

INTERVIEW

To understand 'second world' countries like Lebanon, 'it's the trend, not the details'

PARAG KHANNA EXPOUNDS ON 'THE NEW ARABISM' – AND WHY A STRONGMAN MIGHT NOT BE A BAD THING

Anna Louie Sussman
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: In writing his influential book "The Second World," Parag Khanna visited more countries in the past five years than most of us will visit in our whole lives. The 31-year-old policy wunderkind, who is also director of the Global Governance Initiative and a senior research fellow at the New America Foundation, spoke at the Carnegie Middle East Center's conference on "Emerging Powers and the Middle East," held October 24-25 at the Gefinor Rotana Hotel in Beirut. He sat down with *The Daily Star* between panels.

Q: How can you claim the whole world – or 55 countries – as your area of expertise?

A: I don't claim it as an area of expertise. The book isn't about any one country, it's about a typology, it's about a set of countries that all exhibit similar dynamics. So the goal isn't to be a specialist. If you want to read a book about Saudi Arabia, you can read a book about Saudi Arabia, but if you want to read a book about what Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan and Malaysia have in common, then this is the book for you. And it's the only book that really does that.

Q: How do you keep up on top of all these things?

A: I don't. It's really hard to keep up on everything. When you do the book, you have to go to each place and spend time there and pick up on the patterns that are taking place, and you have to see the evidence firsthand, as it's happening. But you have to realize you can't keep up on every detail. But the main thing is not the details, it's the trends. For example, the first time I went to Ukraine, I saw they had just had an election, the Orange Revolution had just happened. By the time I was finished drafting my book, they had had two more elections that had gone in two different directions. So I condensed everything I saw in Ukraine, and I said that this is just a spin cycle, of recycling pro-Western and pro-Russian leaders, and this is the way it's going to go on and on. And that's all I needed to say – I saw that pattern happening in like 10 other countries.

Now that the book is done, I no longer keep up with most

places. I mostly just keep up with China, with India, with Central Asia, the Middle East, and I pay much less attention to South America and Africa.

Q: This conference addresses emerging powers and the Middle East. Is there any chance of the region itself becoming a power center beside the petro-states?

A: Yes, that's been one of the interesting themes in this discussion, as to whether or not the Arab world can coalesce, or even just the petro-states, can coalesce and make the Arab world not just a region but also a unified power or actor. I think that actually is happening in a diffuse and uncoordinated kind of way. I think the Gulf countries are helping to fuel the Arab world's economic development, and they are helping to fuel its external influence in global finance and energy markets, so I think in a way, even if it's not unified, the Arab oil countries are becoming an important actor again in a way that hasn't been felt since the last oil shocks.

The next step would be something of a renewed Arabist diplomacy where there is a certain amount of integration and coordination of positions with respect to Europe, China and America. And I think that's a long way off. But I think we're a lot closer to that than ever before and I think that's a positive thing for the Arab countries.

Q: The Arab League, in your opinion...

A: It's not about the Arab League – the Arab League was the Arabism of the past. What I'm talking about is what I call the new Arabism which is based on finance and trade, immigration and culture and media.

What about the countries like Syria and Egypt? Egypt has a huge population, and while it states growth of something like 5 percent a year, it doesn't seem to be trickling down to the majority of its citizens. Are these other countries going to be left behind? There doesn't seem to be any interest, besides allowing some of their citizens to migrate to the Gulf states, in building any kind of cooperation.

Yes, I think Egypt is really in trouble. But I also think the fascinating thing is how quickly things can change. No one thought the petro-states would even be where they are today;



Khanna: "Strongmen are the worst, and they're also the best."

now they're considered global financial players and this has happened in a span of 10 years. That will obviously not happen in Egypt – that can only happen in countries with small populations – but you can see Morocco moving forward in a lot of ways, you can see a lot of potential in Libya, which has a small population and a lot of resources, and the same with Algeria potentially, which is going to be one of the gas superpowers of the 21st century. So there are possibilities. Jordan has a very small population and if they can remain politically sta-

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ble, they can develop, in terms of human development, a lot faster than are even right now.

I think that Syria and Egypt are the two countries that are the biggest areas to focus on because they're very populous countries with very bad governments, with very few broad-reaching prospects for reform and job creation. So I think they're hugely problematic, and that's where

the real focus should be. And if you can turn those countries around, then you can actually have some kind of positive trajectory for the region.

Remember – lots of countries can fall by the wayside; Yemen and Iraq can fall by the wayside. They might be mired in conflict for years and years to come, but that doesn't mean it's really dragging down Saudi Arabia and the UAE or Libya and so forth. So just because there's bad things happening, it doesn't really shackle the rest of the region because again, it's one region geographically, but everyone can move at different speeds and in different directions.

Q: Right, except when you have terrorist attacks happening across borders.

A: Right, terrorism can come in many forms. Jordan has suffered very frequent terrorism over the last five to six years, but it's still on the same track it was five years ago. It's investing a lot in education, in modernization, job creation, economic growth. It's better than falling behind; in Egypt there is no investment to speak of, let alone something that could have a positive impact on 70 million people. In Jordan, you have Western com-

panies like Sysco and Microsoft that have huge operations there. It's such a small population that it could become, say, the call center of the Middle East. Even if it became just that, it would be a lot better off than it is today. So again, even in a short amount of time their education levels are going up and you can't say that's a bad thing.

Q: Let's talk about Lebanon, where instability and the spread of terrorism have really hampered the growth of what had historically been an economic and financial center of the region.

Yes, Lebanon is like an archetype of the "second world," countries where you have good things and bad things, and you don't know which is going to prevail: good or bad, positive or negative, potential or liabilities. And that's what every single country I write about has in common: You don't know five years from now whether they will have made it, or whether they've blown it.

Q: So what's the use of you, Parag, if all you can say is "I don't know what's going to happen?"

A: If you pay me enough, I'll give you an opinion [laughing.] I'll do some more homework.

So Lebanon is another one where all kinds of bizarre things are happening. You see new construction going on around the city, in the universities. You see at least the conflict hasn't broken out the way people have been predicting in the last three years, you have this bizarre phenomenon of the South of the country being more stable than the North all of a sudden, and you have a lot of outside diplomatic engagement which is attempting to be more constructive, rather than manipulative. You also have, obviously, an economy that isn't moving, political gridlock, a population and factions that are arming in a variety of ways, you still have Syrian manipulation of the Parliament and the politics, so you have these negative trends as well. I honestly don't know how it changes day to day, who's up and who's down, and so forth.

But the key thing to remember is that what you don't have is the emergence of a strong, single, national leader who changes the dynamic. And as significant as [Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan] Nasrallah is,

and as respected as he is around the region, he has not made the decision to become a federal, national politician with the ambition to change the turbulence that exists in the country.

Q: But he can't...

A: But he's the only one anyone could possibly name if you needed someone to drop in from heaven and do the job. And that's the problem that every single Arab country faces: the lack of some single, unifying, Nasser-like figure. Now he doesn't have to be like Nasser, but someone of that stature.

|| 'What you don't have is... a strong, single national leader'

Q: That recommendation goes against everything I've ever heard about wanting to move the region toward a more participatory, decentralized democracy and away from strongman, patriarchal politics.

A: I agree with you – you're exactly right. Strongmen are the worst, and they're also the best. Look what's happening in Iraq today. Why is it that three-quarters of the analyses about Iraq – and Afghanistan, both – are saying "I guess we're going to need a strongman to stabilize the situation." Even the lefty, tree-hugging European diplomats in Afghanistan are saying, "We need to replace Karzai with a strongman." Every time people throw their hands in the air because democracy gets messy and experimental, they say, "I guess we need a strongman." And it's a very, very disappointing thing to hear. But having a national leader who's unifying and has people coalesce around him, and creates compromises among factions – real compromises – that doesn't make you necessarily some kind of tyrannical strongman. That makes you an enlightened kind of leader.

Q: Let's talk about US engagement, since you do advise Barack Obama on certain aspects of his foreign policy, couldn't you say that a lot of this fragmentation was actually due to appalling choices they've made that have soon sectarian strife? Here in Lebanon they are trying to arm and train the Lebanese

Armed Forces (LAF), they won't really recognize Hizbullah as legitimate political actors. I've read that you've recommended the US engage with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, because it is a viable power center. What are the other power centers here in Lebanon, if you're not going to engage with Hizbullah?

A: Because Hizbullah is a somewhat different entity from the Muslim Brotherhood, I can totally understand and appreciate the reservations the US has on entering into direct dialogue with it the way it has already had with the Muslim Brotherhood in different countries. With respect to Hizbullah, I guess the emphasis then should be indirect, it should be on strengthening the Parliament, having checks and balances, and accountability over Hizbullah's activities, trying to create legislative codes that prohibit the kind of militarization of politics that Hizbullah represents to a lot of people who are afraid of it. And then you can take that route.

Just as in Egypt it isn't just about talking to the Muslim Brotherhood, it's about having consistent parliamentary procedures that prevent any one faction from getting too much power. And I don't think the US has done that in Parliament because it's really outdone, or outspent, by Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and so forth. Actually the French have a stronger role in that. So it isn't just the US alone.

Particularly in Lebanon, the US is just one player, and it is not the most influential player, and it is not the one that's going to shift the entire dynamic. So I don't know that anything that one could advise the US on vis-a-vis Hizbullah is really going to change things. This is a country where, and in most countries I would argue, you can blame the US for a lot of things, but you also have to give at least 50 percent of the blame to local actors.

Lebanese factionalism goes back to before the Ottoman Empire, so fine, the US may take different sides at different times, and it may like [Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid] Jumblatt, and it may strengthen the LAF to fight in the Nahr al-Bared situation last year, but that's not decisive, obviously, in stabilizing the country. Hizbullah is far more decisive than the LAF, basically, and I don't think anyone denies that.

Q: It seems in your book you pin a lot of hopes on the EU. As a US citizen myself, I also have a lot more optimism about the EU's intentions and capabilities than I do about the US' under Bush. But what makes you think the EU would be willing to undertake some of these huge development projects that you propose.

A: Well, the EU has to put its money where its mouth is. I do think they're willing to do a certain amount of things, particularly when it comes to investing in infrastructure, which is something that it does so well around the world, and has done in Eastern Europe, in North Africa, and a little bit here. It's also put its peacekeepers here, it's spoken up a lot more than ever before about Middle East peace issues, so the EU has every reason to obligate itself to put its money where its mouth is. I think they can engage in certain ways that US has not done yet.

What the EU has done for infrastructure in the Caucasus is a very good model: rails and roads, trade promotion and export promotions, [small and medium enterprise] development, these kinds of economic and soft power kind of things, that are not controversial, that are cost-effective, that everyone in the region wants and that will promote integration. No one is stopping them from doing it, like when, for example, the US stops the EU from taking certain positions on the Palestinian issue. No one is stopping the EU from doing these things. It could do them yesterday, and it hasn't.

Q: But it seems like a bit of a stretch – the Caucasus and Eastern Europe are right on their borders.

A: It's not a stretch because Turkey wants to do it too. What I call the "neo-Ottomanism" of Turkey is very much inclined toward trying to increase influence. If you look at Turkey's relations with Iran, with Syria, with Iraq or [Iraqi] Kurdistan at least, they're all very strong. So Turkey is actually taking a leadership role here.

When the EU and Turkey work together, a lot of amazing things happen, like the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline and other sorts of things, so I think EU-Turkish cooperation could do a lot toward melting some of the barriers to progress in this region.

Army bans hunting south of Litani following Israeli complaints about noise

Mohammed Zaatari
Daily Star staff

SOUTH LEBANON: The Lebanese Army Command on Monday issued a statement banning hunting south of the Litani River in a show of full commitment to the implementation of

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

"According to Resolution 1701, the area located south of the Litani River should be free from any armed presence, except for the Lebanese military and security forces as well as UN soldiers," said the statement.

The statement called on the Lebanese people to abide by the Army Command's decision, vowing to arrest violators and refer them to the judiciary.

But at least some hunters in South Lebanon were highly critical the move.

Hunter Mohammad al-Mah-

moud told *The Daily Star* on Monday that forbidding hunting was an "unjust and meaningless" decision.

"This decision affects hunting lovers and gun sellers," he said. "If the sound of hunting arms along the border region disturbs residents of the Israeli

settlements, then it is an Israeli issue. We are just practicing a hobby we have been enjoying for a very long time."

Recent media reports have said that Israelis have been complaining about the sound of shots made by dozens of hunting weapons along the border,

and that Israel fears that some of the hunters might be Hizbullah members.

The UN forces have also complained of their inability to distinguish hunters from Hizbullah fighters, as both come fully armed, according to the reports.

Environment Minister Tony Karam said over the weekend that hunting was not illegal but added that the hunting season had not yet begun.

"The opening of the hunting season will be declared when all administrative elements are completed," Karam said during

a news conference on Saturday. "We are late. The season should be opened normally from September till January," he said, adding that hunting

|| 'We are practicing a hobby that we have enjoyed for a very long time'

would be restricted to four or five species.

According to a source at the Environment Ministry, a deci-

sion to delay the opening of the season was taken because of a change in the migration pattern of some bird species that overfly Lebanon en route to warmer climates where they spend the Northern Hemisphere winter.

"Once the season opens, we will distribute awareness brochures that will help hunters detect the types of birds they should target," Karam said.

"Security forces will be extremely strict in applying the law and whoever breaks it will have his weapon confiscated and be required to pay a fine."



A hunter practices his hobby on horseback near the border town of Marjayoun.



Too soon: The Environment Ministry reminded Lebanese that hunting season has not yet begun.