

The logo for the Bay of Bengal Conversation 2023. It features a blue geometric shape on the left, resembling a stylized map of the Bay of Bengal or a network of nodes. To its right, the text "Bay of Bengal" is in a dark grey serif font. Below that, "Conversation" is in a blue sans-serif font, and "2023" is in a dark grey sans-serif font. At the bottom, the phrase "Rising Tides" is written in a brown, cursive script font.

Bay of Bengal Conversation 2023 *Rising Tides*

Studio Session: “Geopolitical Realism, Great powers, and the Clash of Civilizations in the Indo Pacific”

Speakers

Amena Mohsin, Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Dominique Rakotozafy, Former Minister of Defense, Madagascar

Marc Saxer, Head of the Office for Regional Cooperation in Asia Pacific, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Germany

Felix Kolbitz, Resident Representative, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bangladesh (Moderator)

Felix Kolbitz, “Good morning, everyone. I hope, you can hear me. And also, a warm welcome from my side to our panel on the geopolitical realism and great powers in the Indo-Pacific. And I would also like to say, thank you to the Center for Governance Studies and Zillur Rahman for organizing this conference and hosting us here today. We just agreed before that I will not give a major introduction to political realism and the theoretical background of what's being discussed but that we rather use the short amount of time that we are having here to dive right into the topic. I think most of you are familiar with political realism. So, you will only get examples of political realism today in the discussion rather than getting a theoretical background. Because we agreed that this is not a university class but rather a conference to debate the current political events and happenings in this region. I would like to start with a first round of input from my three panelists. You do get a lot of information about them on the website of the Bay of Bengal Conversations. So, with me today, Mr. Marc Saxer, the head of the regional cooperation office and geopolitics program based in Bangkok; also, Dominique Rakotozafy, former defense minister of Madagascar, retired general; and also, with me, Professor Amena Mohsin, professor for international relations, here at Dhaka University, and I have to admit also a very long and trusted partner for Fong here in Bangladesh. So, let me start with a first question to Marc, and maybe you could just elaborate a little bit on what the current geopolitical trends and developments are. you see globally and especially also here in the Indo-Pacific, and what is your outlook for the coming years?”

Marc Saxer, “Okay, is this working?” “Yes.” “Yeah. Okay, sorry. Well, good morning! Thank you very much for having me. Thank you very much for CGS. It's my second time in the Bay of Bengal. I'm really excited to be back here and engage with conversation for you. I promise to be short. So, I'm just going to give you a couple of markers of what I think. What're we looking at? I would say that we are rapidly approaching a historical juncture. The unipolar moment is over, and

we are going to go into a different situation going forward. I think if you would have asked a person in 1947 to describe what will happen after 1948, the Western Berlin blockade, and so for the official start of the Cold War, it would have been out of their imagination of what happened. Similar: probably in 1988, no one really saw what was coming in 1989 when the wall in Berlin fell. So, I think we are in a similar historical situation—a juncture in front of us—and we cannot see very far ahead. If this is going to be the end of, we have called the PAX Americana. Then, we will see the return of conflict, obviously, in Ukraine, which is going to go on for a while. We've seen what's been going on between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Last night, I think we see what is going to happen in Israel in the Middle East. And Serbia and Kosovo are also staring at each other. So, there are a lot of uncertain events going to happen. In this region, it is going to be a year of elections. Obviously, we're all looking at the big one in the United States, which would have quite some significance for what is going to unfold in front of us. But there are also going to be elections in Taiwan, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh. And that will give us a completely different playing field, so to say. So, strategic uncertainty means that all of us have to make very long-lasting decisions when it comes to defense, energy, alliances, and economic development. But we really cannot see very much ahead. And, that's why I think, for me to start us off this morning, I would like to speculate a little bit and give us four scenarios that I can see unfolding in the next, let's say, 10 to 15 years. The first scenario is a great power hot war, most likely between the United States and China, and if that is going to happen, it will be about Taiwan and the Strait of Malacca. This is a low-probability, extremely high stakes scenario. We need to have it on our thinking board, so to say, because not only is this the first time that we have two nuclear armed superpowers going at each other with a very high potential of escalation into a regional war, If you look at where the American bases are located in the Pacific, you will find it worrying that Japan

and the Philippines, probably South Korea, and others will be sucked into that conflict immediately. So, you're going to have a regional war with an escalation potential upwards. If you only think about the geo-economic disruptions of taking all the supply lines between Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan out of the world economy, you see that is going to be a major calamity. The second scenario that I see, which I think is more likely but and less waring but still quite waring, is a cold war. A different one from the one that we had before. Because China is different from the old Soviet Union is either if you count it as the biggest or the second biggest economy of the world, deeply integrated into the global supply chains. So, this scenario is not going to play out or the old cold war where we count tanks and missiles, but it's going to play out in the theater of tech and economics. Tech, we have basically, if you look at these little things here since the 1970s, an integrated universal technology system. It doesn't matter where you produce something or what software you use; it's compatible on the entire global level. So, technological bifurcation would mean that we have two at least two technological worlds which are no longer incompatible. We see that countries will have to pay a political entrance fees to markets. Something that we already see happening in the US and in China. Investments comes of political strings attached, so do bailouts from financial institutions. So, a cold war on the field of tech and economics drives bipolarity by making countries choose one side or the other, one investment or the other, one infrastructure of connectivity or the other, one technology world or the other. No one wants to do that, and I'm really looking very much forward to the conversation that we're going to have later. Because I do know from my travels in Asia that everyone tries to avoid taking sides. But I think to have the eye and the ball, the prime minister of Singapore said the other day no one wants to take sides, but the structural trends may force us to do so against our best interests. That's the Cold War scenario. There is, to more slightly more uplifting, I would say there is, of course, the

possibility of strategic management, the management of strategic competition. I do not really see the strategic competition between the US and China easing. It's going to be there for us for at least one generation. But you can try to manage it either in a more ad hoc back-room kind of way or in a more institutional kind of way. That would be the fourth scenario, some sort of Deatoned. Strategic management would probably look a lot like the concert of Europe in the 19th century. Great powers do claim zones of exclusive influence, and statesmen will come back together. The same that Nixon and Mao Tse Tung came together in order to see how not to step on each other's foot. This is how in the Cold War. You know, the East Berlin uprisings, Budapest, Prague, and the Cuban missile crisis was managed. I don't step on my foot, you don't step on my foot, and we try to keep out of each other's zones of exclusive influence. The problem with this is obviously that collaboration and cooperation to tackle the global challenges to mankind will be very difficult. Think about pandemics, think about climate change. You will not going to have much left of the multilateral institutions. It's a doggy-dog world. But at least peaceful coexistence may be achievable, and last but not least, because that is my political tradition where I hail from. I see the possibility of a Deatoned, unfortunately not a very high possibility, but one must hope. So, Deaton means we save whatever we can save of the multilateral architecture and get into a 1970s, 1980s, hell sinky nuclear proliferation disarmament limited cooperation between the blocks where some of the challenges that all of us face can be tackled together within a more or less functional multilateral framework. Probably the United States that has to be adapted obviously to the rise of the global south, but at least we can get some stuff done. So, that's what I see highly speculative. I don't even see exactly what's more probable than the other. But it's quite four different worlds that are laying ahead of us. And, like I said, this is not some distant future. This is 2025 going forward—

not a long time, actually, and we have to think about these possibilities now. Because some very far-reaching decisions will have to be made.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much, and I would like to hand it over to Professor Amena now and would like to ask her first of all, what are your thoughts on Marc scenarios, and then also, how do you describe or what is the Bangladesh perspective and way of navigating in the current challenges that Marc outlined? Thank you.”

Amena Mohsin, “Thank you, Felix, and thank you, Marc. I think I'm audible enough to the audience, okay. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Marc, for laying out four scenarios. I think you know when you talk about the end of the cold of the unipolar system. I think, this is something we had been witnessing for quite a long time, and a different kind of world order is emerging that is also there, and the voices from the South. One could hear it loud and clear, and even you know within when I say voices from the South. Though the voices are differentiated but one could find some common threats there. Because you know like the back in the early '90s, one could one started talking about human security issues, and from there, you know like one could see the emergence of what you said. What you talked about the scenario 2, the rise of the emergence of a you know new kind of cold war which is different from the US and Soviet Union. Because obviously, with the collapse of the Soviet Union or breakdown of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the republics, a different kind of a world we did witness. But China had been there, you know, always, and when we say that a different kind, you know, a new cold war between China and the US. This is a very different kind of cold war because, at the same you know, one can see divergences as well as convergences, and one does see, the you know like divergences between China as well as India. But at the same time, one also has to you know has to take into

cognizance that you know China and India; they look upon they look at themselves as you know, like belonging to the to the oldest civilizations. When the Indian foreign minister says that we are not anti-western, we are non-western. I think he's making a very candid statement that you know, like how India is trying to differentiate itself? I wouldn't say distant, but I would say that, you know like draw the lines between the west and the not the south, you know, south but like yes, India on its own is trying to claim on autonomy for itself. So, I would say that along with China, India would also be a major actor and a factor in this new scenario. This I see the probability of your scenario two, as well as I also see for you know like countries like us you know. If I talk about South Asia and Bangladesh, we would, I mean the Datant—the number four scenario that you were talking about. Because, this is something—I mean, this is where Bangladesh would be navigating. This is a scenario that I see for Bangladesh. You know, we're moving to trying to play a role where, what we one can call it strategic distancing, one can call it strategic connectivity. Because, for countries like Bangladesh, there are real issues, like, on the one hand, we have done very well on social indicators—social development indicators and economic development indicators. I'm very much aware and conscious of the limitations and limits of these indicators as well, and I'm also aware of the governance issues involved. Despite those, I would say that, Bangladesh has done remarkably well, and Bangladesh is the second largest economy in South Asia. I mean, one and also one has to realize the kind of challenges that Bangladesh would be facing as Bangladesh graduates into a middle-income country which is not far away. The challenges are there, but at the same time, I pin my hope on the resilience, or, you know, of the people in Bangladesh. But for us, it is very important that we keep this strategic connectivity, and we'll keep, Bangladesh will keep its options open where foreign policy is concerned, and Bangladesh will go for multilateral engagement. I think, this is one option. I cannot speak for the

other countries of South Asia because, South Asia is after all is not a monolithic group, one has to understand that, and this is one of the least integrated regions in the world. That is also a fact. But despite that, you know, we have many commonalities, and one can see that the voice of the global south is emerging, and I think this voice is going to become louder, and there I pin my hope for Datant. Because, it's not only that you know that this new cold war that you are talking about is based on tech and economics. I mean, I would see, I would say argue that there would be more interdependence and connectivity. Because after all, it's a very different kind of world, and with technology, you have more information, and if you have more information, you have more power also and the kind of you know, like war frontiers, have also changed. So, it's not that one would have only hot wars of the kind that we talked about during the classical cold war period, if I may call it. But it's like with extremism and all kinds of forces emerging, so people have to live. I think powers from the north also would have to factor that in that these voices from the south have to be and need to be factored in, for, otherwise, you know like the survivability of their own power situation might also be at stake. I'll just stop here for the moment. Thank you.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much, Amena, and I think having now one perspective from South Asia. I would also now like to come to Dominique, who will present us with a very different perspective from Madagascar. With a similar question to you, what are your reflections and thoughts on mark scenarios as well as on how does Madagascar steers in the current situation?”

Dominique Rakotozafy, “Okay, thank you, Felix. Good morning, everyone. First of all, I'd like to thank the CGS for inviting me for this Bay of Bengal conversation. This is the first time I'm here, and at the very beginning, I'd like to tell you that I'm not a real English speaker because my country is a former French colony. So, I already apologize if there is something that you may not

understand my intervention. So, I'm from Madagascar, for those who might not know my country. It's a big island in the south-western Indian Ocean off the coast of South Africa, the third-biggest island in the world, with about 28 million people. Because of its location, Madagascar then is almost a bridge between Africa and Asia, and its part member of the African Union and the AORA International Association. From a point of view, I agree with some of the points of Marc's scenario. But what they see is now, apart from the decline of meteorism. There is the rise of the middle powers, which coincidentally are most of them ancient empires, that is, ancient civilizations. And, if I take some examples, for example, China with the Han Dynasty, Turkey of the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and Iran with Persian, I think this plays a role in the architecture of the current strategic situation in the world. For that, because of that they use the main leads of power *Confucius* Institute, Institut de France for the French-American cultural center for languages and culture, and then also the Germans with their centers. And in the meantime, there are a lot of summits that were organized recently. USA-Africa, China-Africa, Japan-Africa, and Turkey-Africa—those play a big role. Then, they're not free, even though people like to invite African countries to attend those summits. For Madagascar, I see China, which is interested in mining and infrastructure construction; Russia, with mining chroma and defense sales and defense cooperation; Turkey, which is spreading religion and defense sales, also France, which is a former colonizer of Madagascar and obviously has its own interests there; India, is present with agriculture and maritime security; and to give me an example of the influence now in Madagascar is the role that Russia played during the 2013 presidential elections. Russia financed eight candidates during presidential elections back in 2013 to have access to mining chroma mainly and to have access to defense cells. And, now, next week, we'll start the campaign. The presidential campaign will start for the next month's presidential elections, and all of these great and middle powers are playing

their roles in trying to channel their will for to protect their own interests. One another example is also especially for African states. during the at the beginning of the war on Ukraine, there was a vote at the UN General Assembly to ask whether you are with Russia or the others. And, that was really a problem because when our country wanted to be neutral, we have been dependent to the aid of the IMF and World Bank since the early 1980s, and then there was a difficult choice to make, and this ended anyway to the resignation of our ministry of foreign affairs, who has casted a vote against. I think, he voted for Russia, and he was dismissed. That plays a very important role in the strategic environment in Madagascar. Let me also remind you that there are territorial disputes over maritime exclusive economic zones, not only EES but real territorial disputes. Because in that area, Madagascar has territorial disputes with France since the 1960s over five islands in the Mozambique Canal. Comoros archipelago has a territorial dispute with France since 1975 with Mayotte. Excuse me! *Mauritius has had a* had a territorial dispute with the British since 1968 over the archipelago of Chagos, where the military base of Garcia is located. So, all of those have an impact in the strategic situation in the area where my country is located. So, what I see in the near future is well. I don't think there is an there will be an all-out war between the United States and China because it's not in their interests. This would be a mutual destruction by great nuclear powers; rather, they will go through proxy wars, and in the meantime, military powers will play their roles, especially in the supply chain of military equipment or even, I mean, economic interests like food supply or the other. To take just an example of the wheat supply of wheat to Africa from Ukraine, that's an issue. So, I think that we should be worry of this proxy war like what it is ongoing in Sudan—an example of a proxy war. And I think that the Indo-Pacific area are not left. I mean saved from this proxy war if we are not cautious about this evolution of this strategic environment, and I stop there. Thank you!"

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much. I think there's been quite some insight and a few disagreements, also. So, maybe I would like to hand it back to Marc. To first of all react to the two statements or perspectives from Bangladesh and Madagascar, but also to include his perspective on what role the EU plays? I mean, we had a very recent visit by Emmanuel Macron, also here to Bangladesh, and I think also the topic of colonialism was mentioned by Dominique. So, I think maybe you could also reflect a bit on those, and maybe as a yeah, maybe, that's have some more questions later on.”

Marc Saxer, “Not so many disagreements, actually; I pretty much agree with all your points. I very much see that there is a shift in the global balance of power, a rise of some of the powers of the global south. I totally subscribe to your point that the middle powers are going to play a role. I also believe, and I hope, that the hot war scenario is not the most likely one. I wouldn't completely dismiss it. Maybe that's the German shock over Ukraine, which we also thought was impossible, and it still happened. So, in that sense, I think we agree. But I think we need to continue to speculate a little bit because, like I said, we are living in the circumstance of strategic uncertainty. So, the rise of the global south, and how is that next world order going to look like in a more realist sense, right? So, there is a huge debate right now. Everyone's making good arguments, some better than others over. Is the next world order going to be unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar, right? And I think the unipolar debate is more or less entirely centered in the United States. I haven't heard anyone making that argument outside of the Washington Belt. But the idea what is being brought forward is obviously that the United States and certain areas are going to be so much more powerful that

even the number two, that you can still consider this a unipolar world. I do not subscribe to this point of view. But bipolarity, multipolarity debate is way more interesting. I think that, obviously, we have more centers of power than we had before. You mentioned a few; maybe it makes sense to speaking on a panel on transformative realism to also be honest enough to say that this is not a tide that that's going to live all the boats equally all right. There are huge differences. There is a certain point why it's useful to talk about the global south. But you very easily reach the limits of that concept because it is such a heterogeneous world that we're looking at two thirds of humankind. So, there are without any doubt powerful regional powers emerging. We do see Brazil in South America. We see Nigeria and South Africa on the African continent. We see Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia in the in the Middle-East and obviously well India is a particular country, but Indonesia I would count in the Indo-Pacific. There's a couple of middle powers that still play a large role: Japan and Australia obviously being in kind. So, in that sense, the world has become more multipolar, but is it a multipolar world? I think it is a different question. There are some powers that have continental size but huge problems. Russia being one of them, I think, probably that's not going to be a consensus here but I count Russia as a declining power, not a rising power. India, which has so many internal contradictions that it's not entirely clear to see the trajectory, they are rising. But are they rising to the same level of the United States and China? I'm not so sure about that, and we have the European Union, which is probably in the direst spot that is has been in the last 75 years. Many problems; if you're interested in that, I can go deeper into this. So, it's not entirely clear how those three bigger ones are going to play out. So, I think, it would make a lot of sense to talk about an asymmetric multipolarity. Some powers being bigger than others, and some are more regionally influential. So, you cannot do any politics in the Middle East without the three big ones there. But do they have a global reach much more limited right? There are,

however, also arguments from made for a new kind of bipolarity. I do not believe to the same degree as the old cold war between East and West Soviet Union and the United States. I do not believe that the United States, going forward in 2024, and China will be as overpowering as the two superpowers of the last cold war. They are maybe in a military sense, but are not economically and technologically, and I also do not yet see this kind of ideological binaries that we have in the last cold war. It's going to be about ideology and civilization, absolutely. But it's not going to be this black and white and I do not believe that this whole democracy versus autocracy narrative is going to hold. I think, this was a strategic mistake, and I think it will be pulled. But why then bipolarity of sense? I think, it has a lot to do what I mentioned earlier with the structural drivers that we have to watch. I think, speaking from a German and European point of view, there's always been some sort of a you know say that we also have within the transatlantic community over the Big Brother on the other side of the pond, so to say. So, our voices are being heard to a certain degree, but not when it comes to the absolute hardcore interests, right? And I think if you would ask our friends from Korea and the Netherlands how the "Chip 4 Alliance" was formed, right? Where basically some of the most advanced semiconductor and ship industries of the world had to decouple from the Chinese market. Do you then see that, when it comes to the inner core of the interest, there will be such enormous pressure that you will have to take sides? If you would ask the friends from Pakistan how the latest bailout played out, right? And who provided that, and what that actually mean with the geopolitical strings attached? Is this a very similar situation? So, overpowering in the sense that you know there's this pole, there's that pole, and I'm not seeing that. But I think there are tendencies towards bipolarity that are very hard to resist, and I think that is the strategic space that you both referred to. I have not spoken to anyone in this region of the Indo-Pacific that voluntarily would choose sides, and it would be actually a silly thing to do. Because

the opportunity costs are enormous. Right? Yes, I'm coming to that, but is it possible? That is the question.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much! I think there is again lots of food for thought for everyone. But I would like you, Amena, to maybe elaborate on what would be if we look at these very heterogenic countries around the Indo-Pacific. What would be some recommendations? You would say, what did Bangladesh do well? What could other countries learn from Bangladesh to actually steer in these scenarios?”

Amena Mohsin, “Recommendations I don't know if I'm the right person to recommend over here, you know, given that I see some of my, you know, like esteemed colleagues who served in the foreign service Bangladesh Foreign Service sitting here. But you know, like I think, multilateral, when you know from our location or position in Bangladesh, we would we look forward towards a multipolar world. We recognize that it's it is going to be a world of asymmetries. But Bangladesh I do not foresee Bangladesh taking sides. I mean, given the geo-economics and geopolitics of Bangladesh, I mean people might there are might disagree with me. But I do not see that as a as a very realistic option for Bangladesh. I would say, our strategic options are, we know, because our foreign policy right from the beginning had been, you know, none alignment has become much of a cliché now. But we have tried to like maintain strategic distances. Or, as I pointed out, one can call it strategic distancing, one can call it strategic connectivity. And I do agree with you about the proxy wars. The one would see the rise of proxy wars and the cost attached to it you know, the sanctions and the counter section sanctions that we have saying. But that is something I think, from our perspective that is very unfortunate because this is a cost country like Bangladesh, and the people of Bangladesh are paying for a war, in which they are no way involved, and I think this is

something that the west also has to take into cognizance. They also have to take into cognizance the security concerns that the human security concerns of countries like ours that what and you know we have faced the pandemic; climate change is there. We already say that the climate has been changed and now we are being asked to go for zero emissions. But at the same time, the global north or the west is not taking the responsibility for it. So, these are factors, I think, this is these are things you know where the voices of if I may say of the small people, these are becoming louder. That's why I said that when I said that yes, asymmetries are going to be there, the digital divides are going to be there, the architecture of the world is going to be very different, but these voices are going to be become louder, and because the nature of conflicts and the nature of wars, these have changed, and wars are being fought in different frontiers, and we have seen that. So, it's not that only the you know like the earlier cold war period when one hinged on the military power is no longer like that. We have seen how deterrence has worked and I don't think that is a probable scenario either which the United States or Russia or for that matter in South Asia also we have two nuclear powers. This is not a probable scenario that I do not look, I do not foresee that. That's why I said that you know I do not agree with the scenario 1, but I would go for scenario 2 and scenario 4. The four scenarios that you chocked out the other the trajectories. So, I would say that Bangladesh would continue to play, you know, like multilateralism engagement at multilateral levels and, you know, like push for the agendas on human security climate change definitely is there. Health economics, geopolitics, and geo-economics are important factors. But I also at this I mean since this is a Bay of Bengal conversation, so the voices of the people, which are differentiated again, I'm saying have to be have to reach the you know like the west and I also see the Europe taking its own position, you know, distancing itself from the United States. So, this is something I think, this if I don't know how to call it whether distancing or strategic distancing, but

these are factors that are going to be there, and I agree with you that it's going to be a world of uncertainties. But then international relations have never been about certainties, it was always we always say that unpredictability is the only predictable thing in international politics. So, we never for saw that this kind of a would be facing this kind of situation. But one thing is for sure: China, the rise of China is there, and a different kind of world we are foreseeing. I'll stop here, Felix. I could see your you getting impatient.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Yes, because I would also like to open the floor for the audience at some point. But before I do that, I would like to give Dominique one more chance to maybe if you have anything to add to the point that Amena and Marc just made on especially what Amena just said about climate change and human security in the region. What is Madagascar's perspective on that?”

Dominique Rakotozafy, “Okay, thank you. Actually, I'd like to add something about because talking about human security. It's human at the center of the of the issue. When we talk about the Indo-Pacific area, it's about two oceans: the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, whereas we are talking about something happening on the land. What I mean is for me from my point of view, we should look more in depth at what is the role of AORA in the Indian Ocean because we're talking about multipolarity. But AORA is just, I don't know, I might be wrong, but it's hollow from the point of view of Madagascar; we don't see what can be done there. If we govern better the ocean, climatic change would be reduced, and there will be less turmoil inside the countries. And we should also talk into account the BRICKS expansion by the inclusion of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other powers. Because this would change, whether we like it or not, the strategic environment in the near future, not only economically but also in the security in the region. If you look at the bases in the Indian Ocean, for example, there are military bases all over from the United States, China

and India are starting to do so; and how about the countries who are along the ocean? Are they just there to watch so? I think if you think more in depth about the AORA role in having peace in this region, I think it would be a good idea. Thank you.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much, and I hope that all of that this discussion that these ideas and scenarios gave you some food for thought and I also hope that you do have some questions. So, I would like to open the floor, and there's a microphone in the corner. So, I would like you to get up and move to the microphone, briefly introduce yourself, and then ask your questions. Ali Riaz, I think there's the first one. Anyone else? Okay, let's start with you.”

Question One, “Okay, thank you. My name is Ali Riaz. I teach at Elena Strait University in the United Straits. First of all, Marc, thank you for an excellent. I hope you have written the paper you haven't; please do so. So that we can benefit out of it. It is a fascinating one. However, there are these issues that you have brought up that I would like to hear more from you. You started talking about the elections that are coming up in the region. My point here is that whether the domestic politics will determine the direction or the externality will determine the direction of the election? For two reasons, recent examples give us some indication whatsoever, and however you want to interpret the Maldives election, it is a case in point, same with Pakistan situation. You know that what has happened in this case. So, the dynamics of international relations that you are talking the four scenarios, how is that going to play out domestically? Because, at the end of the day, despite the fact that we tend to make a separation between international relations and the domestic politics, I for one don't think that is actually separable. It is inseparable in the many instances, and this is a very interesting situation. So, that is my question. The second thing I would be try I will try to be very brief. The second issue is with respect to the political price that you are talking about, right?

There would be a political price to be paid into getting into the club. However, you put it, club, alliance, or however you put it. You know, given the technology and the supply chain work and others, the political price that you are talking and precisely the alliance building that we would like to see. What would be the criteria? You have said this whole notion of the democracy versus autocracy is not going to play out. You know, even if we take it at the face phase value, there has to be a certain bottom line of this alliance. Is it the economy, or is it the region? Is it something else that would actually be the driving force or the determining element in in case of this alliance building? And what is the political price? Because these alignments, you know, especially with respect to what you are describing as multipolarity. My last point with respect to it's not a semantic. I think it's better which you have mentioned about asymmetrical one. Should we actually call it multipolar or multiplayer? Because polarity seems to be attracting other people. What is emerging is a multiplayer, and very much what you described as a metal power are more or less regional one with global ambition in some cases. India, for example, which I don't think would in the next 5 to 10 years, is not going to be a global player. They will pretend to be a global player. But in this multiplayer situation, how does that work out, you know? Thank you, and again, I would love to read the paper that you are either have written or is going to write, at least for our sake.”

Question Two, “Thank you. My name is ALM Fazlur Rahman. I'm a retired Major General of the Bangladesh Army. My question is: what is the future of Ukraine war? Will there be the use of nuclear weapons? This is one. The second question is the quart is formed in this region. The tension is also rising, and we are seeing tension between China and the USA regarding the Taiwan and Chinese in cross into the South China Sea and also the worldwide by their prisons. Can we expect

a naval warfare in the South China Sea? To my calculations that China cannot withstand the combined naval power of USA, India, Australia, and Japan. Thank you.”

Question Three, “Thank you very much. Yes, please, one more question. Thank you, Felix. I'm Kori Singh, former director, South Asia Studies Center, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. I would like to just add one point about the clash of civilizations. When Huntington gave the theory of clash of civilizations for sustaining American agrarian unilateralism, multiple responses came from around the world, including the United Nations. So, what is the role of small straits in the Indo-Pacific? So, you see, the once Portuguese proposed to hold an academic event on celebrating 500 years of Portuguese rule over Asia. They planned to hold it in India but had some problems. Then, ultimately, they proposed to hold it in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan scholars thought that it is just to glorify the Portuguese rule. Portugal is also a small Strait. So, the Sri Lankan scholar, one of my friends at that point of time he was president of Royal Asiatic Society in Columbo. He came up with an appropriate response brought up a volume 16th-century clash of civilizations—Portuguese rule over Sri Lanka. So, the small Straits they are thinking in a different direction. They are thinking more in convergence and dialogue of civilizations instead of clash of civilizations. So, why not we call the convergence of civilizations? Why should have a negative thing the great powers and geopolitics? It always believes in some kind of conflict, not in convergence. Thank you very much.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much. Before I. No. I would like to come back to the panel first and then. So, I think the first round of questions was directed to Marc. The second and third rounds of questions were not directed to anyone specifically. So, I think I can easily distribute them among the three of you. So, Marc, maybe, would you like to go first with the first set of questions?”

Marc Saxer, “Well, Ali is such a fantastic professional that he masters the art of asking a question and making excellent points at the same time. So, I don't have to comment on all of that. I think, you're quite right. Just maybe a few snippets of the election stuff, I think; obviously, there are two that we need to think through. Of course! the US being the most interesting one, I think anyone would be a fool to dismiss the possibility of a second Trump presidency, and that would have enormous strategic implications for all of the scenarios, how they are going to play out, and the future course of the United States. That is one to watch; of course, everybody knows that. Also, would say that, giving the razor edge, how are we balancing in this Taiwan Strait? The Taiwanese election is also very important. I think not crossing any lines in the sand there would have global implications. So, I think that's also very important. Let me just because the question was asked: Why is there a possibility of war after all? and I do agree that it would be completely against at least the economic interests of everybody to cross that line. If you imagine the Indo-Pacific map, there is this one line that is I think is really important, and that's the American first island chain. So, that is basically military installations that start from Okinawa in the north and go over Taiwan, Philippines, and basically end in the South China Sea—is a string of American installations that China and I'm not taking sides I'm just basically trying to see how this is being looked at. In China, there is a great fear of strategic encirclement, right? And I think, everybody everything that you can see in the last 15 years of Chinese politics or 10 years at least has to do with the attempt to break out of this strategic encirclement. Westward: this is the Belt and Road initiative. Importantly, look at that the belts and roads in Pakistan and Myanmar because they allow China to bypass the

Malacca Strait. The Malacca Strait is a very narrow chokehold, that the US has a lot of bases there. So, everything that China is doing westward has to do with the Malacca Strait. Eastwood- it has to do with excess denial to the South China Sea, which China perceives to be its own coastal waters and getting into the strategic depths of the Pacific, and therefore, hitting Japan, therefore hitting Taiwan, therefore hitting the Philippines. This is where the regional tensions come from. I do not see China giving up on this because this is an interest of the highest caliber for the Chinese. Now, if you flip the table and look at the same situation from Washington's point of view, this is the first aggressive military pier since Pearl Harbor entering what the US calls already homeland land defense. If you go into the Pacific, you will hit Guam, Hawaii, and the West Coast. So, this is different from what we saw in Iraq or Afghanistan, or some other. Let's say more random theaters on the grand chess board. This is something where the two seals of interest collide, and that's why I would not dismiss the possibility of a war there and how it will play out? So, how would this play out this competition if we keep it civil, if we keep it cold, if we keep it managed? No hot war scenario. Well, I mean, let me give you a very practical example. I talked to the German industry, a lot short one, yeah, very short. So, they say look our biggest market is the American one. If we get into the American market, we cannot have certain components from China. Our second biggest market is a Chinese one. If we want to get into that market, we need to we must have Chinese components. So, this is a very big industrial power. It is already being forced to choose between one market and the other. It's these kinds of questions that happen, and you can observe what you call strategic spillover, which means that we start a corporation on connectivity and economics, and there is a spillover into the strategic sphere that we can observe. So, I shut up here.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Thank you very much. Sorry, who would like to take the second question? Dominique? Then, please, the question is: Will we have a nuclear war?”

Dominique Rakotozafy, "Well, about the war in Ukraine—do have a nuclear war in Ukraine? This is a I think this is a kind of proxy war again, and I don't think there would be a nuclear. A nuclear war is just a disaster because nobody will be safe. Humans and all the assets should be down. So, I think this is just a speculation to go to nuclear war. The West has an interest in Ukraine. To maintain Ukraine on the side, but Russia would go to nuclear war also, I think, because it is just it is a dissuasive weapon, not really a weapon that you use because even yourself, when you use it, you not be saved. So, I'm not in the view that it would go to a nuclear war. Thank you.”

Felix Kolbitz, “Okay, thank you very much, and then I think the last question about Portugal and the conferences is to Amena.”

Amena Mohsin, “About the place of civilization, yes, I do fully agree with you that you know, like the way you know like civilization is a is a concept that do Huntington wrote about ‘The Clash of Civilization’ and there were many responses from you know like not only from the South but also from the North. There were responses to it, but I do believe that, you know, civilization can also be a tool of hegemony like nationalism is. But at the same time, you can look at civilization from a different perspective, and you know like if it is really a civilization, then there cannot be a clash about it. When we talk about the clash of civilizations, there's a contradiction in the term. If you are civil and if you when one is talking about civilization, when we talk about civilizational discourses, these can be very overarching these can be very hegemonic. But at the same time, you know like within that civilization, one also sees many other voices coming, and I mean, I think

this is something which the South has to contribute, or that it is the South's contribution. Again, when I use the word 'South', I use it in a differentiated way. I mean, we always maintain that there that South Asia or this South there's a multiplexity or multi-layered of civilizations over here. So, let's not look at it in a confrontational manner but rather in a multi-logical, you know, multi-dialogue or multi-logical way that would be or multi-layered way that would be more appropriate. Because, after all, I do agree that there is a difference. You know, one has to understand that there are differences between cultures, and this conversation between cultures or among cultures must go on. So, this is the dialogue we are talking about. Thank you."

Felix Kolbitz, "Thank you very much. Considering the time and I know that there are lots of further questions you have, but I think there will be a number of tea and coffee breaks, lunch breaks, etc. today where you can also engage with my fellow panelists to discuss that more in depth, and I would like to use that as one more chance to also say thank you to the three of you. I think that was a very interesting and insightful discussion on where this region might have. We heard four different scenarios, also some disagreements with how likely they are. And I also hope that at least the hot war scenario is the least likely, because I think that will have very tremendous impacts and effects on the region. But also, I think the other three more likely scenarios still mean a lot of change for all the countries involved in especially in this region. So, thank you, Amena. Thank you, Dominique. Thank you, Marc, and thank you also to CGS and Zillur. He was here very briefly in between. Oh, there! He still is, hiding in the very back. Thank you very much for inviting us. Thank you very much for hosting us, and I hope that we can continue this discussion now over a cup of tea or coffee. Thank you very much also to everyone who has been here, and yeah, see you later. Thank you."