

Professor Jacob Goldberg | Why is the Middle East so Unstable and Unpredictable

- [Carly] Hi, everybody. Wendy's flight was delayed by a few minutes, so she's just hopping on, but I'm going to start by doing the introductions and I'm very excited to welcome Professor Jacob Goldberg with us. It's a particularly interesting time to be discussing the Middle East, although, as the Chinese would say, it's always an interesting time to be discussing the Middle East. So Professor Jacob Goldberg is the former acting head of the Diane Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University. He has been a visiting professor at Cornell, George Washington and the University of California San Diego. He received his undergraduate degree in Middle Eastern Arabic from Tel Aviv University. He holds a law degree from Tel Aviv University along with an MA and a PhD in Middle Eastern politics from Harvard University. In addition, he was the foreign policy advisor to Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak. His book, "The Foreign Policy of Saudi Arabia," was published by Harvard University Press in 1986. So Professor Jacob Goldberg is going to spend an hour with us and he'll allow time at the end for Q and A. Professor, thank you very much.

- [Professor Jacob Goldberg] Thank you, Carly. Thank you for your introduction. It's a pleasure to be with you, although you are quite far from it's late in the evening here in Tel Aviv and good afternoon to you in the United States. It has been conventional wisdom that the Middle East is a crazy region. That standard formula from international relations do not apply to the Middle East, and this is why it has been totally impossible to predict anything that might happen in the Middle East. My goal this afternoon is to refute such conventional wisdom and to prove to you that the Middle East works and behaves very much like other regions in the world, though with several differences. But the fact that or the conventional wisdom that everything in the Middle East just doesn't make sense is totally unsupported as I will show you during the next hour. Some of you might have heard the story about the Scorpion and who is trying to cross the Jordan River to the other side, unable to swim. He sees a turtle on the same side of the river and he convinces the turtle to carry him on his back to the other bank of the Jordan River. Being afraid that the scorpion might sting him, the turtle said, I, you know, "I am very apprehensive of carrying you. How would I know that you will not sting me?" So the scorpion explains that "If I sting you, I will drown myself so it doesn't make sense for me to sting you." The turtle is convinced and he's taking the scorpion on his back and as they're swimming to the other side of the Jordan River, sure enough, the scorpion stings the turtle, and they're both about to drown. At the last minute, the turtle turns to the scorpion and he said, "Why did you sting me? Now you are going to die." And the scorpion says, "Well, this is the Middle East, so a joke is better than a thousand words."

And this just reflects and illuminates the fact that the conventional wisdom that the region is totally crazy without any rules and is totally unpredictable.

First, let's define the region, the geographical dimensions of what we are talking about. This is known as the core Middle East. It consists of two large non-Arab countries, Turkey and Iran, and several Arab countries, the largest one, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the countries of the Fertile Crescent, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Sudan, and to some extent also Ethiopia but needless to say, Yemen and all the Persian Gulf states, the oil rich Persian Gulf states are included in this area, which we call the core of the Middle East, but there is an extended Middle East, which includes also the countries of North Africa. In other words, in addition to the countries we have mentioned, we have to add Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and also Mauritania, by the way, with the exception of Turkey in Iran, which are non Arab, all the other countries are Arab and they are members of the Arab League. Some 22 countries are members of the Arab League. A very brief in just one slide, historical summary of the region. The Middle East has been ruled by empires for 2,500 years. The Babylonian, the Persian, the Greek, the Roman, the Byzantine, and then with the beginning of Islam, a series of Islamic dynasties for no less than 1300 years. I repeat the Middle East has been ruled by Islamic dynasties for almost 1300 years. These are the years 636 to 1917, the last of which was the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Dynasty, which ruled from Constantinople, today Istanbul for exactly 400 years, 1517 to almost the end of World War I on 1917. Then it was followed by a very short British and French rule. Some of you might have heard the term mandate, British mandates, French mandate, French rule in North Africa and so on, to the modern Middle East. By mid the 20th century, a new political map emerged in the Middle East and North Africa. The result was the establishment of 20 sovereign states, and this is the map of the 20 sovereign states that are in the current Middle East.

Now, to understand the sources, I also refer to them as the pillars of instability. There are four dimensions that need to be analysed. If you, if one is missing, then you don't have the full picture. And the four are the internal dimension, the regional dimension, the global dimension, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. What we will do in the next hour is to discuss just the first one so that you understand the complexity of the problem. This dimension, the internal dimension could be a more than a full year seminar in the course on the Middle East. So the mission I have tonight, this afternoon is actually almost mission impossible to summarise the internal dimension in 45 minutes. Think about the instability of the Middle East as resting on four pillars, the domestic, the regional, the global, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. And as I said this afternoon we will focus on the domestic dimension. With the end of Islamic empires after 1300 years, the goal of all these Arab peoples was to establish a one large Arab state, but this has failed. Instead the whole area was fragmented into

20 territorial states. These facts created three sources of instability, of domestic instability. The first one is the identity crisis. The simple question that people of each country are asking, who are we? And you will see in a minute that there are various answers to this question. The second source, all the borders that I showed you, especially in the Middle East, in the core countries of the Middle East, are in a way artificial, drawn by in many cases British and French diplomats. Look at the border between Egypt and the Sudan. It was drawn in a meeting between foreign policy people, a straight line, look at the border between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, straight lines. And of course the borders between Iraq and Syria, between two mandatory powers, the British and the French. So if the borders are artificial, as you will see shortly, the countries are also artificially created, which results in a third source of instability, countries with heterogeneous population. You don't have a monolithic group in most of these countries, that starts with A, the identity crisis. Their question is who are we? Are we Moslem? In parenthesis, Shiites or Sunnis. For 1300 years when ruled under Islamic dynasties, our identity was Muslim, we were individually Muslim, we were governed by Muslim law. We were governed by a Muslim empire by a Muslim dynasty. The head of the empire, a Kalif or Sultan was both the head of the state and the head of the Islamic community.

Now, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of these states, who are we? Are we still Muslim or are we Arab? Since we, most of us speak Arabic. If we are Arabs, why don't we have one large Arab state? And if we were fragmented into individual states, then are we Egyptians in Egypt, Iraqis in Iraq, Syrians in Syria, Lebanese in Lebanon, Persians in Iran, Turks in Turkey? Then, who are we? The fact is that for the last 100 years there has been no consensus. There has been a profound disagreements over this basic core question of identity. Why is this question so important to answer? Because identity determines the country's orientation. Its constitution, its policies, both domestic and foreign. Its priorities, its agenda. The question of identity is the most predominant determinant of everything related to the state. And I'll give you an example. Let's take Egypt in the last 100 years. For the first 30 years, the answer was we are Egyptians in a nation state called Egypt with our own Egyptian history that goes back 5,000 years. Then there was the revolution with Colonel Nasser coming to power and he completely reoriented Egypt. We are Arabs, not only are we Arabs, but we are the leaders of the Arab world. As such, we cannot detach ourselves from our Arab sister countries. We have to show solidarity, we have to support them, we have to intervene and support them if they have conflicts with other states. Nasser was succeeded by Sadat who went back to the old answer. We are first and foremost Egyptians. And to show you how this determines Egyptian policy, you will never be able to understand why Sadat concluded peace agreement with Egypt without understanding that he went back to the identity of Egypt, we are Egyptians. If we are Egyptians, we have to look after the

interests of Egypt, of our own people and not at the interest of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and so on. And then came Mubarak until the Arab Spring and he was sort of ambiguous. We are Egyptians but we are also Arabs. So he walked the tight rope between the two and then there has been one of the oldest organisations in Egypt, the Moslem Brotherhood And by the way, in six years, in 2028, they will mark the 100 anniversary of their establishment and their answer is, we have always been Moslem. And the reason we are not now is because the Egyptian or the Arab nationality is a western concept. So we should revert back to our Moslem identity. It's not only Arab countries which have this problem. Look at the two large non Arab countries, Turkey and Iran, on the left, this is a brief history of Turkey. First for thousand years it was the Byzantine Empire. Then for 600 years it was ruled by the Ottoman Islamic, a hundred years ago came after World War I, Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey. And he totally shifted, reoriented, created a metamorphosis, not Ottoman, but Turkish and not religious, but secular. A secular western, western oriented national country by the name of Turkey. Who would have believed that after 80 years, Erdogan, the current prime minister or former president and now president of Turkey would go back to Islam, Sunni Islam as the core identity of Turkey, exactly the opposite of Turkish and exactly the opposite of secularism? And Iran went through by and large the same historical process. It from ancient times it was the Persian empire. Then after the beginning of Islam, Iran was conquered by Islam. Islamic dynasties ruled over Iran for 1300 years. After World War I, the Pahlavis dynasty headed by Shah came to power like Ataturk in Turkey, it totally reoriented Iran from Islamic to Persian, from religious to secularism. And again who would've believed that after all this, there would be an Islamic revolution in 1979, creating an Islamic Republic with a specific Shiite identity, which I will talk about later on briefly. So there is a clear cut identity conflict here. Are we national, Turkish or Persian, secularist or are we Islamic and religious? Unresolved and during all this time in all these 20 states, Islam is playing a major goal, as I said in Egypt is the Muslim brotherhood. Jama'ah Islamiyyah is another group. They were responsible for the assassination of Sadat. In Asia, in Pakistan and Afghanistan, al-Qaeda and Taliban, in India, Lashkar-e-Taiba, in the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf, in Southeast Asia, al-Badr, in Syria, ISIS, al-Nusra, Jaysh al-Islam, Ahrar a-Sham.

To add an anecdote here, the rival, the Muslim rivals of ISIS said that ISIS was established actually by Israel. How do they know? Because ISIS, which you might know stands for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Its rivals said that this is not the right abbreviation, the right acronym, ISIS stands for Israeli Secret Intelligence Service, which of course is a joke. In the Palestinian community, there is Hamas and there is Islamic Jihad, in North Africa, Ansar Sharia in Libya and Tunisia, Murabitum, al-Qaeda in Morocco and Mauritania, even in Black Africa. Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab in Somalia, in Lebanon, of course it's Hizballah, in Iraq, it's the

popular mobilisation unit, Hezbollah battalions, Badr, Mahdi Army. The reason I painted these two in red is because unlike all the others which are Sunni Muslim, in Lebanon and Iraq, these are all Shiite Muslim. And just pay attention to the slogan of these jihadi groups, "We chose death as a way of life." Bear this in mind when we come to the last two slides, which try to explain the chaos in the Middle East, we chose death as a way of life. So in all these countries, there are Muslim groups whose answer to the question of identity is a clear cut one, we have been Muslim for 1300 years. It's Western imperialism which created this fragmentation and we should all go back to a unified Islam. So to summarise, A was the question of identity, B is the artificial borders or countries created after World War I when the modern Middle East was established, and it's interesting, you can see the artificial nature of these countries by looking at their names. What does Iraq mean? There has never been a country by the name of Iraq prior to 1920. For centuries it was called in Greek and Latin, Mesopotamia coming from Meso, which means the middle and Potamus in Greek, which means a river. Mesopotamia means the land between the rivers, the two rivers, of course, meaning the Euphrates and the Tigris. Why this country artificial? Because the British took three separate Ottoman provinces, merged them together into one state in 1920 and created a country by the name of Iraq. Jordan clearly is the name of a river. This is a clear cut British creation in 1921 for reasons which we will not speak about now, but it has to do with the Balfour Declaration and the promise to create a Jewish national home in Palestine. Lebanon, if you look at maps prior to 1920, Lebanon was the name of a mountain, Mount Lebanon. It is the French who created what they called in French, the Greater Lebanon in 1920. Totally artificial, as you will see in a minute when I show you the map. There has never been before a country by the name of Lebanon. Lebanon is a mountain. Even the trees are named after the mountain. The Cedars of Lebanon, the Cedars coming from Mount Lebanon and last is Syria. It is named after an ancient empire, Assyria. And it was again a French British creation in 1920, artificial.

Now, the countries I've mentioned now are geographically what is called the Fertile Crescent. Why fertile? Because the rest of the Middle East here is a desert, the Syrian desert in the north and the Arabian desert all the way down in Saudi Arabia, all the way down almost to the Indian Ocean. The Fertile Crescent consists of Iraq. You see here the name Assyria as it's an old map, you will see the name Iraq here because it's an old map. And where Lebanon is today, what do you see? The name is Phoenicia. The Phoenicians. They supposedly the inventors of paper and glass. And here is Jordan and Palestine. This is the Fertile Crescent where the four countries that we just mentioned are located. So we'll go one by one. This is modern Iraq, as I said under the Ottomans, it was that this, the province of Al Basrah, the province of Baghdad and the province of Mosul, three separate provinces, why were they separate? Because the Ottomans were smart administrators. This region in the south is predominantly

Shiite. This region in the centre is predominantly Sunni and this region in the north is predominantly Kurdish. They didn't want to have problems. So it was three separate. The British took all three and united them into one country, Iraq, you can see already now the seeds of chaos. Jordan, artificial creation. After 1921, Jordan was part of the British mandate over Palestine. In 1921, the British wanted to separate the area east of the Jordan River, which is here, and to allocate the western part to the Jewish national home and creating here an Arab administration. So they called the country Trans Jordan. Why? Because when looked from Western Palestine, it was on the other side of the Jordan River. In the absence of any name for the country they called it, they named it after a river. Three, this is the Syria landscape. Look at this. Kurdish, Turkish, Syrian government allies, completely fragmented and Lebanon, as I explained, Mount Lebanon is the yellow colour here. This is the core Lebanon of the past. What is the most characteristic feature of this Mount Lebanon? It's predominantly inhabited by Christians. Only in 1920, this area in the north, predominantly Sunni Muslim was added. The eastern part, the Becca Valley predominantly Shiite was added and the south also predominantly Shiite added to create the modern state of Lebanon. When I speak in a minute about the demographic crisis of Lebanon, if you keep in mind what I just said, now, how these regions non-Christian were added into Lebanon, you can clearly understand the answer. And this brings us to the third and last source of domestic chaos. The artificial borders created countries with multiethnic religious groups, and I'm showing you here tables of four countries. The most clear cut examples of this crisis, which will easily illustrate the problem I'm talking about. As a result of the what the British did of merging three distinct Ottoman provinces into one, you have one country with 55% Shiites Arabs, 20% Sunni Arabs, 20% of Sunni Kurds and 5% Christians, which today probably are less than 3% or 2%. Now look at these two, Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds. To explain to you what the difference is, they share a common religion. They are both Muslim Sunni, unlike the majority, the Shiite majority, the Kurds and the Arabs are both Sunnis. So religiously they are the same. But ethnically, they are Arabs, they are Kurds, linguistically, they speak Arabic, they speak Kurdish. Racially, the Arabs are semis. The Kurds are in the European, so they are not the same. And to double the problem, multiply the problem, for 80 years since the beginning of modern Iraq, until the American invasion in 2003, the minority, the Sunni Arab minority of 20% ruled over entire Iraq. One doesn't have to be a genius to understand the Shiite resentment and the seeds of rebellion. Look at Syria, Sunnis 60% and then four groups each 10%, Alawites, Kurds, Druze, Christians, and again, to double problem, the Alawites, which compose less than 10% of the population of Syria, they have been in power for over half of this last of the century, since 1966 and since 1970, it's now 52 years. It's Assad Senior and Assad Jr. A father and a son. For the last 52 years, a minority of less than 10% ruled over the entire country. And the 60% Sunni majority, again not really too elaborate, but the most incredible example is Lebanon.

Now look at the middle chart here. The population, when the Lebanese National Covenant was crafted in 1943, based on a census taken 10 years earlier, it was assumed that Christians composed 55% of Lebanon, Muslims in red here, 45%. Today it's the Christians lost their majority and are down to 30%, the Muslims went up to 70%. But unlike other countries, the Christians themselves are not a monolithic group. Today of the 30%, 20% are Maronite, Greek Orthodox are 5%, and Greek Catholic are 5%. The Muslims too are not a monolithic group. The Sunnis are 25%, the Shiites are now 40%, and the Druze are 5%. But this is only a partial picture, which does not reflect the situation today because this chart does not include the Palestinians who came to Lebanon after the war of 1948, and the Syrian refugees who fled from Syria during the Civil War in Syria in the last 10 years. These two groups together number close to 2 million. So you can see the total chaotic demographic situation in Lebanon. And to give you a further example, despite the fact that the Christians lost their majority and the Muslims became the majority, with the Shiites being 40%, the largest single group to this day, the power structure in Lebanon hasn't changed. The Maronite, the president of Lebanon has to be a priority, a Maronite. The Prime Minister has to be a Sunni and the largest single group, the Shiites, what do they get? A symbolic post of the Speaker of Parliament. The Druze which are only 5%, they are much more powerful in terms of position, the defence minister. But this whole structure is just on paper because in the last 25 years, the real power in Lebanon is in the hands of one specific Shiite group, which you are all familiar with its name, Hizballah. So this whole pic, this whole table, this power structure is a total facade. It is the Shiites who will determine who the president will be, who the parliament speaker will be, who the ministers will be, behind the scenes. And they also control the army of Lebanon. This all, and just to finish this, you can see here the two faces of Lebanon, A photo speaks better than a thousand words. On the left side, you see the supporters of Hizballah dressed in black with the flag of Islam, some of them with even Barakas. And on the right you see the Christians with the flag of the cedars of Lebanon, secular, nationalistic. The two have nothing in common to say that they are, their goals are diametrically opposed, will be a huge understatement. They have nothing to do with each other. Their goals, their vision, their platform, their identity totally diametrically opposed. This demographic picture of Iraq and Lebanon and so on reminds me that when the war, the religious war in Northern Ireland between the Catholic and the Protestants was raging for years. Someone said jokingly that in Northern Ireland there are Protestants and twice as many Catholics, but no Christians. To paraphrase, I can say that in Lebanon there are many Maronites and many Sunnis and twice as many Shiites, but not even one Lebanese. Each of these groups identify itself as Maronite Christian, Sunni Muslim, Shiite Muslim, and so on and so forth. And the same would apply to Syria. They identify themselves primarily as Alawites or Kurds or Sunnis or Druze, not as Syrian. And in Iraq it's

the Kurds, it's the Sunni Arabs, it's the Shiite Arabs, a lot of Shiites, a lot of Kurds, a lot of Sunnis, almost no Iraqis at all. Just to give you an idea that this multiethnic portrait is not limited to the Arab world. Here is an example from Iran. Only slightly more than half of the population in Iran are Persians. There some many are Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, Mazandarani, Baluchis, Turkmen, and so on and so forth. And last but not least important are the Kurds. The brown colour here represents the Kurdish concentrations in the Middle East, as you can see, they are all in one neighbourhood bordering on each other, but in five countries, the largest segment in Turkey, then in Iraq, then in Iran, then in Syria, and then in the tiny concentration in Armenia.

It's hard to believe, but there are over 30 million Kurds and everyone is asking a rhetorical question, how about the right of self-determination to these 35 million Kurds? Why does everybody speak about right of self-determination to people who have 5 million or 6 million or 7 million, and nobody speaks about right of self-determination to 35 million Kurds. What are the consequences of those three sources of instability? There is lack of consensus on who are we, lack of natural entity and lack of shared ethnic and religious identity. These three combined create a recipe for a mess. Lack of solidarity, lack of unified vision, lack of cohesiveness, and they create internal dissent. And as we also all saw as well, total chaos. And finally, also, civil wars. I should put it in plural, not in the singular. I drew up a table here to give you an idea of civil wars that have taken place in the Middle East in the last 60 years. It's not even from the beginning of the 20th century, it's the second half of the 20th century. Bear in mind the fact that all these cases have nothing to do with wars between countries. There are all internal wars, civil wars, domestic wars. In the Sudan in the last 50, 60 years, close to 2 million people were killed. 300,000 Kurds were killed in Iraq, Iran and Turkey. 300,000 Iraqis were killed by Saddam Hussein in the 33 years that he ruled, a quarter of a million people were killed in the Civil War in Lebanon, almost a quarter of a million were killed in the Civil War that raged for 15 years in Algeria, 100,000 people were killed in the Civil War in the sixties in Yemen, during the Iranian revolution, 80,000 people were killed. In Black September in Jordan, 25,000 people were killed. In one rebellion in Syria against Assad, Assad raised the whole city of Hama to the ground in April, 1982, killing 20,000 people over a few weeks. And in the South Yemen civil war another 10,000 were killed. And this is all in the 20th century. If we come to the Arab Spring, during the five peak years of the Arab Springs, the Civil War in Syria, 600,000 Syrians were killed, in Iraq, 75,000, in Libya, 50,000 and in Yemen, 20,000, all in all. Just before we come to that, if you want to know where this figure, Syria, 600,000 here is a breakdown to the years. In the first year, only 7,000, and then 50,000 over 70,000. The total by the end of 2014 was 200. Then it was revised to almost 400, another 100 in 2015 and another 130,000. Can you imagine this huge, mass killing,

600,000 killed in one country in the course of five years? Just look at the problem of refugees. Of the population of Syria, 13 million refugees were created in five years. 6 million of them in Syria proper. And all the other, 7 million people went to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Europe, 1 million. This is a displacement of 57% of people. If there is an ethnic cleansing in the Middle East, Syria represents the biggest Arab ethnic cleansing of 7 million Sunnis. To put this mass killing in perspective, during the same period, 1948 to the present, total Arab casualties in the Middle East, seven wars, 4 million people. In the entire Arab Israeli conflict in the last 72, 74 years, the total, the number of total Arab casualties is 40,000. Look at this figure, 4 million, 40,000. That's a coincidence that it's 1%. And again, not a photo or a cartoon speaks better than a thousand words. This is a cartoon that appeared in an Arabic paper. The word here in Arabic is 'damask.' So it could have been in Syrian, but I doubt it. It's probably an Egyptian paper. And the headline here in Arabic says, The mother explains to the son who is asking, "Who are all these people buried here?" And she said, "These, my son, are the victims of the Arab Israeli conflict." And then they go to a huge cemetery with a huge number of graves, and the son turns around in disgust and said, "Who are all these people killed here?" And she answers, "These, my son are the victims of the Arabs killing each other." No need to elaborate. And I would like to conclude with something that one of the preeminent writers in the New York Times, Tom Friedman, I'm sure you all know his name. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, he wrote the following, "The Middle East is in a self-destructive, tribal and political madness." In a minute you'll see why I underlined and painted red the word madness. And he explains the self-destructive tribal madness. Persians against Arabs, Shiites against Sunnis, Saudi against Qataris, Alawites against Sunnis, Islamists against Christians, Yemeni Houthis against Yemeni Sunnis, Turks against Kurds, Libyan tribes against other Libyan tribes, Egyptian regime against Egyptian democracy activists. And it concludes so much hate and in so many directions. This is, these are in his opinion, the results of the Arab Spring. Do I need to remind you the hopes that all the writers in the press, in the Western press, in America, in Britain and France, why did they call it the Arab Spring? Because they were sure that these demonstrations in Cairo, in Baghdad and other places represent what happened in Europe in 1848, the yearning for democracy, for changing the regime from dictatorial to democratic. So instead of an Arab spring, as we say, the region ended in a Islamic winter. And this reminds me of a famous saying attributed to the late Abba Eban, who was the foreign minister of Israel, probably the most deep, most preeminent diplomat that Israel has ever had. He says that, he said that when people offer alternatives to an existing situation, they sometimes forget that the alternative to a disaster could be a catastrophe. So if the Middle East situation prior to the Arab Spring was a disaster, after the Arab spring is a, it is a total catastrophe. There are four or five countries which are on the verge of non-existence. They are failed

states and other are non-functioning states. And this is what Tom Friedman call "Madness and Hate." And I take issue with these two terms and with this entire explanation of this, my criticism is that his interpretation is Western centric perspective. He's judging the Middle East societies by Western standards.

Secondly, he is assuming, not only here, but this is just an example, that world history evolves in synchrony between different regions of the world. He looks at Europe after World War II in the last 70 years and sees a stable Europe. World wars have come to an end, Europeans have united. There haven't been really any major war since then. And he assumes that in this modern era, the same should apply to the Middle East. But this is not the case. This is the wrong assumption. Different regions in the world are not synchronised with each other. We know it for sure from the basic division of history into three periods. When in Europe for 1000 years, the period is called the Middle Ages, which is characterised by the Dark Ages, the rule of the church, the corruption, wars and so on and so forth. No freedom whatsoever. In the Middle East, in the Islamic world, this was at the golden era of literature, of poetry, of architecture. Look at Andalusia at Cordoba, Seville, Granada. When Europe was in the Dark Ages, Islamic civilization flourished and by the way, Jewish civilization too, this era is called the Golden Era in Jewish literature, philosophy, minorities, and so on and so forth, lived all when in Europe, was Europe was ruled by the Dark Ages. And the fact that there is a modern Europe does not necessarily mean that there is a modern Middle East. To put it, to explain it in one sentence, the Middle East today is where Europe was a few hundred years ago and my third criticism is, remember the word madness and hate in describing Middle East conflicts as psychological and emotional. What is hate? It's an emotional term. What is madness? It's a psychological title. In using such psychological, emotional terms, one ignores that the Middle East conflicts are rational. They are rooted in real tangible conflicts. And if you keep in mind that these five sentences, you'll understand why everything that happens in the Middle East in terms of domestic, the domestic dimension, which I analyse today, is very rational and logical. The Middle East in the 20th and 21st centuries is where Europe had been for centuries until the mid 20th century. What is the history of France and Britain for 900 years? War after war after war. And that applies to all the countries in Europe. We speak about Shiites massacring Sunnis, and the other way around. Didn't Catholics massacre Protestants in Europe for many, many years? If I were to tell you that prior to this lecture, I listened to the news and they said that in Baghdad, Shiite terrorists entered the Sunni mosque and killed a thousand people. You would say that, yeah, this is normal there because they're crazy people. But what if I tell you that Catholics did the same in France in one day, August 24th, 1572, known as the Night of Bartholomew, Saint Bartholomew the Catholics in Paris attacked Protestants. The French Protestants were known as the Huguenots and killed 2000 people and within two months, 24,000

Protestants were massacred by Catholics. And this happened before and after. So it happens only between Shiites and Sunnis? This is what happened in Christian Europe for centuries, what happens in Iraq is unbelievable. And what happened in Northern Ireland, with Catholics and Protestants killed each other for decades? Syria is a mess today, what happened in Bosnia, Sarajevo and Kosovo, which are part of Europe, bordering on the EU, weren't there massacres just a few years ago? And keep in mind that Ireland and Bosnia are just one country, in the Middle East, you have 20 countries with such conflicts. All these conflicts that Tom Friedman described here happened in Europe too. Instead of Persians and Arabs, English and French, Shiites and Sunnis, Catholics and Protestants, Saudis and Qataris, Spain and Portugal, Alawites and Sunnis, the same, different kinds of Christians, Islam, Eastern Christians, Christians who were fighting Muslims for centuries. What is the whole essence of the crusaders? They went, they wanted to go to the holy land, to free it from Muslim rule, Yemeni Houthis against Yemeni Sunnis were under civil war in Europe and so on and so forth. Would Tom Friedman call these wars in Europe which rage for hundreds of years also madness, just hate? No, he would explain them in rational terms, fights between nations, between different sects of a religion and so on and so forth.

So why in the Middle East is it madness? It's very rational. It's what I called rational, real tangible conflicts. So the Middle East today is governed by chaos. It has been governed by chaos for 100 years since the end of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of modern Middle East with 20 countries. And this chaos is by no means at its end. Moreover, in the last 10 years, the chaos peaked into civil wars and into non-functioning states. And the reason is because the elements of instability, the unresolved issues of identity of these artificial states and artificial borders and these multiethnic states, the absence of monolithic states is as powerful as ever. And I started with a joke and I would like to end with a real story which will exemplify my conclusion. Some 35 years ago, I gave a talk at Stanford University. It was during the Civil War in Lebanon, and I explained all the various groups and so on. And then there was a QA and one of the, it was to the Stanford faculty, and one of the professors sitting in the front row who during my entire lecture was, showed signs of unrest. He lifted his finger at the end and he asked, "How can you make sense? This is a totally senseless situation. How can you explain it at all?" And I said, "Well, do you have another formula, another method to explain this?" He said, "Well, I'm a professor of computer science and we have now a whole new thing called Artificial Intelligence. Why don't you feed in the computer Middle East politics and have the computer using artificial intelligence come with certain clear cut, logical explanations?" I said, "Well, I am not familiar with computers at all. Since you are an expert in artificial intelligence, why don't you do it and write to me?" Of course, I never heard from him. But two years later it happened that I was at Stanford again for a lecture and I was looking for him. I couldn't see him, but

just towards the end of the lecture, I see in the very last row was sitting the same professor and he didn't say a word. At the end of my lecture, I pointed to him and reminded him that he promised to use artificial intelligence to solve the Middle East crisis. And I ask him, "So?" He said that, "I did try. I fed all the Middle East equations into the computer." So I said, "And what happened?" His answer was that the computer started to cry. And on this unhappy note, I will stop and open the floor if we have a few minutes to questions.

Q & A and Comments

Q: What caused the decline of the Christians in Lebanon? Was it the Civil War in the seventies?

A: It's very simple, even though there are many explanations, but the most important one, the two most important ones are immigration of Christian Syrians, waves of immigration because they realised that they live in an Arab Middle East. They wanted a secular European or Western oriented state in Lebanon and hundreds of thousands of them realised that this is never going to happen. Lebanon is part of the Arab world. And little by little they emigrated, first wave in 1948, second wave during the first civil war in 1958, third wave in 1975, fourth wave after the establishment of Hizballah, fifth wave and sixth wave and so on and so forth. And then of course there is the rate of birth among the Christians. The Muslims, especially the Shiites, have three or four more children as the Christians because they are European secular, modern oriented. They have at maximum two kids, whereas the Muslims have a lot of children. So if you add childbirth and then first and foremost immigration, you understand why they declined from they were even more than 55%. But please keep in mind that a, what I called as the original sin was that non-Christian regions were incorporated into the Mount Lebanon original Christian enclave, the Northern Shiite, the Northern Sunni, the Saudian, and the Eastern Shiites. That was the first historical reason for the erosion in Christian majority.

Q: Thank you, a lot of people are asking where Israel fits into all of this.

A: Okay, there is no, it's not a coincidence that I did not mention Israel even once, except one time when I mentioned it in the context of how many people, how many Arabs were killed in the Arab Israeli conflict. Israel does not fit at all into this domestic dimension. And this is why I made it clear at the beginning of my talk that these four dimensions of instability, domestic, regional, global, and the Arab Israeli conflict are totally separated from each other. Or to put it differently, had there been no Arab Israeli conflict, everything that I said this afternoon would've remained intact. The identity crisis, the artificialness of the countries and the borders, the

multiethnic realities of these countries all would've existed regardless of whether there is Israel or there is no Israel. And I'm glad, I'm grateful for the question because this was an important clarification and the best one I could make in order to drive home the nature and the magnitude of the domestic crisis. It has nothing to do with Arab Israeli conflict, nothing to do with the inter Arab rivalries and nothing to do also with the global dimension, the French, British, and in for 40 years, the Soviet American, all these elements of the domestic dimension would have existed without the other three dimensions, thank you.

Q: And I will ask one last question from the audience since we're short on time. Can you suggest any solution to the chaos in the Middle East or any starting steps?

- Or any?

- [Host] Any beginning steps to create peace?

A: Okay, you can imagine that solving the domestic dimension and these multi crises would be equal to square in a circle. The only solution that I have heard that is a comprehensive solution is to go back to the Ottoman Empire. During the Ottoman Empire, there was one major centre, one major authority, one major identity. Everybody knew who the emperor was. He was the head of the state and the head of the religion. Their loyalty was to him. The empire was divided into districts, provinces. Each one was governed by a Wali or governor of a province, a governor of a district. Each province was basically monolithic, predominantly monolithic, to reduce the possibility of crisis, of chaos, of civil wars. So going back to the Ottoman, the days of the Ottoman Empire would potentially be a solution, but of course, this is what Arad Duhan would like to have. This is the agenda that he tried to advance. Having again, a Middle East ruled by Turkey, reviving the Ottoman Empire, maybe with a different name, not maybe using a different name because the Ottoman Dynasty is nonexistent, using a different name, calling it an Islamic state. This is what all these Muslim groups that I described in all these parts of the Muslim Arab world would've loved. What are the chances of this happening? Close to zero. In the absence of going back, I can see in the foreseeable future any other answer, but continuing strife, continuing chaos, and continuing civil war ups and downs, but basically unresolved issues of identity, of being an artificial creation and having all these ethnic groups fighting each other. Thank you.