

# MEETING EVALUATION

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## REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A VIEW FROM LEBANON

*A roundtable entitled “Regional Security in the Middle East: A View from Lebanon” was organized by ORSAM on October 11, 2017. Dr. Imad Risk, President of ISTICHARIA, delivered an introductory speech on the emerging security issues and the new power balance in the Middle East, proceeded with a Q&A session.*

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## REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A VIEW FROM LEBANON

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President of ISTICHARIA Dr. Imad Risk started by underlying the importance of recent developments in the Middle East especially after 2010. He touched upon the emergence of multiple security crisis and hotbeds of tension that spread throughout the region, which led to a sharp decline of security in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. He also underlined that the deterioration of the overall security situation in these countries caused the flow of terrorists into the region from all over the world.

Dr. Risk continued with the policies and strategies of regional countries towards these risks. According to him, competition among regional powers escalates, as they seek to manipulate sectarian and ethnic divisions and radicalism of societies. In addition, he continued, leading world powers pursue their immediate interests which destroyed the balance of power.



Dr. Imad Risk also emphasized that the root causes of international terrorism started in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Since then, according to him, the terrorist networks started to spread all around the region and their main financial sources include smuggling, taxes they collect from the population and business in the areas under their control.

Dr. Risk emphasized that one of the survival strategies of terrorists is to prevent the restoration of Libyan and Afghan states and they sabotage the ceasefire attempts between Damascus and the armed opposition. From his perspective, the establishment of low tension areas in Syria is an important step towards promoting the cessation of hostilities and facilitating the arrival of humanitarian assistance and protection of civilians. Through low tension areas, he added, a control mechanism was established to oversee the situation and to create cooperation between Syria, Turkey and Iran with the initiative of Russia. However, Dr. Risk warned that the risk of external interference and internal developments still exist. Therefore, he suggested that a continuous coordination between the parties and efforts for political solution are necessary to overcome the current problem.

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Moving onto other regions beyond the Middle East, Mr. Risk stated that Asia remains another target for ethnic and religious tensions and a joint action to combat these risks is necessary. Additionally, he also touched upon the growing threat in Africa as armed conflicts among radical terrorists continue.

Dr. Risk asserted that the issue of security necessitates a complex approach from individual level to state level. He argued that world historical experience shows that the concept of security has shifted to the information and communication space over the last several years. Therefore, he added, stability in security situation is a partnership between state army, judiciary and management of media and communication systems and technologies with other countries and states.

Dr. Imad Risk concluded his introductory remarks by raising certain questions on new regional security situation in the Middle East: How to develop the new national security of the regional system? What is the role of security structures? What is the role of armies in the information



battlefield? Who controls the information? Are the fronts of war still ‘visible’; or are they ‘invisible’? How can we define hybrid wars?

The roundtable proceeded with a Q&A session moderated by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şaban Kardeş, President of ORSAM. In this session, several diplomats, academicians, specialists and researches contributed to the discussion.

Upon the question on the de-escalation zones agreed in the Astana process and the Lebanese perspectives towards the current situation in Syria, Dr. Imad Risk stated that Astana process is a real success in negotiations to create de-escalation areas and it is an opportunity to reach a realistic solution. He added that Astana agreement provides a transition period to return to Geneva process because in the end there must be a political solution. Then, he continued, there is a need for at least two years to start Geneva process for a political solution and a real election in Syria.

Regarding the Lebanese perspectives towards the current situation in Syria, Dr. Risk commented on Hezbollah’s role in Syria. He stated that in few months, we will hear about ‘Syrian Hezbollah’, not ‘Lebanese Hezbollah’. He argued that Iranians are preparing a new organization which

will be named as Syrian Hezbollah and which will be different than Lebanese Hezbollah.

On the question of the future of the de-escalation zones and the territorial integrity of Syria and its implication for Lebanon, Dr. Risk stated that there is a lot of communication between Syrians and Lebanese in border area. He continued that after the latest operations, although the border area seems quiet, it is very questionable whether Lebanese government and army are ready for an unexpected crisis. For the effects of Syrian crisis to Lebanon, Mr. Risk emphasized the refugee problem and its burden on Lebanon. Specifically, on the question of territorial disintegration and changes in geography, Imad Risk asserted that the change of geography is impossible although Syria will never be like before, which means that war militias will be the future businessmen and politicians and will continue to hold certain level of power in their areas.

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Mr . Rabie Narsh, Chargé d' Affaires of Lebanese Embassy, also commented on Lebanese position in Syrian crisis. He clarified that the official position of the Lebanese government is disassociation policy since the beginning of the crisis. However, he stated that it is not secret that on the ground many Lebanese parties are involved in Syria, and the most obvious of which is Hezbollah; but there are also other groups along the Syrian opposition. According to him, the main impact of Syrian crisis on Lebanon is the refugees, which has economic, security and demographic aspects for Lebanese people. He also clarified that Lebanese government is against the disintegration of both Syria and Iraq.

Moving onto another question about Saudi-Qatari crisis, Dr. Imad Risk stated that although it has just started openly, the problems between these two countries has a history and therefore there is no way to return to the situation before the crisis.

Dr. Imad Risk concluded his comments by stating that although the Middle East is a region of crisis and therefore it attracts world-wide attention; analysts should be careful about the developments in Asia and specifically in Afghanistan.

ORSAM is an independent think-tank specializing on Middle Eastern affairs. ORSAM seeks to diversify sources of knowledge on the region and establish a channel of communication between the local experts and Turkish academic and policy circles. Toward that end, ORSAM facilitates the exchanges of officials, academics, strategists, journalists, businesspeople and members of civil society from the region with their Turkish counterparts. ORSAM conducts studies on the regional developments and disseminates their results to the policy and academic circles as well as the wider public through various publication outlets. ORSAM publications include books, reports, bulletins, newsletters, policy briefs, conference minutes and two journals *Ortadoęu Analiz* and *Ortadoęu Etütleri*.

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