep.

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A few years ago to talk about Egypt actually has just done a book on the aftermath of the day after of the 2011 revolutionary uprising. So it seems I'm talking a lot about day after stuff.

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And the title of my presentation today is the day after October 7th in the geopolitical transformations in the wider Arab region. But before I get started, I'd also like to extend my thanks to Reyhan.

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Patient and my very strange travel schedule meant I had to go back and forth several times and she tolerated and entertained my memories requests. So again, I thank you. Caroline is probably somewhere trying to, you know, figure out the crisis.

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That arise from having panels like this, but I'd like to put on the record that I'm very appreciative for all of.

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Assistance this way.

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So before I start the so I did choose the title, so I'm not blaming anybody for this. But when I said when I said day after, I just want to put a bit of a proviso, because this phrase has been very.

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Commonly used over the past year to talk about Gaza the day after Gaza and I just want to be very clear here. I'm not talking about that at all because we're already living the day after in Gaza and I know a lot of people won't be happy to hear that. But this is the day after I'm happy to talk about that later. If people want to.

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There is no prospect for anything particularly different than what we see now, except worse. So I'm not talking about some sort of, you know, massive change in Gaza.

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But the day.

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Is pertinent because of the time that we're living in now, the geopolitical transformations in the wider Arab region against something I chose because I prefer the wider Arab region over the Middle East. Apologies.

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Then yes, there's definitely a day after October 7th. And of course that's October 8th. But let's map out what October 6th looks like. OK, so instead of day after day before.

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So there are certain trends that we're definitely underway prior to October 7th that we're already changing by the time we got to October 7th. So 5 things that I wanted to just, you know put on the the mantle pieces that were before we deconstruct.

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Saudi and Iran? Saudi normalisation broadening of Abraham Accords it's 2. Turkey, Egypt. That's three. Qatar, GCC. That's four. And Syria, Ahmet and are generally speaking, that's 5.

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Where all of these parts October 7th.

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So the Saudi versus Eugen were talking about this is before we started the Saudi versus Iran rivalry as it were, had really started changing quite a fair bit. And if you go back to.

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The first Trump administration, I always wanted to say the only Trump administration, this Irish, we're all going to have to get used to saying the first Trump administration.

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When it came to their rivalry, of course, the Saudis during the first Trump administration viewed it as a time where they could raise the tempo on Iran and get something out of it. And I think that other countries in the GCC.

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For a time felt the same.

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OK.

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And certainly from 2016 to at least 2018-2019, I would argue there was this escalation paradigm in play.

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In the the Turk thought that they could push in a certain way and get something out of it. The Saudis thought they could push in a certain way and get something out of it. The Emiratis VIS a vis the Qataris so they can push in a certain way and get something out of it. By the time you get to the last sort of 12 months of the Trump administration.

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That changes and it changes, I think, primarily frankly out of.

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But also out of realisation that the quote UN quote permissive atmosphere that a Trump administration had provided for was quite likely coming to an end where powers in the region recognised that.

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A Biden or Democrat administration of any type was not going to allow this any further and that it wouldn't be advantageous to continue in that same sort of fashion. I I bring this up because I'm going to talk about how this is very different this time around later.

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So you see.

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The de escalation paradigm coming in, that's true versus that's true when it comes to study versus err on. That's true on Turkey versus Egypt. Turkey. Of course, that's making a lot of overtures over to Egypt and the Egyptians respond kind of.

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Playing hard to get, but you know their own. They're all on the same track. The same thing in regards to the GCC versus Qatar, if I suspect emirati's weren't really enthusiastic from day one, but they went along with it because the Saudis made it very clear.

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We.

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And then, of course, on Syria, Bashar al-Assad was still on the cold. But, you know, people generally sort of coming to the idea that, yeah, he's, he's not going anywhere.

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The last part of it is the normalisation track. There was of course the Abraham Accords and the last year of the Trump administration, and you had the Abe, the expanding of the Abraham Accords, being.

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One of the most.

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Pronounced and probably the only really pronounced foreign policy objective of the Biden administration when it came to the Middle East for several years, there was no Middle East policy is what we're fond of saying in Washington and the Biden administration, with the exception of expanding the Abraham Accords and quote unquote, keeping things quiet.

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Which isn't exactly much of a policy. And then they succeed very well, as we can see. Over the past year and a half when it came though to the Saudi normalisation pact with Israel.

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I want to say things moved. They didn't get as close as people think they got, and it wasn't because the Saudis were not willing to make certain moves. It's because in order

to get the the sort of three pronged key into the key hole and twist it in just the right way, you have to have movement within Israeli politics.

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From within the American Senate on the security guarantees for the Saudis and.

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Something symbolic, maybe, but significant to some extent.

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On the Palestinian fire, all this is pre October 7th.

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That's where we were, you know, let's say on October 6, October 7th happens. And I think that October 7th is a very monumental milestone in the region for everything that happens there after.

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OK. You know, many of your students in the room. I think that when people write about 2023, you know, 10 years from now, 20 years from now, it's going to be deeply significant.

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Because the the changes that happen as a result of the repercussions of that day, I I don't think it would really be underestimated at this point. Lots of movements, lots of change.

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And of course, tremendous catastrophe. I will lower my training, so I find it instinctively as a lawyer by training. Difficult to conclude that certain certain things are what they are in legal terms. So I don't call what happened in Gaza over the past year genocide.

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On a legal basis.

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Because I'm just waiting for the court. It's as simple as that. But if we look at the number of experts, if we look at all of the definitions that exist in law.

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Find it very hard to believe that any court looking at even a fraction of the evidence is going to come to a conclusion that isn't consistent with concluding his genocide and you're living that and we're all living that. So it's been a very, very troubling year in that regard.

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Now, going back to these five particular geopolitical realities. So Saudi versus Iran, well, the Saudis.

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Have normalised relations to an extent, but far more than they have in recent years.

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Iran to.

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The point where you saw over recent weeks, even against the backdrop of a Trump election.

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And success in the in the United States, the Saudis making it very clear nobody should impinge on Iranian sovereignty. That was a message to Israel. But it was a message also to the United States that you're not going to be able to peel us off.

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And create some sort of anti Iran axis and I don't think that they were kidding about that. I don't think this was purely PRI think that they realised that the circles when they put it in motion like that.

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Can have really deleterious consequences for the Saudis as well As for the Iranians, and of course, the Iranians made it very clear you come after us, we're going to come after your assets in the region. Of course, what they're talking about are the GCC states, the normalisation piece and the Abraham Accords. Forget it.

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It's not happening, at least not in the short to medium term, but not because the Saudis have suddenly become, you know, diehard supporters of Palestinian sovereignty, but because they know there's no way for them to normalise.

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With a regime that is guilty of this level of destruction, not simply in Gaza, but of course Gaza's the biggest part of it, but also in Lebanon, and also is looking forward to doing a lot more in the West Bank and the wider story around the Palestine question.

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And you know, the Saudis do pay attention to local pressures to domestic pressures, but some of democracy, let's not kid ourselves, but it does pay attention, and it also pays attention to the way in which Saudi Arabia is presented on the international stage.

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In the wider Arab world, but also in the Muslim world, with large when it comes to a lot of the other files, Turkey versus Egypt, I mean Turkey, the Turks and the Egyptians are trying to get along with each other as much as possible.

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A lot of coordination of many different files, qalta versus GCC, just over the last few days you've seen very high level representations between Qatar and the UAE, and that's the main fault line. And I think that that's very clear that they don't have.

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Like each.

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Other.

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And they actually don't like each other too much, but they are aware that the the future for success for both of them in the region relies on not causing fights where they're not necessary.

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Syria. Syria is looking very interesting. Over the last few days in particular because you have when we get to the the axis issue, OK, because of course the axis of resistance I

put resistance in quotation marks for two reasons. One because of academic integrity, but also because there's no such thing as resistance.

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A regime like Russia.

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Awesome. I want to make that very clear, but the way in which that particular access access has, I won't say crumbled. I don't think that that's quite fair, but the idea of his bottleneck.

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Impenetrable. Invulnerable. You know, incredible resistance movement that was going to leave Israel shivering in its boots. Well, that.

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OK. And what we've seen instead is that although I don't think that they've taken out the operational capacity of Hezbollah, but I do think they've degraded it quite significantly and they certainly managed to degrade and.

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A huge part of its leadership, Tier 1 and tier 2 OK when it comes to Hamas, of course. Hamas again, it's not. It has not disintegrated, it has not disappeared. It's not going to disappear. Neither of these movements are going to disappear.

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The strength of.

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Them and the ability of the of them able to coordinate with each other and other members of the axis OK, has certainly been pulled into question. Hamas was expecting, for example, after October 7th, that the Axis was launch.

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You.

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Into operation and the access, by the way, is not simply Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah. There are other groups that exist, of course. The Houthis in the Yemen, different militias in Syria, different militias in Iraq and even further afield. If you want to go into the subcontinent. But.

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I won't say nothing happened. The hoof is obviously stopped. All of our Amazon packages coming on time, but the the impact of the axis on changing the direction of what was happening in Gaza was.

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Virtually non existent. The Israelis destroyed Ghana, the Israelis pummelling Gaza to the ground and levelled it. And it did so to a point where the ICC has issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gelad.

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Where the ICJ, as I said, is hearing a case on genocide, none of that was changed as a result of the Axis, OK.

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Iran was struck directly.

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OK, an assassination of Miss Marie Hania in Tehran the day after the inauguration of the new president. OK, right in the heart attack. Now that this the idea that the axis was this very, very powerful thing.

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I think is has been fundamentally called into question. I don't think it's irrelevant. I think that we have to think of it more of a network that can exact certain prices over a very long period of time. So you know that's why 1000 cuts doesn't work, doesn't work, but it's not that. It's very, very, very.

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Very annoying. You see that? Of course, when it comes to his bubble as well, in his bubble has been pushed back tremendously within Lebanon, and there'll be a I think there'll be a reconfiguration in Lebanon where the Lebanese state is either stronger or.

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Falls into complete state collapse and possibly civil war. I don't think that the latter is likely. I think the former is much more likely given everything else that is going on, but of course what we also saw in the last few days where Syrian rebels, Syrian rebels recognising that the access is at one of its weakest points in the past.

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Years, if not longer, and they took.

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Word of Bashar.

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And they suddenly seem to make impressive gains in Syria over the last few days. So we'll see how that all works out. I want to say one last thing, which is geopolitics in the region is never simply about the region. Geopolitics in the region.

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Is fundamentally about the depth of involvement from other powers external to it. Most of all, the United States, and what we've seen from the United States over the past year in particular, is an aggregation of international law on a level that I did not imagine.

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Would be possible in the bite administration.

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So all of these countries know very well, except for Israel, they're on the wrong they're not giving help from the US except from Iran. So if Iran were to declare war on any of them, they could come in the US. But apart from that, the US is not going to be saying we'll stand by you in accordance with our treaties, or we'll stand by you in accordance with international law or in accordance with any sort of.

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Actual treaty? That's not it. So instead what we are seeing and what I think we will continue to see are a lot of protocol, middling powers trying to hedge and prepare themselves for very, very destructive potential going forward.

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Particularly on the Israel Palestine question.

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So it's not looking particularly great and we haven't even seen a Trump to take office yet. So with that very optimistic note, I I take again for kind invitation for Eugene for keeping me to time and for all of you.

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Listening. Thank you.

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Thank you, chef.

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Yeah.