



**Statement of the
Federal Minister of Defence of Germany
Dr. Ursula von der Leyen**

IISS Manama-Dialog

**3rd Plenary Session
„Conflict and Diplomacy
in the Middle East“**

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10 minutes

Check against delivery!

Royal Highnesses,
Excellences,
dear John!

John, what an honour to celebrate the 60th birthday of IISS here. And many thanks to our host Bahrain. I commend you for this outstanding conference. It is a great pleasure to join my colleagues Elisabetta Trent and His Excellency on the panel. I am delighted to be speaking at the Manama Dialogue again after I last did so in 2016. I spoke about our common concern, as e.g. terror attacks in our capitals or illegal human trafficking.

Today, two years later we still talk about the worries we have given the crises, conflicts and wars in the region, but we also see opportunities that the people in the region are eager to seize. That brings me straight to the topic of our panel:

Let me start by giving you my German and European perspective on the conflicts: Recent years have taught us, that the conflict zone of the Middle East is neither isolated nor detached. It is situated in the centre of an arc of crisis, stretching from the Sahel and North Africa all the way to the Gulf. Many of the conflicts are connected and interlinked:

- Human traffickers are running their gruesome business in the Mediterranean, the sea has become a graveyard for tens of thousands of people.
- Political transition in Libya is very much at risk.
As a result of the chaos there,
the region has been swamped with weapons.
- The people in Yemen are suffering a humanitarian crisis of catastrophic dimensions. And I want to refer to the outstanding remarks of Secretary Mattis:
It's time for diplomacy now!

It is high time now, after years of civil war, after suffering and misery, people demand peace and a life free from fear of war and oppression.

And nothing indicates that conflicting interests could be brought to success through the ongoing use of force. Quite the contrary: There are many reasons to believe, that diplomatic solutions can be found - provided that all voices are heard and that negotiations are not held about them but with them.

This can work if we all fully support the UN approaches. When I say “all”, I mean the parties to the conflicts, the countries in the regions, and of course, also us neighbours.

The war in Syria has reduced the country to rubble; the noise of battle is dying down. Yet, it will cost billions and billions to rebuild this country. I do not see Assad and his allies able to master this huge investment. The help of the international community is crucial. However, reconstruction to the profit of the dictatorship of Assad is not conceivable. To be very clear: There will be only investment into Syria if there is a satisfying political process that includes all parties. There is no other way than engaging in the peace talks of the United Nations. In this crucial phase, all those who really care about the people in Syria should pull their full weight to support the Geneva process. This is the reason why today Chancellor Merkel, President Macron, President Putin are meeting at the invitation of President Erdogan. It is about revitalizing the Geneva process in line with UN Security Resolution 2245. In this respect over the past years, Staffan de Mistura’s efforts have been invaluable and have paved the way. Let me take this opportunity to thank him for his work.

In Iraq, too, it is all about stabilisation and reconstruction now. But the preconditions are different. Together with the Iraqi government and the people of Iraq, an international coalition of more than 70 countries fought and defeated DAESH. And now together we have the chance to rebuild and reconcile the country.

We all know that – winning peace requires

- security,
- education,
- economic development,
- and a broad investment

all packaged together in a political plan.

I commend the new government. You can count on Germany in achieving a fair internal balance that is acceptable to the people of Iraq. Germany has already engaged with 1.5 bill € and especially supported the Peshmerga in their fight against DAESH. And we will expand our efforts: We just decided to continue our capacity

building of the Iraqi Security Forces. And – most importantly – we will continue our economic cooperation and offer investments focussing mainly on infrastructure.

At the same time, we are engaged in close and successful cooperation with key partners in the region, such as our Jordanian friends – who carry a huge burden for the security in the region and beyond. I want to express my condolences concerning the death of so many school children. We stand at your side.

We also engage because we are convinced of the immense opportunities of this region,

- the creativity of a bright generation of young people,
- empowerment of women – at least half of the population –,
- your cultural richness,
- economic growth,
- diversification,
- and many opportunities for common trade and investment.

I am convinced: Now is the time to fully concentrate on political solutions and peace processes. And these processes have to be driven by the countries of the region.

And finally: People all over the region expect a good balance between security and freedom. They demand respect for human rights and the dignity of each human being.

Therefore, concerning the killing of Jamal Khashoggi: the circumstances must be fully investigated and brought to light, regardless of considerable political consequences.

It is a question of human dignity, but also a question of credibility and an opportunity for trust and transparency. These values are the pillars a common future has to be built upon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have come here to Bahrain not just as a European, but as your European neighbour – and as neighbours, we share each other's problems, and we are ready to find solutions together.

Thank you for your attention.