

In this episode titled "The Gulf's New De-Escalation Foreign Policy Among World Powers," our host Jonathan Fulton is joined by esteemed guest Mohammed Baharoon to discuss the shifting dynamics of Gulf countries and their foreign policies. From the focus on developmental issues and sustainable economies to the changing perspectives on security and power, our experts explore the implications and potential solutions to foster stability in the region. Join us as we tackle crucial topics such as the impact of China's presence in Africa, the concept of de-escalation as a security strategy, and the evolving landscape of international relations.

Takeaways

- The Gulf's Shift Towards De-Escalation and Development in Foreign Policy
- African Nations: Resources, Youth, and the Impact of Foreign Influence
- Evolving Notions of Security and Power: A Changing Perspective
- The Changing Geopolitical Landscape of Asia
- Gulf Nations' Complex Ties with Global Powers
- Pursuing Rapprochement and De-Escalation in International Relations
- The UAE's Focus on Development and Collaborative Initiatives
- The Growing African Community in the Emirates
- Geopolitical Considerations and Africa's Emerging Opportunities

Quotes

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution to resolving conflicts. Each situation requires a nuanced understanding and a tailored approach." - Mohammed Baharoon

"Fostering access, connectivity, and de-escalation is the new approach to address security concerns, shifting away from military solutions" – Mohammed Baharoon

Featured in the Episode

Jonathan Fulton

Nonresident Senior Fellow for Middle East Programs at the Atlantic Council. Assistant Professor of Political Science at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi

<https://ae.linkedin.com/in/jonathan-fulton-2627414b>

<https://twitter.com/jonathandfulton>

Mohammed Baharoon

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mohammed-baharoon-a870b424/>

Chapters

- 00:00 - Introduction
- 02:02 - Shifting from Security to De-Escalation Strategy
- 05:28 - Abrahamic Accords: A Shift into Identity Conflict
- 07:59 - Cooperation for Addressing Cosmic Challenges
- 11:58 - Asia's Expanding Concept: India and China Included
- 14:56 - Gulf Countries Facing Tough Choices in Geopolitics
- 18:31 - Trump's Masterful Attempt to De-Escalate Korea
- 20:11 - Prioritizing Local Development over Power Competition
- 24:33 - Japan's Tech Support for Gulf's Energy Transition
- 28:56 - Investing in Diversification for Energy Security
- 30:18 - Emirates' Growing Interest in Africa's Development
- 35:27 - Questioning the Necessity of African Economic Development
- 36:45 - Seizing the Early Opportunity in West Africa's Urbanization
- 40:15 - Creating Safe Spaces for Interaction and Conflict Avoidance
- 45:56 - Outro

Produced by Heartcast Media

www.heartcastmedia.com

Transcript:

Jonathan Fulton:

Welcome to the China MENA podcast. I'm your host, Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a political scientist at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The political landscape in the Middle East has been undergoing dramatic shifts. The Abraham Accords has created space for cooperation with Israel. Bitter relations between Turkey and several Arab countries have improved, Syria is back in the Arab League, and Saudi and Iran are normalizing relations. Importantly, these transformations are coming from within, as Middle Eastern actors seem committed to making a less turbulent region. What this means for people and governments of the region is uncertain, but it does feel like there's cause for optimism.

What this means for people and governments outside the Middle East is less clear, as extra regional actors are responding and recalibrating to a dizzying pace of change. To provide us with a perspective from the Gulf, I'm delighted to be joined by Mohammed Baharoon. Mohammed is director general of Bahuth Dubai Public Policy Research Center, which focuses on international affairs, public policy studies, and public opinion research. Mohammed's work

focuses on the emerging geostrategic space of the Arabian Peninsula, and he frequently contributes analysis to leading publications around the world. Mohammed, welcome to the show!

Mohammed Baharoon:

Jonathan, thank you very much for having me.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. I'm glad to have you. I've been wanting to have you on the show for a long time now. I guess I was inspired because recently, you published an article I thought was really interesting. You had an article called The New Gulf of De-Escalation in the Hoover Institution's Caravan Magazine. I thought it was really insightful. I thought our listeners would benefit from hearing you talk about it. One of the things, in your article you wrote, "de-escalation is possibly the most common buzzword in Middle East policy making circles nowadays." Can you give us a brief overview of recent trends and why people are talking about de-escalation?

Mohammed Baharoon:

Well, de-escalation is, practically, a term used usually in terms of confidence building mechanisms or in conflict areas. But I think it has grown to be more of a strategy as we see de-escalation moving into a way of replacing the old construct of security in the region. Securities have always been about walls. You build a wall to protect yourself from an enemy who's possibly going to attack. I think we're changing that into roads. Your enemy, if they can have access to you, to your, you know, commerce, to your network; I think things are gonna start changing. Now, again, this is until now seems to be like an experiment, but we've seen very positive outcomes of that experiment. Maybe the most positive outcome is what you've alluded to, is the relationship with Turkey. It seems to have changed more than 180 degrees.

A few years ago, Turkey was accusing the UAE of funding a coup. Now the UAE is a major strategic partner for Turkey. So things have changed quite dramatically. But I think it's changing also as dramatically as in other areas, though we haven't seen the results fully until today. So there is always a question, where else should the escalation start to apply? We've seen it applied to decades long conflict with Israel. We've seen it applied to much shorter decades, struggle or conflict with Turkey. We've seen it now being applied to Iran.

We've seen it applied to Syria. Where else could the de-escalation be applied? And I think there are a number of areas in the world where de-escalation could turn into some sort of an experiment that people look at and say, well, can we do this or not?

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. I mean, all that. So I teach international relations, you know, with young Emirati students. And we were talking today, just about 2 hours ago in class about these different theoretical ways of looking at international politics. And in the past, when we did this class, we talked about realism with, you know, this kind of hard security military approach. Most students said, well, that explains the region to me. That speaks to how I see international politics. And when we talk about liberalism with a cooperative approach and economic interdependence and cooperation, they'd say, yeah, that just sounds like, you know, very unrealistic. That sounds very idealistic. And today, when we talked about it, they all said, yeah. You know, that actually describes how we see the region right now. You can see a lot of examples of how you can meet your security concerns through cooperating, through negotiating, through, I guess de-escalating. So it's really interesting. I think you're onto something here. You know, of all these things you went through with Syria and Iran and Turkey, you know, just this long list of things that have been changing, which do you think represents the most consequential in potentially changing or reshaping the region.

Mohammed Baharoon:

I think the Abraham Accords are. And, basically, because the Abraham Accord is not just a conflict between 2 states over, say, borders. It has changed into something far more ingrained, into identity. It became an identity conflict. And it started with a political, security issue between Israel and the Palestinians. Turned in the time of Abdul Naser into something between Arabs and Zionists, and then later on became something between Muslims and Jews. So it has been escalating. It's like a snowball, getting bigger, and it became the major driver for a lot of the problems we've had here in the region. Including terrorism, radicalization - Saddam Hussein, when he invaded Kuwait, said, I'm going to liberate Israel.

So, it became an easy way of attaching anything that cannot be accepted. And in that sense, the Abrahamic Accord, particularly by virtue of its name, was a way of de-escalating that conflict of identity back into a political discussion that can be heard on a negotiation table. And I think we're right now seeing the results of that in those talks between Saudi, US, Israel, Palestinians, and how to bring it back to concrete discussions on the table rather than just, you know, all of the Jews die or all of the Muslims die.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. And, you know, I can see this. When I go to Dubai, especially, You know, but here in Abu Dhabi as well, like, you know, you see so many Israeli tourists in town. You'll see people in our line of work, think tankers or academics, who are coming here to collaborate with Emirati or other Arab counterparts. Like, this isn't just face value. There's a lot of real engagement taking place. It feels different.

Mohammed Baharoon:

Absolutely. I remember this discussion with a journalist from the Christian Science Monitor just after the announcement. And the question was, how do you look at it? And, honestly, my answer at that point I think still is valid today. I look at it as an experiment. We've never had something like this when a foe is turned into a friend. And now all of those walls that we've been erecting, we're tearing them down, replacing them with new roads because now both of us are benefiting. The region is benefiting.

And I think there are a number of concrete projects. Maybe the latest is, this economic corridor announced between India and Europe through the Middle East. That's a way of saying that with cooperation, we can address much better challenges, and these are cosmic challenges. This is not a challenge between two countries. If you're talking about health security, if you're talking about food security. Right now, the UAE is talking about water security. These are huge, huge issues. We've seen how the world has shifted, with energy security on the forefront of the discussion. So, these are cosmic issues that need a lot of cooperation, and cannot be solved by two or three or four countries next to each other. And I think that is causing what I describe as the quantum politics here in the region.

Because what we used to calculate politics, what we used to calculate security based on relationships, is shifting. And it's not strange that the UAE, for instance, is signing those, economic, or strategic economic cooperation, agreements, the CPAs or the strategic partnership agreements with countries that they don't share borders with. So geography is not becoming the main, you know, way of building cooperation. It's not based on geopolitics alone. We're transcending that, and I think that is, changing and shifting a number of officials.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah, so again, like just to go back to me teaching a couple hours ago, like when I was talking about this stuff with my students, you know, I'd ask them, how do you see security? How do you see power? And in the past, it always would have been in very traditional terms. They would describe security in military terms. They describe, you know, power as, you know, how many divisions or weapons or whatever you have. But now they're talking about, you know, the things you're describing. You know, like, your relationships are a big part of it. Right? Your influence, your ability to punch above your weight because you have CPAs with different countries or because you've got these, you know, venues to cooperate and influence other countries to see the region in the same way you see it. So I think it's led to some really interesting policy options for countries in the region.

Mohammed Baharoon:

Absolutely. And even the concept of power is changing. Power is not the ability to dictate. It's the ability to facilitate. And that's why I keep describing the emerging world order as an organization of the world order. It's like Uber. Uber is the biggest taxi company in the world that does not own a single taxi.

It's owned by other people. Its ability is to facilitate that service being moved. Now Uber cannot exist in a world without connectivity, so connectivity becomes very important. Otherwise, if you're in Abu Dhabi or if you're in India and you want to use Uber and there is no cellular network, there is no Wi Fi, there is no connectivity. You won't be able to order it. If you cannot transfer money, then you cannot order Uber. So it's this cooperative model that seems to be driving the world, and I think the CPAs and the other, strategic partnership agreements are doing just that. It's enabling others to cooperate with each other. And, people talk about the rise of the global south. It's not the rise of the global south. Global south has been there. It's the ability of that global south now to connect to each other. So they're realizing new power that they didn't have before because of connectivity.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. So a couple of things I think of with this. 1st is I'm gonna go turn around and write an article like the IR theory of, Uberization of international politics.

Mohammed Baharoon:

Sorry, I already wrote that.

Jonathan Fulton:

Okay. Fair enough. It's your idea. But no, the other thing is I'm thinking I've been writing and thinking a lot about, you know, how our concept of Asia has been changing to incorporate, you know, what India and China call West Asia, You know, countries of the Gulf or the Levant or the Middle East. And, this Japanese guy, Yuichi Funabachi, wrote an article way back in the early nineties describing, you know, what you just talked about, like how in Asia, countries that were disconnected, you know, in kind of earlier stages of Cold War globalization. You know, as they start to build that connectivity, as they became markets and investors and commercial competitors, how, you know, those ties start to grow much denser, and how that led to a greater security environment and more prosperity, more opportunities in just a much more, diverse and wonderful region. So you can see how that's playing out here as well, I think.

Mohammed Baharoon:

I mean, you're absolutely right. And, if you look, for instance, and we're not shifting away. We're talking about China, nonetheless. But if you look at a country like South Korea. South Korea is very strongly attached to the US when it comes to ideology, diplomatic, political orientation, security, but also economically, it's attached to China. And they cannot really choose 1 over the other. And if they are put in a position where they have to choose 1 over the other then we 'll see a huge strain to this idea of polarization. And that is why, I think the world cannot be divided into this. Friends, foes, and fence sitters.

You know? It cannot really be that way, it is more of a network world order, where you can connect to different people, different countries without having a specific affinity. Because of the concept of polarization, which means you are attached to one center of gravity, you cannot be attached to another. That is what is changing. And it's quite interesting that that article says that the US is losing the UAE to Russia and China. Losing the UAE means that the UAE is drifting away from that center of gravity, it is losing that gravity to the US, but that is the old way of looking at the world. This is not the way we look at it. We are still attached very strongly to the US even though we're developing a relationship with China because it is not a zero sum calculus anymore. That calculus has changed, fundamentally.

Jonathan Fulton:

Okay, well, this to me is interesting, because I like a lot of the geoeconomic stuff we were talking about, but I'm primarily a geopolitics guy at heart. And I spent a lot of time in East Asia before I moved to the Gulf. And I do agree, you can see, you know, Korea, South Korea has had really an up and down relationship with China over the past couple of decades, where, you know, the tremendous economic opportunities, by more deeply integrating their economies seem to drive a lot of policy, but then, other issues would kind of get in the way, whether it was Chinese support for North Korea or, you know, South Korean military cooperation with the US and the THAAD missile defense system. And, you know, geopolitics does have a habit of getting in the way. I do wonder, you know, when you're describing not having to choose, I think most countries would say they don't wanna choose between different poles of influence. I think most countries in the Gulf would much rather say we have a vision of what we think Gulf security looks like, and we would like extra regional powers to support that and work with us and try to achieve it. But I do wonder, I mean, we are talking today on September 25th. I saw last week, of course, the UNGA meetings, and Anwar Gargash gave, I thought, a really interesting conversation where he's talking about, you know, largely what you're describing, that the UAE in particular would like a more ironclad security commitment with the US. And then you saw, I think, I believe the next day, a report that the UAE might reconsider exporting certain products to Russia. So do you think that there might be a rethinking maybe within Gulf countries to think okay, the space to navigate in this competitive atmosphere is getting tighter, and maybe we do have to make more, difficult choices in this new environment?

Mohammed Baharoon:

But I will remind you of what, his excellency and what Prakash said. When the idea of the Middle East, NATO-like alliance was floated just before president Biden came and visited the region. He said we're not going to be a member of an alliance that is directed towards just one country. It's counter to what we're trying to build. Yes. We need collective security. We need security protection for the supply chain. That's very important to us, and I think to the world at large. But that doesn't mean we are going to have a security arrangement against one country.

Going back to South Korea, if I were Korean and as looking at things as they are today. And I say, look. Now there is more militarization in the South China Sea. And there's more naval

pieces or trolls going on. There's discussions of fielding nuclear umbrellas in both Korea and Japan. So if something went wrong, one way or another, just think of the possible consequences of the Nancy Pelosi visit going sideways. What will happen? That area will not be inhabited for a few 100 years. So there is a discussion. There is consideration that this might not be the only way of addressing the China problem.

I think president Trump tried to do something clever. We can agree or disagree whether it was done cleverly or not. But, trying to create a rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea was a masterful way of creating a de-escalation That would not force people to choose between China and would possibly have given the US huge sway in that region through cooperation rather than through security. Unfortunately, he did not stay long enough to do that. And I don't think it was picked up later on, by the current administration. But that is one way people in Korea would look and say, look, if the Gulf countries can have the de-escalation of Iran, how can South Korea not have a de-escalation with North Korea? How can Japan and Korea not have de-escalation with China? In a way, to prevent a catastrophe in that region. As we can see in Yemen, as we can see in Sudan, as we can see in Ukraine, there is no such thing as a short war. There's nothing short and sweet about wars.

It can become protracted, and they can have, you know, huge impact on the world at large. And I'm sure those considerations are going through their minds. And I think the US could be looking at that and say, look, we could play the role of the facilitator rather than the role of the protector. Mhmm. And I think that is an important question to be discussed.

Jonathan Fulton:

I agree. And I guess that comes back to just wondering what the calculus from within the Gulf countries or Middle Eastern countries is for all this de-escalation. I mean, I've had a lot of meetings with folks in different Middle Eastern countries over the past year, and one of the common refrains is that we are very much obsessed with developmental issues and building sustainable economies and creating new jobs for our young people. And these are the things that drive most of what people in the region are thinking and talking about, much less so partaking in any kind of great power competition. Is that part of the thinking here? Is, like, we see extra regional powers talking about, you know, these big geopolitical competitive tensions, maybe we just have to step in and take care of this region on our own and try to focus on the stuff that matters to us and hope that we can get support from different actors. And the countries that can contribute the most to this are the ones that are gonna provide the most value to us going forward?

Mohammed Baharoon:

I mean, I think, the manifestation of this type of discussion we're seeing is what is called the principles of the 50. These are the principles, the 10 principles the UAE announced as it was celebrating its 50th anniversary. And the thinking behind that was that we've achieved so much in 50 years. What can we achieve in the next 50 years? How can we protect what we've

achieved? And the outlook to that is that for the UAE to continue developing itself for it needs the region to be developed. If the region needs to be developed, then there needs to be more investment in the developmental agenda. And no one else in the world, possibly with the exception of China, had some sort of a development agenda, be it in infrastructure, be it in connectivity, be it in trade. The US was not really interested in that. Europe was not really interested in that. And then we could see neighboring areas like Africa becoming a challenge both to us and to Europe. So that's an area for cooperation, but it requires development. So, I don't think it's just a development for those countries for their own national interest. I think there is a view that there is nothing regional about this region. If we want to be stable here, we have to have Africa stable. We have to have Iran stable. We need to have, you know, stabilization between Turkey and Cyprus and Athens. Those areas are very important for the whole world economy, and we really cannot, you know, take a lot of those - and if a conflict, heaven forbid, starts, all of that type of thinking made us understand that, one, we need to put the economy first.

I mean, a lot of people say yes, yes, yes. All of us, you know, talk about the economy first and forget about other sources of conflict. But in reality, economy 1st means my connection with those countries becomes more important than preventing these countries from having, like, access to me. And I think this is the thinking that is now guiding a lot of those discussions. Yes. The UAE has recently announced a call for action for a global move to secure food security. And I think this is the UAE taking forward those big issues and looking at the water security as one of those possible areas or reasons for conflict in the region, not only ours, but also in Africa. Because of climate change. So we're attaching climate change to real security issues, but the way of addressing them is not going to be through armies. Armies won't help us with water security. We will need cooperation. We need research. We will need infrastructure. We need innovation, and we will definitely need diplomatic cooperation to achieve that type of security and reduce that potential

Jonathan Fulton:

So this makes me think, you know, when you're talking about Korea and everything you just said about, you know, how other countries can contribute to this agenda, we saw a couple of visits from Japan. Recently, the prime minister Kishida was in the Gulf in July and a couple of weeks ago, the foreign minister was in Riyadh for talks with GCC countries. And one thing that struck me as interesting, you know, beyond all the stuff like FTA talks and, you know, the typical political stuff, when PM Kishida was in the Gulf over the summer, we often thought of Japan's Gulf relations, at least in the energy sphere, as a kind of buyer-seller dynamic. You know, Japan gets more than 90% of its oil from the Gulf, and that makes it a very important region for Japan's economy. But this time, he was talking about energy security from a different direction, saying, look, you know, we've got a lot of tech that can help you guys in this transition towards, you know, decarbonization and moving into newer, cleaner energy. And Japan's done some pretty interesting stuff, and we can help you crack the code too.

So, I mean, is that how you see working with other countries is, like, what can you bring to the table to help us get to where we need to be rather than, you know, this traditional, we want some great power that can help us deal with regional tensions, you know, in in kind of these hard security sectors.

Mohammed Baharoon:

Absolutely. I mean, this is a major area of, any type of, let's call it a modern relation, modern day type of relationship between countries. It's quite interesting the way the UAE is describing those agreements as comprehensive economic agreements. It's not a trade agreement anymore. Trade used to be the way that yeah, an FTA, a free trade agreement, is the benchmark when it comes to two countries wanting to make their economic cooperation strong. But it's not a free trade agreement anymore because your relationship economy is not about trade. It's also if you're talking about the knowledge economy, so knowledge transfer is important.

In the knowledge economy, research, innovation is very important and would require a lot of things. It's not only having smart people doing research. It's having facilities. It's having a way of funding that research. So that collaboration will need to be done among countries. And I think this is the way forward. The other issue is energy security. We, in the world, we need far more energy than we used to three or four or five decades ago. My kids are consuming far more energy than I used to consume when I was their age. So it's not only about transition from one source of energy to another.

It's about making sure that that energy is there for their schools, for their commutes, for the hospitals, for the work environment, you cannot work anymore without energy. So, we cannot talk about development in Africa without energy. So we will need far more energy. And that's why, you know, diversification of energy resources is possibly far more accurate, than just transitioning. Transitioning has to do with reducing carbon. There are also other ways of reducing carbon, but it's very important to have energy for people to be able to move on. And that's why there's an investment in hydrogen. That's why there's an investment in nuclear energy.

That's why there's an investment in renewable energy. So they are all different and there is no discounting of fossil fuel. There is less fossil fuel, and we will need far more better tech to help us deal with carbon. But we cannot just discount it because, 1) it's there. 2) We have a legacy of using it. But most importantly, there's no other form of energy, until now, it has had this capacity for storage more than fossil fuel. And this is the same thinking we had when we were talking about the vaccines in Africa, we cannot just think of distributing the best vaccine, which is the Pfizer vaccine in Africa.

Because of the, you know, the degree of, our temperature needs to be kept at. There is not enough electricity to light light bulbs in Africa. And now suddenly, we need to keep it at subzero. So you need to think of other forms of vaccines that do not require that type of energy, but it opens up your mind that there is no energy. There's a huge energy deprivation in those areas,

and that's why we will need to have more work. So the idea of energy security requires a lot of investment in diversification of energy sources, but also, as you mentioned, in decarbonization. And I think any discussion today between two officials, the UAE and, Japanese on foreign policy will not be about bilateral relations alone. They will have to talk about the region. They will have to talk beyond the region.

They will have to talk about Africa. They will have to talk about South America, they would have to talk about Iran. They would have to talk about Central Asia. And I think this is the new type of energy that guides people's thinking here in the region, and that is possibly, creating a huge validity for the concept of de-escalation.

Jonathan Fulton:

This is getting off the topic a little bit, but you've mentioned Africa probably half a dozen times. And I think this is really interesting because when I moved to the Emirates in 2006, this wasn't something that came up a lot. You know, back in the nineties when I was doing my bachelor's degree, I was mostly focusing on African politics, so I've been enjoying this, you know, it's very Tom Friedman-esque. But to look at the taxi driver situation, there was always kind of this change in the Emirates. When I came here, everybody's from Peshawar, and then a lot of people were from Nepal. The past few years, a lot of the drivers are from Uganda, at least here in Abu Dhabi, and the African population has grown tremendously. You know, we've got African exchange students at my university. You see this changing in a big way, and I'm just wondering, what's driving this, do you think? Is this, is this a natural thing given the just the interdependence you're describing, or is there a state led development? Why is Africa becoming such a big continent for the Emirates?

Mohammed Baharoon:

It's not only Africa. Asia is as well. I think the idea emerged very early when the UAE started talking about energy divers, sorry, economic diversification. And, we were preparing for the time after oil. So if there is no oil, what would you do? And the easy question or the natural question of what did we used to do? We used to trade. We used to trade with India, and we used to trade with Africa. So that's the natural way of doing business. And the post oil economy means that you expand on this, multiply it by ten or one hundred, and an increase on those routes.

So Africa is also a gateway to South America. In the same way, India is a gateway to the entire, you know, to China, to, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea, this new type of relationship with Korea has not been considered possible, you know, a couple of decades ago. We've looked at Singapore, but we looked at Singapore as a model of development. It was not a direct relationship, but today, the direct relationship between us and Korea is huge. And we have no borders, shareholders at all. We have a lot of water that is separating us, which could be hugely important. That will take you to the concept of the Indo Pacific and what it means to all of those countries. So, strategically, that is the way we're looking at. We started with the trade routes, but there is no such thing as just trade routes.

Because with trade, there is always, you know, security that comes with trade diplomacy and then its cultural exchange. And I think that is why Africa is important. But in the same way, that's why India is important.

Jonathan Fulton:

Mhmm. Yeah, you know, because we've talked several times over the years, I focus on China and the Middle East primarily. But the way that global politics is described so much these days it's always a binary. It's China or the US, you know, Pepsi or Coke. It feels like you've got two options. And I keep saying, you know, living in the Gulf, living in the Emirates where you see so much diversity, so many, so many people, especially from India, from South Asia, in the big roles they play here, you know, economically, administratively, people working at banks, people, you know, running, owning businesses.

You know, the Indian population here is a really important factor that I think doesn't really get recognized unless you're here seeing it firsthand, those economic and social ties that you're describing, I think, are pretty significant.

Mohammed Baharoon:

And you're absolutely right. And, I think at the risk of taking the off topic back to topic, because we're talking China as well. Part of the way Africa is looked at from Europe and the US is through that lens of China, getting a bigger foothold in Africa. And sometimes the discussion is that we want cooperation with this region to prevent China from having that type of effect. So that's again, it's the zero sum calculus. But what we see is that there's a huge room for cooperation between China, US, Europe, and there is far more room for others to come and enjoy if we want to stabilize Africa. Otherwise, it will always come back and it's I mean, people talk about rare earth minerals, and sometimes you talk about uranium, and sometimes you talk about oil and gas. And we've seen all of the different coups happening in Africa.

All of this is really a moment for people to question. What do we actually want from Africa? I think, a major area for that is why can't African nations have a very strong developed economy. They have all of these resources. It's also a very young continent. So the number of people, but also the number of young people. They're going to be a huge, you know, hugely important as, as a major driver for the labor force. We need just to help make it a smarter labor force by investing a little bit in education, connectivity and, also I mean, I'm talking about particularly internet connectivity, combined with remote type of education can create a lot of impact in those areas. We don't need to think of the old way of having an actual school with buses and books. You can deliver a lot more faster, more specific, concise type of education slash training to make the population very adaptable to requirements.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. Agreed. I mean, I would look a lot at population projections and think this would be really what you're describing. I agree completely. I think this would be the perfect time to get in early and enjoy that kind of early investor advantage because you can see places where there's going to be just tremendous, you know, potential for innovation for positive change, positive economic growth, and just especially when when you're looking at West Africa, there's going to be just, I remember reading a Howard French article in The Guardian a couple months ago, just talking about this massive urbanization that you see, from Sierra Leone to Cote D'ivoire, and how you're going to have these mega cities with, you know, tens of millions of people. I mean, I see that as a tremendous opportunity for us. If you go in and you're investing in that and nurturing it, it could be a really good, a good, time to get in early. One other point, though, when you're - you brought up China again, and, I have to come back to the geopolitics of it because that's my gig.

When we're talking about a lot of these Asian countries, especially those that have deep presences here in the Gulf, you know, we're talking about India, we're talking about Korea, we're talking about Japan. Of course they're all important trading partners with China. They've got pretty dense economic engagement with China. They also have pretty serious political problems with China. And there's a lot of, beneath the surface, I think a lot of analysis has kind of bought into this Asian miracle narrative of how, you know, Asia is nothing but economic growth and innovation and a very peaceful, stable, mega region. But beneath the surface, you've got a lot of tensions that are just beneath the surface or not even beneath the surface. How do countries in the Gulf that aren't directly engaged in that navigate it? I mean, you mentioned the Indo Pacific. That's not something you hear Gulf countries talk about much. You hear about, you know, cooperating with Asian countries and trade investment and SEPA's, but the Indo Pacific seems to be really a kind of hard politics expression of geopolitical tension. How do you keep that out of the region? How do you try to navigate that in a way that, you know, continues the prosperity without getting caught up in the more competitive side of it?

Mohammed Baharoon:

It's a difficult question because there is no one thing one country can do, to address this. But I think the major - if there is a contribution in this, from this area or from this region, would be proven that the de-escalation can be a method that can be utilized by others. And if you use the same method in the South China Sea, then you are going to reduce a lot of that type of tension potential for conflict. Taiwan is a different issue, but Taiwan has been resolved by the US. It was Kissinger who dealt with Taiwan, and this concept of the one China has been a principle that has stabilized things for a long time. And I was wondering what is the wisdom behind trying to change it right now. But again, that is one of those areas of de-escalation that can be seen. As far as differences between countries, we cannot do much about it.

But we can create or help create a safe space for interaction where they can interact with others without having to fight. And I think we've been doing this with Iran even though Iran occupies islands for the UAE. But the UAE has not ostracized Iran. It did not seek to exclude Iran. It created that safe space for conversation, for exchange, limited as it is. But that is a safe space

that helped not make things escalate hugely in the past years. And I think, again, this is an experiment that is really worth looking at. How could those countries with a border dispute, with a lot of security concerns, with an ideological, even religious type of differences, deal with each other and never slip into a huge conflict.

And I think that some of those lessons are applicable. They just need to have a will, both from, you know, countries here in the region and, countries in, I mean, the countries in those regions. And have a space for them to start talking about where can this lead us? Do we really want to go where that trajectory could take us or not? And I'm sure all of them agree that having some sort of a huge conflict in that area is not good for anyone. That's why it didn't happen until today, possibly. So what's a way of turning those walls into roads? And I think that's a major, major shift in thinking that could, allow things to settle down.

Jonathan Fulton:

Yeah. That's great. You know, Mohammed, just one last thing. We're running out of time, but a lot of the audience is in Washington. I was in Washington, earlier in the summer, and a lot of people were saying, like, they're trying to get their head around what's changing in the Gulf, what what does this mean for for the States, what can they be doing in the region to support or to, you know, just try to find a way to be kind of positive actors in this changing in this changing regional environment. So we'll give you the last chance to give them some advice.

Mohammed Baharoon:

I think the US is starting to think differently about it. In my view, the announcement of the economic corridor during the G20 is a huge example of how the thinking in the US is changing because it didn't put its foot down and say, look, guys, if Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Egypt, join BRICS, then you're out. They realized that they're not doing this against the US. They're trying to build new roads practically. And the US said, well, we can also build roads. And that's why the economic corridor is the - economic corridor, calling it economic, I think, is a reduction. It's a huge potential.

It's possibly something similar or even bigger than the Belt and Road Initiative. It can be diplomatic. It can be cultural. It can have knowledge. It would have energy, connectivity all across it. So, in that case, I think, at least to me, listening to president Biden thanking both Mohammed bin Salman Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed for their contribution, giving them credit for their ideas. He's playing the role of the facilitator, not the guy who's in command. This is a huge role of leadership that the US has left aside for a while.

Now it seems I'm not quite sure, but I'm hoping, it seems to be picking it up again, and this is something that would be hugely encouraged by everyone in the region. That is the type of leadership we want. We need the team builder, Not the one who divides the team into two. You're either on this side or that side. So, I'm hoping that this is a new trend, a new way of thinking in the US, and this is only as, you know, a symbol of of how. But, again, and as they say the proof is in the pudding. We would need de-escalation on issues like the Ukraine-Russia

war. We will need that economic corridor not to turn into something similar to I2U2, which had a lot of hopes, but no real action happened on that front. I think of this corridor as an expansion of the I2U2.

It's not only about those 4 countries. It is going to be much bigger. But we will need to see something more concrete happening. We will need leadership in that, not only, you know, opening it up to, private sector and saying, well, we created the pitch, go and play over there if you want to. I think there will need to be a little bit of formality. There will need to be a tournament, prizes, scheduling, media, all of the shebang, for that tournament to actually that pitch to turn into something really, important.

Jonathan Fulton:

Mohammed, that's great. Thank you so much for doing this. This has been really helpful. I really enjoyed this. I'm sure our listeners will as well.

Mohammed Baharoon:

Thank you, Jonathan, for the opportunity. It's always great to have a conversation with you.

Jonathan Fulton:

Absolutely. Thanks a lot, man. To our listeners, thanks for joining us. Follow us on social media and subscribe, rate, review, and all that great stuff. And we'll see you soon with another guest. Thank you very much.