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**Aboul Gheit's address before  
Oman's National Defence College  
on "Global changes: Risks and  
"opportunities for the Arab region**

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**Major General Ali bin Abdullah Al-Shaidi,  
Commander of the National Defence College at the Academy of  
Strategic and Defence Studies,  
Distinguished guests,**

**Allow me to begin by expressing my profound pleasure in being here today, in the Sultanate of Oman, and the National Defence College—a place for which I hold deep affection and respect. I have long admired this institution, its members, and its dedication to excellence, particularly in its ability to stay attuned to global developments and adapt to the ever-changing dynamics of our world. It is my firm belief that, at this critical juncture, military institutions must foster a profound and agile understanding of the swift and successive changes taking place globally. It is crucial that we deeply analyse these shifts and assess their long-term implications for national security.**

**I am fully aware that the developments in our region are placing immense pressure on all of us. This past year has been marked by relentless Israeli aggression against Palestine, which has tragically escalated in recent weeks to include further dangerous provocations in Lebanon. What is perhaps most troubling—and I speak candidly here—is the blatant and regrettable impotence of the international community in halting the machinery of war, as though Arab blood, if I may be so frank, holds little value in the eyes of the world.**

**Despite the strain these events place upon us, I have deliberately chosen—consistent with my approach in this annual address—to look beyond immediate regional concerns and instead focus on the broader picture. This choice stems from my deep conviction that, at this critical time, we must recognise the overarching patterns of global events and the underlying threads that connect them. It is not enough to simply react to events in isolation, as though they occur without rhyme or reason. By understanding the larger trends, we can discern the connections between them, thus enabling us to respond in a more strategic and coordinated manner.**



**Today, I will confine my remarks to four pivotal themes: the unfolding of the new Cold War, the global conflict zones, the transformative impact of technology on warfare, and finally, the latest developments within our region.**

**First: The Second Cold War**

**I can assert with confidence that we are currently witnessing the onset of a second Cold War. The intensifying rivalry between the world's major powers, which has been simmering for years, has now entered a new and more dangerous phase. One distinguishing feature of this second Cold War is that it involves three dominant poles, unlike the first Cold War, which spanned four decades and primarily took place between two superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union.**

**Similar to its predecessor, the current Cold War is being waged among nuclear-armed states—namely the United States, China, and Russia. However, the difference lies in the erosion of many of the nuclear arms control agreements that were painstakingly negotiated during the first Cold War. These accords have largely deteriorated, and significantly, they do not include China, which is now rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal. In my view, this new Cold War is far more dangerous than the one that preceded it. During the first Cold War, the Soviet Union was a military giant but economically weak. Today, China is the world's second-largest economy, and it plays a vital role as the most important trading partner for many countries across the globe. China's deep economic ties to the global economy, including its significant trade relations with the United States itself, mean that the economic fallout of this new Cold War will be severe—not only for its principal actors but for the entire world.**

**The logic of the Cold War, as we know, dictates that its participants strive to avoid direct confrontation, instead opting to engage in proxy wars. Currently, we are witnessing a perilous and unprecedented test of this logic in Ukraine. For nearly three years, Russia has been waging a proxy war against NATO. Neither side wishes to lose, and NATO has progressively escalated its involvement, providing Ukraine with**



increasingly advanced and dangerous weaponry. I remind you that the mere provision of tanks to Ukraine sparked heated debate within NATO just two years ago. Today, the debate has shifted to the use of long-range missiles supplied by NATO to strike targets inside Russia. In response, the Kremlin has repeatedly threatened to resort to nuclear weapons.

In my estimation, this represents the gravest moment the world has faced with regard to the potential for nuclear catastrophe since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. It is important to remember that this crisis was narrowly averted through direct communication channels between the United States and the Soviet Union. Today, however, those essential lines of communication between the major powers are eroding. For a period, military communications between the United States and China were completely severed, only recently being restored. This is an unimaginable scenario in terms of its gravity and the existential risks it poses.

#### **Second: The Most Dangerous Hotbeds of Conflict**

There are three critical arenas of global conflict that, in my view, are shaping the contours of the new Cold War.

The first hotbed is the European theater, particularly Eastern Europe, where the lines of contact between Russia and NATO are drawn. This tension has manifested itself most visibly in the ongoing war in Ukraine—a conflict marked by its indeterminate nature, with no decisive outcome in sight.

Despite nearly three years of fighting, Russia, with its overwhelming advantage in size, economy (ten times that of Ukraine), and population (four times greater than Ukraine's), has been unable to achieve a clear military victory. On the other hand, Ukraine, bolstered by significant Western and NATO support, has attempted to counterbalance its disadvantages through strategic, high-impact operations. For instance, it has threatened Russia's naval fleet, which has seen roughly half its strength in the Black Sea depleted, despite Ukraine lacking a significant naval force of its own.

Nonetheless, the prolonged war of attrition that we are witnessing is slowly tipping the balance in Russia's favour,



albeit gradually and without a decisive end in sight. The second hotbed lies in the South China Sea and Taiwan, which I consider to be an even more dangerous flashpoint. Here, the stakes are far higher because both of the major players—the United States and China—regard the region as essential to their strategic positioning on the global stage. For China, the goal is the restoration of territorial integrity, with the ultimate aim of bringing Taiwan under its control, much like it did with Hong Kong. Conversely, the United States views any threat to Taiwan and the surrounding straits as a direct challenge to the principle of freedom of navigation, a cornerstone of the international system it has safeguarded since the mid-twentieth century, which underpins its global dominance.

This confrontation is anticipated to escalate in the coming years, with tensions already rising incrementally. The consequences of any military conflict here would be profound for the entire world, as this region has become an indispensable hub for the global economy. A telling example of this is Taiwan's near-monopoly on the production of advanced semiconductors, which power nearly all modern technology—from smartphones to automobiles, and from artificial intelligence to quantum computing. Taiwan produces approximately 90 percent of the world's advanced chips, making its geopolitical fate of tremendous significance to the global technological and economic landscape.

The third hotbed of conflict is the Middle East—a region we will address in greater depth at the conclusion of our discussion.

### **Third: Expansion of Power Tools and the Risks of Emerging Technology**

The third trend that I observe today is the expansion of the scope of power to a broader range of actors, with an increasing likelihood for more parties to acquire the tools of power.

What this means is that it is no longer feasible for a select group of countries to monopolise advanced technology or restrict its access to others, particularly in the military domain.



**The hallmark of modern technology lies in two defining characteristics: its rapid dissemination and its declining costs. Take, for instance, the swift proliferation of technologies like the Internet or mobile phones, which spread across the globe within just a few years, accompanied by a steep reduction in costs. Now, imagine the potential implications of a similarly fast-evolving technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI). The applications of AI are numerous, with most offering substantial benefits to humanity. They can be harnessed to improve life and significantly enhance its quality. However, my focus here is on the strategic and military dimensions of these advancements.**

**We have already witnessed the rapid development and effective use of technology, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones. This technology has seen a dramatic reduction in cost while demonstrating highly effective results in various military contexts. Some of its applications have been evident in our region, such as the attacks launched by the Houthi group in the Red Sea. Drone technology provides a significant advantage to attackers, especially given its relatively low cost compared to the resources required to counter it.**

**To illustrate, consider the missile and drone strikes that Iran conducted on Israeli territory in April. The cost of these attacks amounted to no more than \$10 million, whereas the cost of intercepting them reached \$2 billion.**

**In short, these emerging technologies are poised to dramatically alter the landscape of future warfare, empowering medium-sized and smaller nations—and even non-state actors and individuals—with unprecedented capabilities.**

**Recently, we have encountered numerous warnings regarding the perils of unregulated AI applications on humanity. I believe these dangers cannot be easily mitigated for a fundamental reason: the major powers will be unable to resist the allure of developing these systems amidst the intense competition that characterises their relationships, particularly in the realm of military applications.**





**It is imperative for military institutions in our region to closely monitor the developments in these technologies and assess their impacts across various military theatres. These advancements are poised to transform the very nature of warfare. While certain enduring features of military confrontations will persist—evident in the parallels between the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and World War I—the integration of artificial intelligence technology into the military domain will undoubtedly reshape the landscape of warfare, even if it does not fundamentally alter its essence.**

#### **Fourth: The Potential Repercussions on the Arab Region and Our Required Actions**

**The picture I have described earlier, reflecting the conflicts among major powers and the dangers posed by advanced technology, raises significant concern and anxiety regarding the future of our region.**

**Firstly, recent developments have revealed the alarming reality of a party in our region—Israel—that possesses considerable capabilities to develop and utilise advanced technology in warfare. As long as Israel continues to occupy Palestinian land and persist in its violent actions against Palestinians to sustain this occupation, its military capabilities must be a source of great concern for us all. It is imperative that we, in the Arab countries, remain vigilant regarding these capabilities and their potential dangers.**

**I must emphasise that Israel operates under the illusion that it can establish normal relations with Arab countries while the occupation persists, relying solely on its military and technological power. This is a profound misunderstanding. The Arab countries have no interest in peace with a state that seeks to impose hegemony through force. Furthermore, its leaders seem to be haunted by ambitions of establishing a Greater Israel, motivated by interpretations of ancient prophecies. It is evident that the occupying state could not have perpetrated the heinous massacre in Gaza over the past year, during which the random, retaliatory killing did not cease for a single day. This rampage, the unfortunate events of which we are**



currently witnessing, would not have been possible without the protective umbrella provided by Western powers, particularly the leading force of the United States.

Today, the major conflict hotbeds occupy the West more than the Middle East. The Israeli occupation has adeptly exploited the internal situation in the United States, which is approaching one of the most polarising electoral processes in its history, to perpetrate its actions and evade accountability. However, the reckless exercise of force cannot guarantee a lasting peace or security.

It is evident that Israel lacks what can be termed an "End Game," meaning there is no definitive solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. The formula it offers perpetuates the status quo—namely, the occupation—manifesting an apartheid-like system reminiscent of that experienced in South Africa. This reality compels us, on the Arab side, to continue our struggle using the same methods that the oppressed people of South Africa employed. This includes mobilising global public opinion, employing boycotts and sanctions, engaging in legal and judicial activities, and intensifying our diplomatic efforts to besiege the occupation, isolate it, and raise the costs of its actions.

I believe that the leaders of the Israeli occupation are acutely aware of the risks associated with losing their legitimacy on the world stage, especially among younger generations. The widening gap between these younger generations and their elders in perceiving the reality of the occupation—rejecting its injustices—has become increasingly apparent. These younger individuals, whose peers we have witnessed demonstrating in favour of Palestine, will soon assume decision-making roles in influential countries.

In conclusion, the international landscape I have described necessitates that Arab nations maintain the greatest possible degree of what is referred to as "strategic flexibility" or "strategic independence." While conflicts among major powers pose certain risks, they also present opportunities and spaces for manoeuvring.





**I contend that middle powers enjoy greater latitude for action in defence of their interests in a world characterised by such polemic rivalries.**

**The experiences of the past year have demonstrated that the Arab world must confront its challenges by relying on itself and collaborating with friends and partners worldwide—regardless of their geographic location—as long as our interests and visions align on specific issues.**

**The emerging global landscape, as I perceive it, will not be characterised by rigid alliances or constant friendships but rather by fluid, intertwined, and complex coalitions formed around specific issues among parties with similar perspectives and compatible interests. It is essential for us in the Arab world to navigate this environment with a flexible vision to preserve our strategic independence and enhance our manoeuvrability. Ultimately, the individual actions of our Arab countries on the global stage, despite their inherent risks, tend to weaken our influence and limit our effectiveness. Conversely, negotiating with global powers as a unified bloc on specific issues provides us with greater leverage and a wider scope for action, particularly since the resources at our disposal as Arabs are neither few nor insignificant.**

**The future demands our complete vigilance. The transformations we are witnessing today are accelerating and intertwining, creating a new reality for which we must be prepared—ready to meet its requirements and adhere to its rules.**

**Thank you, and may the peace, mercy, and blessings of God be upon you.**

