

David Menashri - Iran, Israel and the USA: In a changing Middle East

On 19th December 2016 David Menashti had a global conversation with students of Global Governance, he talked about Iran, Israel and the USA in the changing Middle East.

Professor Menahri is a scholar of modern Iranian history and a leading expert, also the founding director of The Alliance Center for Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv University. He had also been a popular visiting scholar in many universities and has received grants from three famous foundations.

Prof. Menashri started the 1 hour and 22 minuted long Global Conversation by addressing how sensitive this particular issue was due to the genocide and decided to focus on Iran touching several developments as well as going through an extremely delicate phase of a 100 years of Nation State system.

Referring to the era of nationalism and versatility of religion existing in the Middle East, he talked about loss of trust among tribes and nations causing division even among religion because of different currents of Islam (Sunnis and Shiites etc). Conflicts between Arabs and Non Arabs, Sunnis and Shiites added even more magnitude towards the division. Promises made by the opposition were completely different than what was achieved when in power. If a clash was to exist between dogma and interests, interests were given more importance to.

In relation to the other countries in the Middle East, Prof. Menashri talked about the cinema industry being one the best in the world, and their newspapers being the best in the Middle East; he gave us an example of a writer who published a book titled 'Fascist Interpretation of Islam' which was widely received by many newspapers. About 100 liberal papers existed highlighting the freedom of expression in Iran, however they were shut down: so the problem later evolved into the repression of that freedom of expression that Iran was so proud of; diversity does exist in some forms, but since power is in the hands of few radicals and extremist, there are problems in achieving any kind of success.

Recent Iranian political movements have started questioning if Islam is truly the solution, since it actually didn't prevent the two revolutions, nor any of the social issues still existing today.

In this context, Iran is now trying to develop nuclear energy and, possibly, nuclear bombs. Obama wanted to solve the issue in a peaceful way: he wanted to use dialogue.



When the agreement was settled, Iran came to the negotiation table very weak, but the Professor specified that Iranian people are pretty good in the art of negotiation: they learn how to do that at the “Bazar University”, since they have to bargain and find an agreement even for the smallest things.

The deal, eventually, was not the best deal for Iran, according to the Professor, but at

least it was a deal: indeed, he thinks dialogue is always better than war, since the latter doesn't actually solve problems.

The professor then started talking about USA being the country that helped Iran the most: particularly, in 1991, the American soldiers fought against Iraq military power and destroyed Saddam Hussein's

dictatorship, the first biggest Iran's enemy; again, in 2002, on the East side of Iran, the Marines defeated the Afghan Talebans, the second biggest Iran's enemy.

Now that the President Obama has finished his mandate, the new elected President Trump will take his place, also in deciding the future relationships with the Middle East; we don't know what to expect from him, especially because there's a big difference between what politicians say during the campaign, and what they actually do once elected.

The Professor Menashri closed his speech saying how future can be uncertain: we didn't see the two big revolutions, we didn't see the arab springs...

"When you start studying the past, you learn to understand the impossibility of predicting the future."

Questions:

The GG students then asked some questions to the Professor Menashri.

A student from the first year asked if there are some democratic regimes at the current time, and the Professor answered that there was a time when they thought they could impose democracy, and the United States thought they could export democracy, but you can't do any of the two things. Democracy grows in the country- no country in the Middle East is really democratic, the closest is Israel, but only for the Jewish people.

The reason for this is that there are wars, so the regimes are either monarchy or military.

Another student asked what actually changed in 2009 when people from the Iranian middle class protested against the oppressive form of government, and the Professor said that civil society was suppressed in 2009. The two leaders of the rebels are still at house arrests, and the president elected in 2013 is much more moderated.

The third student, then, asked what is going to be the future of the agreement between Iran and USA. According to the Professor, it's not possible to say anything about the future: *"Young people want to know, but we can only give them some guide lines. Even the future is not what it used to be."*

Anyhow, about the nuclear deal he thinks it will be very difficult to revoke. There's the need of making sure Iran follows the deal during the near future.

He then added that, since he considers Iranians as smart people, he thinks they'll follow it.

In conclusion, we think Professor Menashri's presence was a great and unique opportunity for us to try understanding better such complex issues, that are often explained and debated poorly and superficially.

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