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November 20, 2023 at 1 pm
AUC New Campus GAPP Executive Education Room
Event Report by Maha Muehlhaeusler

Event Title: "The Gaza War: Implications for the United States and Egypt"

Summary:

Director of CASAR Professor Mark W. Deets, also a current member of the History department of AUC specialist in African Studies acted as moderator for this Event. CASARs two guest panelists in this discussion were visiting scholar Professor David Dumke and Professor Karim Hagag. Dumke is the Executive Director of the Office of Global Perspectives & International Initiatives at the University of Central Florida (UCF). He teaches Middle East history, U.S. foreign policy, and American politics, and “has written extensively on these subjects.” He also is host and executive producer of WUCF-TV’s award-winning Global Perspectives (Public Broadcasting Service). Dumke spent the early years of his career in the United States Congress, and also has experience working with NGOs in the Middle East and North Africa. Panelist Karim Hagag is currently a Political Science professor at practice AUCs school of Global Affairs and Public Policy. Before his shift to academia, Hagag served for over 25 years as an Egyptian diplomat and has focused on “on US-Egyptian relations, Middle East regional security, arms control and non-proliferation, and Arab-Israeli diplomacy.” These two figures engaged in an important conversation surrounding the current events in Gaza, and discussed the Egyptian and American position, analyzing them in a global context and providing insights to the larger scene of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The conflict threatens the Biden Administration according to Dumke, and has changed United States politics. In Egypt, the conflict has been more humanitarian, and dealt with by preserving stability on the border as much as possible.

Report:

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David Dumke opened the discussion by shedding light on the American perspective. As a disclaimer, he stated he is not defending the Biden administration nor any other position, but simply providing context for the United States perspective. Up until now, Dumke stated that there are over 43,000 Palestinian casualties and 220 incidents in the West Bank, and that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been handed a "blank cheque." Dumke argues this conflict is a "global test for leadership in the United States" and "what is happening now will not strengthen America." Dumke assumes the problem will get worse until there is a ceasefire or defined end point. He then moved on to the impact of the events in Gaza and Palestine on American politics. As the media has shown, demonstrations have been happening world wide. 300,000 Americans stood in solidarity in DC, so obviously this has big implications for American politics. Furthermore, the conflict has already affected Biden's reelection next year. Only 40% of registered voters approve of Biden's standing. Also, voters aged 18-34, which make up 70% of Biden supporters, now changed their vote. There is a large Arab and Muslim American population, part of the reason why these numbers are changing. Biden has been in elected office for over 50 years, and while in "In 1972 the Arab American vote did not matter, now it does more than ever in overwhelming numbers." Dumke emphasized that out of all voters, only 33% supported Biden's Foreign Policy, which is a devastating amount for the administration. Dumke stated that "Biden cannot afford to work on this issue, he must get involved" with the conflict in hopes for his reelection. Another aspect making this conflict important is that it has "taken up all the oxygen" in the media, leaving no room for the Biden Administration but to act. Dumke also stresses that it is important to remember how the United States got into this position. Since 1973 the United States became "the central player on the international scale of Middle East Stability." It has worked hard to "minimize conflict and preserve oil flow." On the topic of two state solutions, Dumke states the United States did not put effort into it.

The next topic tackled by Dumke was "how to deal with terrorists." He stated that Israel is embarking on a campaign and slowly going towards a slippery slope. There needs to be a normalization process that needs to begin with American Politics. Dumke argues that the biggest mistake by the United States was giving Netanyahu a blank cheque and "believing he will be cognizant of American priorities" because Israel is entirely motivated by its own political self interest, and the United States will have to act soon.

Karim Hagag then began his discussion of the implications of the conflict, first and foremost being "challenging and difficult." He stated that it was obvious that this "round was different" and that Egypt had been involved in the conflict for decades, especially the last ten

years, negotiating ceasefires. This time is different according to Hagag because the conflict is prone to rapid escalation to on ground fighting, and potential regional escalation to Lebanon and Syria and the West bank as well. Hagag also addresses the humanitarian situation, and that the “serious challenge is the forced transfer of Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt” is “deliberate and intentional” and an attempt to depopulate Gaza into Egypt. The on ground reality is depopulating the North of the Gaza strip and overcrowding the South. A question after this conflict will be who is in charge of Gaza, as Israel will not allow Palestinian authority in Gaza, and Gaza might be uninhabitable for a few years after.

Karim discussed the arranged peace summit for ceasefire organized by Egypt right after the start of the conflict. However, he stated that due to intense divisions the diplomacy was not successful in creating a ceasefire. The Egyptian position is a very strong stand by the Egyptian president and others against the forced movement of Palestinians moving to Egypt, while also emphasizing the importance of getting humanitarian aid to the citizens of Gaza. Hagag stated that the “Egypt’s position is to sustain Palestinians on their land.” Furthermore, Hagag stressed the importance of how the conflict is framed. The “Israel-Hamas war gives a narrow perspective” he stated, as this was “is on the people of Palestine, a war on the idea and aspiration of a Palestinian state.” Hagag refers to Israel as the most “radical Government in history” by declaring war on the idea of a Palestinian state. Like Dumke, Hagag also provided the historical context for the conflict. In 2005 when Israel pulled out from Gaza, Israel made the claim that “there is no prospect for a Palestinian state.” In 2007, when Hamas took over Gaza, the Palestinian state became divided into Gaza and the West Bank. There has also been growing backlash against Netanyahu for entrenching Hamas in Gaza, which has allowed for the Israeli government to make claims that no unified state of Palestine exists. Hagag continues, stating that Egypt has had to be responsible for the humanitarian and security problems, and that this problem has been “offloaded onto Egypt.” There have been several proposals for Egypt to take charge of Gaza as well, which Egypt has acknowledged. Hagag states that “Egypt refuses to be implicated with another Israel attempt at a Nakba.” What Egypt will have to deal with are questions such as what happens after the war in Gaza? What reality will prevail? Who governs Gaza? Who will reconstruct Gaza?

David Dumke agreed with Karim Hagag, again stressing that this round IS different. “The time is different, the stakes are higher, the context is different, and it is a time when American power is being questioned globally.” Dumke also states that this “is a test” and that the issue is taken up more by democrats than republicans, and politics are changing on the grounds of human rights considerations. Both panelists agreed that the United States moral authority may be damaged by United States politics, and both raised questions about the future of the conflict.

The Panel was then open to questions by audience members. One member asked about the results of the summit, and the solidarity in the Middle East region was diminishing. Hagag answered by explaining how it was an attempt to call for a ceasefire, but could not because of divisions. What it does show is that Egypt is taking initiative. Another question was about the logistics of negotiating with Hamas, which Hagag also answered. He stated that “It’s always

difficult to negotiate with Hamas, it's about how the conflict is framed, most have agreed with the Israeli perspective of destroying Hamas, with no future at the negotiating table. Hamas is the main obstacle to a ceasefire, if Hamas is still there why should we ceasefire?" A question for Dumke was why has the United States not yet called for a ceasefire, which Dumke responded that by withholding a ceasefire there is "a cover to not proceed with negotiations and a cover face to continue fighting."

To conclude the event, Karim Hagag and David Dumke offered some concluding statements. He stated this is a "game changing conflict" with dynamics that "should engage all of us" and that "you cannot destroy an idea." Dumke added that "The United States has made itself a major player in the region, Biden himself has political motivation to do the right thing to serve America and his own political interest."