



In the Name of God the Almighty

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**The speech of H.E. Dr. Muhammad Hassan Shaykh al-Islami,
President of Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) and Deputy Minister of
Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran
at the 8th Forum “Middle East in Quest for Security, Stability, and Economic Identity” in
Bucharest, 7th July 2022**

- **H.E. Prof. Adrian SEVERIN**, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania
- **H.E. Prof. Teodor MELEȘCANU**, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania
- **Mr. Flavius CABA-MARIA** distinguished President of MEPEI
- **Dr. Liviu MUREȘAN** distinguished President of EuroDefense
- **Prof. Anis H. BAJREKTAREVIC**, International Institute for the Middle East and Balkan Studies

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning!

I am very pleased to attend, even virtually, the eighth annual international conference organized jointly by Middle East Political and Economic Institute (MEPEI) and EuroDefense, being held this year with the theme of the Middle East in quest of security, stability and economic identity.

The Institute for Political and International Studies of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IPIS) has always been interested in actively participating in this forum. We believe that attending such meetings provides a great opportunity for the participants to exchange their views on important international issues in a favorable atmosphere and to gain a direct understanding of each other's views on these issues.

Needless to say, the collaboration between the IPIS and Romanian Think tanks has a long history and is not limited to participation in this annual conference. We consider the cooperation between the two countries research institutions and think tanks as mutually beneficial and fruitful and welcome its continuation and expansion.

Distinguished guests,

The world we live in is changing at an incredible and unprecedented speed. Until a while ago, we used to think that high politics issues including traditional geopolitical competitions would gradually lose their importance and priority, and that the challenges facing us in the future would be more of the types that we used to call them low politics, such as the social, economic and environmental issues. Nevertheless, the occurrence of some recent developments suddenly threw us all back into the geopolitical space and territorial rivalries.

These developments have deep impacts on our understanding of the world. Although the level and degree of influence of these developments on each international actor is not the same and depends on several factors, they were all required to revise definitions of identities, interests, priorities and preferences and to reconsider not only their goals, strategies and policies but also the predictions they had about the future of the world.

Nonetheless, the topic of our meeting today is related to the Middle East. Therefore, let me point out the three major developments that, in my view, will have the greatest impact on strategic relations and security policies in this region of the world, and then share with you my insight of how these impacts will be.

Firstly, whether we like it or not, the negotiations to lift Iran's oppressive sanctions in Vienna and recently in Doha are one of these important developments with wide-ranging effects. You

more or less know this story and there is no need to repeat it. Let me just emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran has entered these negotiations with seriousness and good faith and by presenting numerous initiatives to manage differences and disagreements. As always, Iran still supports a win-win solution which is fairly achievable, provided that all negotiating parties are ready to return to 2015 agreement. The revival of the JCPOA will have remarkable effects on the security arrangements and international relations of the Middle East region.

Secondly, the Ukraine crisis, which has already caused significant changes in the geopolitics of the Middle East and have brought challenges and opportunities in terms of food and energy security.

Perhaps, Middle East was the fastest region affected by Ukraine crisis, among other things, due to its geographical proximity and its inevitable interdependence on the European security structure. In other words, security in the Middle East is sensitive to security developments in Europe and vice versa;

In any case, it seems that under the influence of the Ukraine crisis, the Middle East is prone to increasing tension and unrest for four reasons.

The first long-term effect of the Ukraine crisis was to demonstrate the necessity and importance of the concept of hard deterrence. Today, the European Union talks about the need to strengthen military deterrence. Countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, which traditionally did not seek to strengthen their offensive defense base, have made a clear turn to strengthen their defense base. These developments are a double pressure on the issues of disarmament and arms control, which the Middle East needs seriously. In other words, I think that the global trend that we will see in the coming years is a decrease in the willingness of countries to enter the arenas of arms control and disarmament negotiations.

This issue is especially troublesome in the Middle East; because reducing tension in the Middle East and building trust among regional actors really requires a level of recourse to arms control models and is a serious need for our region. Rivals must at some point enter into arms control-based de-escalation talks. On the one hand, the Ukraine crisis may reduce the desire of the Middle East countries to enter into arms control talks, and on the other hand, it may lead these

countries to the necessity of strengthening deterrence. The combination of these two trends may increase the level of tensions in the Middle East.

The second impact of the Ukraine crisis is related to changes in Russia's Middle East policy. Russia's Middle East policy has been based on a type of balancing between different actors and creating the role of a type of balancing actor among regional powers. After its presence in Syria, Russia acquired various tools in order to be able to play the role of a balancing actor and saw many political benefits for this issue. I think Russia's diplomatic maneuvering power will decrease after this crisis for various reasons, including the necessity of military and diplomatic focus on the Ukraine crisis; Therefore, we should expect that Russia's presence in the Middle East will change in the coming years, and perhaps Moscow will no longer be able to play a balancing role which may make this crisis-producing region even tenser.

The third impact of The Ukraine crisis is that both because of the energy issue and because of the efforts of Europe and the United States to prevent new security blockades by Russia, the Middle East has once again returned to the center of attention of the West.

As the 4th impact, I refer to the issue of food security in the Middle East which is also a very important issue that can cause many tensions in the region.

Coming back to the main important recent geopolitical developments that have had important effect on strategic equations in the Middle East, I do mention the ongoing disengagement of the US from the Persian Gulf region as the third.

Some countries in the Middle East, tie their security to the presence of the United States in the region. They believed that security can be imported like any commodity. The so-called Pivot to Asia as well as the policies of the United States during president Trump era and the subsequent policies of President Biden have finally led them to the conclusion that they can no longer rely on the United States for their security. That is a step forward.

Dear friends,

I think the simultaneity and combination of the above three developments has created a completely new situation in the Middle East. This situation, if properly understood and managed, can lead to a unique opportunity to transform the Middle East into a secure and stable region; a region where the establishment of a comprehensive, endogenous and cooperative security system will bring the economic development and welfare of all parties and results in their effective role in the global security and economic order. Repetition of previous mistakes, including dependence on foreigners, mutual distrust, arms race, and resorting to force to resolve disputes will destroy this historical opportunity and lead to increased tension in the region.

In the framework of the neighborhood policy announced by the new government, the Islamic Republic of Iran has started extensive measures to take advantage of the historical opportunity. The 13th Iranian Administration's diplomacy to reduce tensions and enhance bilateral relations with neighbors including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan and other neighbors has been active and has been more or less successful so far. Iran's permanent policy towards its neighbors is the development of comprehensive and strategic relations, along with good neighborliness. We believe that any alliance with the Zionist regime, even non-security and non-military, will threaten the stability and security of the region. We hope that the goodwill of the Islamic Republic of Iran will be properly understood by its neighbors and other actors in the Middle East and will find an appropriate response.

By expressing this hope, I will end my remarks and wish the organizers and participants of this forum a successful and useful meeting.

Thank you!